My Time in Vietnam

By Robert Hardrick

I arrived in Vietnam in late September of 1968 and it was night when we landed at the DaNang Air Base. It took about three days to get to An Hoa Combat Base, to which I was assigned, because there wasn't a convoy available to take us there. We kept getting ready to go only to be told that the convoy for that day had been cancelled. Finally, we got a ride out of DaNang on a C-130 and flew into An Hoa.

Upon arriving there, I was assigned to Hotel Company, 2nd BN., 5th Marines. My group got our three day introduction and then off to the bush to join the company which was operating in the Arizona Territory. It was a real eye opener.

The operation that we were on was Maui Peak. On my first patrol that I went out on, I received my baptism of combat and fire. I was put on the right flank and during the course of the patrol, we received enemy fire and the initial fire came from our side. I can vividly remember the guys from the main column yelling for us to come back one at a time under the cover of fire. It was a trip especially being new and running for your life expecting to be shot!!

A few days later, the company returned to An Hoa and we got ready for our next operation. One thing that really struck me being new and I learned real quick, was going to the mess hall. It was out of this world. You used a soda or beer can to drink out of if you didn't have a canteen cup. There was a huge hunk of butter on the table to use. It was like every man for himself or you got left out. It was like a zoo at first, but like everything else in Nam, one got used to it, just part of the program.

We stayed in An Hoa after a few days and during that time got acquainted with more members of the platoon, second which I was assigned, and the company; the usual stuff, where were you from and were you a West Coast or East Coast Marine. Even though I had a mortar MOS, everyone starts out as a grunt until there is an opening or there is an immediate need for your MOS.

Our next operation was Henderson Hill. A search and destroy op, they all were. We did make contact with the NVA and took quite a few casualties. One was third platoon's commanding officer who was KIA, a couple of corpsmen who came in country and joined the company the same time I did. It was a tragic day, one I will never forget. We also had an individual hit with shrapnel from friendly fire from an air strike that hit our brother company Echo. After that ordeal, we patrolled the area a couple of days and even found a large amount of rice in 100 pound bales.

We returned to An Hoa for a few days of rest and to get ready for the next operation. While there, I was assigned to a machine gun team because they were shorthanded.

Our next operation was Mead River. This was in November and our task was to surround the NVA and VC in the Dodge City area as it was called. This was a combined effort that consisted of the 5th, 7th, 26th 1st Marine Division Marines and ROK Marines and ARVAN Troops. As luck would have it, we saw little to no action until the very end. We thought we were going back to the rear but our battalion commander re-assigned Hotel Company to help the 26th Marines. We got our fair share of action in the

last few days of the operation, and took a lot of casualties. We had one individual receive the Silver Star for his action in taking out an NVA held bunker.

It was on Mead River that I was assigned to Mortars, my MOS (0341). With our part of the operation over, the company returned to An Hoa. Before we left for Operation Mead River, 2/5 was billeted next to the air strip. When we returned from Mead River, we had been moved to the other side of the base adjacent to Liberty Road. At any rate, we rested and got ready for our next operation which was Taylor Common.

We also got a change of scenery because now we were going to operate in the mountains that over looked An Hoa. They called them "Rocket Alley" because the NVA fired a lot of rockets from them and it was an infiltration route for the NVA and VC.

The operation got off on a rocky start because the chopper in which our skipper was riding in, (Captain Ron Drez) crashed near the landing zone. Some individuals were hurt but Captain Drez come out of the crash unscathed and caught up with the company. Even though the terrain had changed, we still searched for the NVA running patrols and scouting for trails to ascend the mountains.

We had a few clashes with the enemy and even found NVA ammunition and rifles in a cave beside a mountain stream. We also had our Christmas dinner in the mountains. They were a change, the mountains, from the rice paddies. It was cooler and there were triple canopy trees that in some places blocked out the sun and the daylight. We had our share of fire fights with the NVA and took our share of casualties in the process. We even had a Marine hit upside the head with a mortar round that fell short. The round didn't go off. It stunned him. He also didn't get medivaced out of the field. He was lucky.

When we got to the top of the mountains, we stayed a few days and then the battalion returned to An Hoa. Once again we stayed there a few days to rest to get a few hot meals and back on the road again. We returned to the mountains again, this time for operation Taylor Common II. Taylor Common II wasn't that long, although we operated in or very close to Laos. One platoon made contact with the NVA but that was about it. We choppered to a fire base, stayed overnight and then returned to An Hoa. As usual, we got hot meals, a shower, beer and sodas and then prepared for the next operation which was Muskogee Meadows.

Muskogee Meadows was conducted in the Arizona Territory. It was springtime but still Vietnam Hot. As usual, patrolling the bush looking for the "rag man" as we sometimes called the NVA. After Muskogee Meadows, we started operation Forsythe Grove.

Forsythe Grove had us in the Arizona Territory, Phu Loc 6, the Phu Nons, and the Cu Bons. It was in the Cu Bons that a scout dog was medivaced for heat exhaustion. It was also during this time that the United States landed a man on the moon. This was in July. We were to go to Go Noi Island, a known NVA stronghold, sweep that area and move back over into the Arizona Territory. One night the

NVA talked to us on loudspeakers trying to get us to Chu Hoi. It was real funny to us. My mortar crew fired a few rounds in their direction and they stopped talking.

After leaving the Arizona, we got an in country R&R at China Beach in Da Nang. From there, we went to an area below Hill 55 and had bridge security plus conducting patrols. It was in this area that the mortar section and CP encountered a large python being dragged by some Vietnam kids. You never saw so many Marines running for their lives.

It was also at this time tat I received my orders to rotate back home. This was early fall. My time in Vietnam was up. Now I could return to the world.

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