

John Kincaid – Action Around Bach Ma

There were enemy in the valley and a 50 cal on the slope of one of the mountains, at the time of occurrence no friendly's were on the ground. There was an abandoned firebase on the tallest peak and a slick flying with me. When I was shot down the Cav inserted the platoon of infantry in the valley and the other troop of their platoon into the firebase. I was between the two on a 60 degree slope. The guys in the valley made contact and resources were piled on.

Hank Calonkey – Action Around Bong Son

The night run in was shortly after I got to Vietnam and something like in my first week with Delta Company. We were doing a company night move to do a cordon & search on the next morning. That was a deal where we'd stumble around in the dark, usually lost, and get someplace near our objective with the help of distant arty flares or hotel echo rounds which we'd use as a point of reference in our navigation. Eventually the powers that be would decide that we'd arrived and we'd as quietly as possible form a perimeter around a cluster of huts and wait for the sun to come up. Damn near every time something would set off the nervous Nellies and a bunch of firing and it would be our own people firing thru the hamlet at our own people on the other side... Right off the bat a kid named Schwarts taught me the trick to deal with that madness- get down behind a paddy dike, just make sure that nobody was coming toward us, and keep quiet and maintain fire discipline. It worked!

Anyway, on the first one of those night moves for me, when we were in a single file "follow the leader" column, our point squad ran into an NVA group coming our way on the same paddy dike trail. You name the color of tracer and somebody fired it! It was one of those deals that scared the shit out of everybody involved. My platoon (3rd herd) was on the tail end that time and all we could do was be alert. I don't know if there was any body count on that one, but we did continue the mission and I can't remember what it was and how it turned out- only the spooky surprise encounter in the dark.

The sniper incident happened on either 30 or 31 OCT 67 and we called it the "Trick or treat" mission. Trouble was that we surrounded the wrong cluster of huts and we searched the place all the next day. What pissed me off, and still does, is that I was then an assistant M-60 gunner and my position took some sniper rounds fired at us from across the rice paddy behind us, whenever an illumination round went off. I tried to report it but nobody wanted to hear information contradictory to our mission briefing. Like I say we searched the place, the ARVN Natl Police searched the place all damn day long.

That afternoon my platoon was to get a 24 hour stand down on LZ English. The afternoon resupply CH-47 came in and the crew was very nervous beings we'd not found and killed the SOB that got off by shooting at 'em. We off loaded the food, mail, ammo, and general supplies and hustled aboard. That bird took off like a homesick angel!

I was sitting on the rear most seat on the left side of the bird and as we're climbing out I noticed some kind of commotion up by the RH side gunner and our people in the seats close by. After everybody sat back down I could see a big rip right up the SAS closet door by the gunner's station. Our ride had been "gut shot" but we were still flying and everything seemed OK. Shortly the bird got to bucking and yawing but I blew it off as turbulence because we were right along the S China sea beach. We turned in land and it got worse. By this time we grunts are getting a little nervous. But by then we could see LZ English out the windows and the driver seemed to have us in a gentle glide slope headed toward it.

The driver pancaked the bird into a dry paddy field just outside the wire over by the chopper pads at English. Apparently to not risk crashing into other acft. Soon as we hit and bounced the crew chief was screaming for us to the hell out fast, but we were already so inclined! We did our usual haul ass out and form a perimeter. I then noticed the red stuff puking out a hole in the bottom of the acft. (OHA "cherry juice")

Ever since then I've trivialized it as that our driver was "low on power steering fluid"...

Mortar Attack at Dak To

We'd been doing hit & run type CA's, just snooping around the area, and my unit had been dropped off out in the middle of a huge grassy plain over looking Dak To Army Airfield while our lift birds went someplace for refuel and reload and we were just sitting on our ass taking a break and waiting for them to come back.

I'm guessing we were about 1/2 mile from the airfield flightline when mortar rounds started walking down the flightline! It was awesome. I saw with my own eyes one round go thru the vertical fin, pass thru the horizontal stabilizer, and blow when it hit the ground. I could see the sheet metal fly away as the round went thru. Others hit vital parts of a bunch of acft. Yes, they had some fire problems. The good news is that our lift birds came back and got us the hell out of there and I didn't get to see what all happened later! From there I ended up out in the boonies some place where it was peaceful and quiet.

The flight line was loaded with parked C-130 acft! Must have been 6 or 8 of 'em, mebbie more. It had to be a target the NVA couldn't resist! We watched one USAF crew hustle out there right in the middle of the barrage, crank their bird, back it out, then taxi down to the other end of the place.

Hill 724 Near Dak To

If you want something to run up the player's rectal pucker factor do up a game segment where s/he has to pilot a helicopter "down the chimney", in other words hover the thing down thru a small hole in tall trees, then fly it back out. That's how we got onto and off of Hill 724, out of Dak To in Nov '67. Scary ride both directions!

A tactical problem is the extreme vulnerability of the aircraft to enemy fire. It has severe lack of ability to maneuver. It is flying in/over a known and pre-plotted target, so enemy indirect fire crewmen can do serious damage anytime they hear the sound of a helicopter at hover and not need a FO to guide them.

That's the short of what happened to us on Hill 724. All we got were some token ground probes. But we took a bunch of H & I mortar fire. Someplace in there we figured it wasn't really H & I, but instead the mortar crews were "bracketing" us and registering their firing data settings. Sure in hell... Seems like it was the day after we got there they tried a re-supply. The UH-1 bird (either D or H series) was about 10' off the ground when a mortar round hit it someplace around the big turbine engine exhaust pipe.

Damn! Talk about a flying crowd killer... Helicopter parts flew every direction. The thing dropped straight down. We had casualties in our ground reception party and the flight crew people were injured, but everybody lived thru it. It was scary as hell to have a UH-1 burning and cooking off ammo right behind my position!

After that the tactic seemed to be they'd fake a landing approach to draw NVA mortar fire, then attack the sources with vigor! When we went in there it was miles and miles of multiple canopy jungle as far as I could see. When we were lifted out after several days it was a hill covered with multiple canopy trees, with a little hole in the top, and about 2 miles all around that looked like the craters of the moon!

The real story, the big story, about Hill 724 involves the 4th Infantry company that got wiped out. We went in there 1 UH-1 load at a time. Upon touch down we just grabbed anything laying around and loaded it in the bird we'd just got out of. By anything I mean bodies, field gear, weapons, anything that belonged to the 4th Div outfit. If I got it right, there was only around 20 people from that 4th Div rifle company still fit for duty.

Vague memory is that they'd made nite camp on 724 and moved out to the East in the morning. Hill 724 was damn near straight up/down on the South, West, and North, sides, with the East side being a beautiful ski slope- except for wall to wall tall trees. They'd moved down the slope and were patrolling into a ravine at the bottom of the hill when they were ambushed. They retreated back up the hill and into another ambush. The NVA had moved onto the hill soon as they left and the fight started at the ambush and continued back up on the hill.

Right above my position, facing down the ski slope, was a dead NVA, hanging from the rope that tied him in the tree. The first evening on the hill somebody over on the West side of our perimeter got a case of the heebie jeebies and tried to blow him down with a grenade launcher. All it did was cause some frag injuries to us below.

Again, the big story involves the 4th Division unit and some 173rd Abne units. All we did was occupy the hill, run patrols down the flanks of the hill, and generally try to bait the NVA into an attack.

Typhoon at LZ Geronimo

They pulled us out of the Bong Son Plain and told us to take a break up on Geronimo. It was on kind of a foothill, probably several hundred feet elevated from the plains floor and clear off to the North end of the Bong Son Plains AO.

We had a wonderful day. Test fired and zeroed weapons. Had good hot chow. Got and sent sugar reports, and generally took it easy (a rare treat). Were told to man the bunkers and stay inside no matter what 'till the storm blew over. Hell, there was no sign of a storm, just a fantastic sunny day, not hot and not cold, gentle breezes, a story book day...

Toward sundown it all changed! OH SHIT! time... During the nite we had horizontal winds combined with rain that was beyond belief.

During the nite we'd throw grenades over the side of the hill and shoot off small arms H&I fire down the slope, just in case the VC were taking advantage of the weather.

During the nite it got real quiet and the rain stopped. A short time later it started up again with the wind from the other direction. Now, I have some comprehension of the hurricanes in the SE USA!

Next morning the plains at the bottom of the hill was one huge lake that stretched as far as we could see. It sure in hell stopped the war for a few days!

Around mid-day next day we were inserted in the hills to the West and South and did our search and destroy thing there for a few days, till the flood waters went down.

The suffering of the peasant farmers and damage to their lifestyle was tremendous.

Tom Wilson – Ambush at Nui Nhon

On August 28th 1970 an estimated 10 man NVA squad ambushed a convoy on the highway between An Khe pass and An Khe. D-1/10 Cav reacted to the ambush. The plan was to insert the Aero Rifle Platoon along the NVA escape route and sweep back to the highway. The Aero Scouts identified a one ship LZ on the lower peak of a saddle and cleared the LZ for insertion. The first ship successfully inserted its troopers, but took heavy ground fire from well-camouflaged bunkers. The second UH-1H of the lift was shot down while attempting to land. When it crashed in the LZ it killed five of the Aero Rifle troopers from the first aircraft. The A/C burned and was a total loss. The burning A/C effectively blocked the LZ. The survivors in the LZ were pinned down by heavy fire from the bunkers.

After about a half-hour the 3rd and 4th ships in the lift inserted the remainder of the Aero Rifle Platoon onto the other peak of the saddle in an attempt to link up with the soldiers in the first LZ. The second LZ was also surrounded by well-camouflaged bunkers and the soldiers were pinned down as well. Fortunately the site of the battle was only about 3

kilometers from the 4th ID base camp at An Khe, and clearly visible from anyone watching there. AH-1Gs from D Troop formed a daisy chain between the Division rearm point and the contact site, providing intense suppressive fire on the NVA positions. One of the initial lift A/C had been shot in the main transmission and was leaking oil. However, the A/C commander elected to take his wounded door gunner to the dust-off pad.

A tactical emergency was declared. I was not scheduled to fly that day, but was called out to make the extraction, since the 4 mission slicks were shot up too badly to fly or had been shot down. I was the crew chief for UH-1H 68-16335. I grabbed an off duty gunner. He was off flight status since he was DEROS/ETSing the next day. We grabbed the machine guns off of one of the aircraft that was shot up and put them on my helicopter. There wasn't a chick plate for the gunner, so I gave him mine. When we got to the contact site we join a A/C for 4th Aviation (Black Jack) for an extraction of the lower LZ. We took the number 2 slot. As we made our approach we passed over a platoon of M48 tanks from 1-10 Cav laying down a base of fire with their main guns. The Cobras were flying parallel to us, firing rockets into the LZ. All the survivors of the first LZ got on the first slick so we just made a fast pass and lined up in the #1 slot for the second LZ. I could see black smoke trails from what I assumed to be B-40 rockets and concentrated by machinegun fire suppressing the rocket fire.

When we landed in the LZ the Cobras walked 40mm fire around us. The Cobras reported that they could see muzzle flashes all around us. Two NVA soldiers came up behind the helicopter. My door gunner could see them, but he couldn't shoot them because of the stops on the machinegun, he didn't have a personal weapon, and the Aero Rifle Troops were out of ammo. When he leaned over to try to shoot them, his flight helmet became unplugged so he couldn't report that they were there. They must have been out of ammo to, but they threw two grenades at us. One went off and the concussion lifted the aircraft about a foot off the ground and blew a hole about the size of a silver dollar in the sync elevator. The second one landed under the hellhole, but did not go off. We got everyone on the A/C and pulled pitch. As we were leaving the gas cylinder plug fell off of my machinegun. But it didn't really matter since I had only 27 rounds left.

We went straight to the dust-off pad since we had wounded. When we landed there, the medic came running out and slipped and fell when they hit the transmission oil that had spilled on the PSP from previous A/C. We dropped off the wounded and returned to the Shamrock Green. (D Troop ready pad). Maintenance replaced my sync elevator. The pad looked like a used helicopter lot. We only had 2 of 8 UH-1s operational. A ground Troop from 1/10 Cav assaulted the hill. They lost an M-113 ACAV and had one soldier killed. They were able to secure the first LZ. So we picked up a graves registration team and flew back to recover our dead. The ground troop was unable to secure the second LZ.

I thought the battle was over, but that night we attempted a night insertion with soldiers from the 4th ID. However, the artillery illumination was not sufficient so the insertion was aborted. The next morning we made the insertion, but the NVA had withdrawn during the night. A 38 cal pistol was recovered in the LZ. It belonged to the Platoon Leader who

had thrown it at an NVA soldier when he ran out of ammo. We lost 5 KIA and 18 WIA from D Troop that day. The Aero Rifle Platoon Sergeant received the Distinguished Service Cross and a sucking chest wound for his actions that day. Intelligence latter reported that we had been in contact with an NVA battalion.