

August 19, 1996

Greetings:

Man, do I remember August 19, 1968. We were on LZ Carol at the time. We had C.A'd from LZ Barbara in July to Carol, had humped off, spent time patrolling, and returned to Carol on the 5th of August and had built bunkers. As I recall, the two weeks spent on Carol were very pleasant. Except for building the bunkers and stringing concertina wire around the perimeter, there weren't many details. So, we spent our time just relaxing, that is until the 19th of August. We had gotten word at first light that we were going to replace A Company on some hill somewhere. We were getting our gear together when suddenly we were under attack from incoming. At first, we thought we were getting a few rockets, but the sound wasn't quite right. Very soon, we realized that we were being bombarded by NVA artillery. I guess we were pretty close to the Laos border. According to the Daily Staff Journal, this is what happened: "At 0750, LZ CAROL rec'd approx (60) incoming arty rds. Rds impacted on West side of LZ, resulting in (1) US KIA & (1) US WIA from D/2-8 Cav. Rds subsided at approx 1030 hrs." We, in Range, had heard that two "Cherries" from Skull had been killed during the opening barrage. For all these years since 1968, we all believed this to be true. Rafael "Cosmo" Cosme-Ortiz even remembered their names: Grady and Fast. But, only Roger Fast is on the "Wall" for 19Aug68. There is no Grady on that day. Plus, the Daily Journal said (1) US WIA. Talk about a mystery. Finally, I found John Lee from Missouri. John had been in my fire team down South (Oh yeah, John and I talked in Vegas in May about 3Jan69. He remembers bending down to pick up a duper round when he caught out of the corner of his eye a gook squeezing off a round aimed at John's chest just as he was bending over. John believes the round went through a tree, splintered, went through his arm, and then hit me in the mouth as I was coming up over the log. We both agreed there is a God!) Anyway, Dennis Grady went through A.I.T. with John, and they both came to the field together. They had heard in the rear that SKULL was the best Platoon (Yeah, right!), so they flipped a coin to see who would go to SKULL. Grady won the toss, and John went to RANGE. Well, John sent me a copy of his A.I.T. orders, and Rich O'Brien ran the Social Security number for Dennis Grady. Guess what? Dennis T. Grady is alive and well in the Chicago area. He doesn't remember a thing, except that when he was recovering in the World, he received some awards that were awarded posthumously. Far out! If anybody out there remembers him, give him a holler at: 135 West Madison Street, Girard, IL 62640 (217-627-3494). Here is Mike "Mouse" McGhie's recollection of 19Aug68: "That morning, we were told to get our shit together because we were going back in the field. LT Spencer came by our bunker (White Skull 2nd Squad gun team) and told "Spump" (Tom Spampinato) and I to go down to the O.P. After he (the LT) left, Grady and Fast came up to us and said they already had their gear together and they'd be glad to go out on O.P. for us (they were "Cherries" and had only been with us for four days). It seemed to me that they were down the hill for just a few minutes when the rounds started coming in. As soon as they stopped, we ran down the hill knowing that the first round had landed next to Grady and Fast. We found Roger Fast in convulsions with a large shrapnel wound in his side, and Grady was sitting up with no apparent wounds but was in obvious shock. After closer observation, we found a small hole about the size of a 22 cal. in his back. (Editors note: Grady told me the shrapnel missed his heart by less than an inch). We took them both up the hill to the LZ. Roger Fast was gone, the only man in our gun team to die during my tour. We were told that Grady had died on the chopper from internal bleeding. I was both relieved and elated when I found out otherwise. I always felt that Dennis Grady and Roger Fast saved my life that day. I will never forget them or the events of 8/19/68. Thank you Dennis."

September 12, 1996

It's been a while since I have sat down to finish writing this newsletter. I've been busy sorting through all kinds of papers, rosters, etc. Maybe, I can finish now and get this thing mailed out within a couple of weeks, to about "570" men. What's that make us, a Battalion? Our reunion this past May in Las Vegas was a big success. Those who attended included Mr & Mrs Rich O'Brien, Mr & Mrs Bill Warden, Mr & Mrs Andrew Pruitt, Mr & Mrs Fidel R. Sandoval, Henry Martinez, John Kotzian, Mike Irvine, Mr & Mrs John Lee (CA), John Lee (MO), Kenneth Baker, Ed Kotch, Mr & Mrs Karl Derums, Ed Regan, Bill Laferriere, Bob Gray, George Johnson, Jim Lang, Mr & Mrs Byram Price, Larry Hemphling, Jim Nix, Phil Chaffey, Ken Patek, Nat Ward, Wendell Barrett, Mr & Mrs Lee Wicks, Mr & Mrs Elbert Lang, Mr & Mrs David Anderson, Allan Smith, Mike McGhie, Chuck Hustedt. If anyone out there has access to the Web Pages on the Internet, check out the Angry Skipper Web Page and see all of the Vegas reunion pictures at: <http://pages.prodigy.com/AIRCAV> Otherwise, you'll just have to come to our next reunion, which will be in:

SAINT LOUIS, MO, home of Anheuser-Busch, the Gateway Arch, the Bowling Hall of Fame, one of the best zoos and botanical gardens in the world, and much more. Plus, it's smack dab in the middle of our great country, so we can all meet in the middle. The location will be the Holiday Inn, Westport, 1973 Craigshire, I-270 at Page, St. Louis, MO 63146. The dates of the reunion are Thursday, May 15, 1997 to Sunday, May 18, 1997. Rates are \$72.00/night. When you call to make reservations, call 1-800-HOLIDAY, and be sure to mention that you are with the "Angry Skipper" group. The organizer of the St. Louis reunion is Larry Hemphling. Larry is a big shot with Anheuser-Busch, and you can well imagine the type of hospitality we will probably experience. So, come to St. Louis. We had 30 Troopers in Las Vegas; why not try for 60 or better in St. Louis?

Since the Las Vegas reunion, various people have sent me pictures, books, information, and letters, and I have just not replied. So, I am going to thank you all here in this newsletter, and I hope that I cover everyone: Richard Muller-Thym; thank you for sending me names and social security numbers from your orders covering Feb-Nov 1971. The numbers were run and this newsletter is going out to 44 of your buddies: Karl Derums; thanks for the pat on the back and thanks for writing to Washington, D.C. on behalf of Chuck Hustedt and George Johnson in trying to get them their C.I.B.'S: Nat Ward; thanks for the book and all the copies of the pictures from Las Vegas. You asked me who had the photograph of LZ Playboy. Ed Kotch has it: Chuck Hustedt; thanks for the packet of pictures from Las Vegas: George Johnson; thanks for the phone call. Sorry I wasn't home: Jay Davidson; thanks for the 30Apr68 Company Roster. That roster came out the day before I arrived in-country. The names we didn't have on our current roster were run by Rich O'Brien, and we have 39 new names from that roster that this newsletter is going to: Lee Velta; thank you for writing your memoirs of the Battle of LZ Illingsworth on 1Apr70. Thanks for sitting down and doing it. It took a lot of courage to reach into your memory and put your experience into words. Your narrative will be published in its entirety in this newsletter.

An interesting thing happened last night. John Lee (CA) called and said that he had been to a local fair and he had worn his "Angry Skipper" Tee-shirt from the Vegas reunion. The shirt has D 2/8, 1965-1972, etc. Well, some guy comes up to him and says that he was in that unit. What, the Cav? No, D 2/8. In 1972. To which John replies, "Hey, I'm sorry that you lost all those guys and your Captain in that Chinook crash." To which the guy replies: "I was one of CPT Rosenbergs RTO's, but when I went to get on, they said it was full, so I didn't get on. "I tried to call the RTO last night, but he wasn't home. So, I e-mailed Robin Woo with the info, and this is what I received from Robin today: "Spoke to Everett this morning. He was in CAT Platoon and confirmed I was in SKULL Platoon. He was boarding the Chinook when the operator told him it was full. He said he heard the Chinook went down near the Firebase Melanie." Let us all welcome home Everett Torres, 3791 Avenue 216, Tulare, CA 93274 (209-687-8204). It now appears that besides the Skipper of D Co. and one of his RTO's, the Platoon that went down was SKULL. Robin Woo DEROS'd one week before the crash. The HONOR ROLL appears at the end of this newsletter.

In the January 3, 1996 newsletter, I posted a lot of new names of people found and stated that if they didn't want to be part of what we are doing, they should contact me and say so. Otherwise, their names and addresses would be added to the roster in the next newsletter. Well, here I go again with names gleaned off the 30Apr68 Roster sent me by Jay Davidson, and names from Feb-Nov 1971 sent to me by Richard Muller-Thym. First the 1968 names of people that will receive this newsletter: Gene Austin, Joseph Bailey, Bruce Barrett, John Bean, Sam Blinn, Tom Cox, Dale Davis, James Dotson, Gordon Elliott, Christopher Gahagan, Hollis Gaither, James Galik, Paul Grandmont, Darrell Gritz, John Guthrie, Ray Haley, Richard Hamlet, Gary Leonard, Billy Lewis, Barry Livengood, William Manske, Grant Mills, Lowell Newman, Larry Nichols, Robert Ogletree, Richard Parrish, Michael Parmeley, Donald Pfeifenroth, Lynwood Queen, Tirson Rivera, Robert Smith, Thomas Standard, George Thaler, Francis Treanor, James Weddell, Blair Wettstein, Roy Wiley, Larry Yeary. AGAIN, if you don't want to participate, let me know. Otherwise, I'll assume that you are "one happy clam" for being found.

Now for the 1971 names, some of whom may have remembered LZ Illingsworth and the subsequent Cambodian Incursion: Dennis Alloway, Gregory Amaral, Gus Angelos, George Bassford, Lane Boler, Robert Burke, Russell Burnett, Carl Buttermore, William Carpentier, Randall Carter, Larry Cate, Jim Catterson, Ray Clark, Thomas Clark, Michael Cobb, Gary Collins, Bradley Cullen, William Davidson, William Dismuke, Jack Fink, Larry Fishell, Roy Gasaway, James Green, David Gough, Ray Graham, Kenneth Hensley, Eugene Jenkins, Leo Kincaid, Kyle Lockhart, William Lyons, Oscar McAdory, Thomas McGough, Marvin Miller, Lynn Murray, Michael Orban, Roberto Recendes, Leroy Sells, Billy Sheppard, William Small, Charles Stevens, Bruce Sykora, John Ward, Grant Webb, Stephen Whiteside. NOW, if any of you mentioned above have old sets of orders with more names and social security numbers on them, let me know so we can try to find them. I am particularly interested in anything Officers may have, since for the most part, they are listed separately from the rest of the men when it comes to awards, decorations, etc. I, for one, wouldn't mind finding LT "Skull 6" Spencer from 1968. And, one LT Carr, who supposedly was killed on 2May69 in a bunker complex, does not appear on the "Wall." Does any Officer out there have LT Carr's social security number? Like Dennis Grady, maybe LT Carr made it. It's tougher finding people from pre-1968 because only the service number was listed, and the only way to find somebody is by sending a blind letter through the VA. However, shouldn't somebody out there have LT John Cool's SSAN? Hopefully, someday, we can find as many people from Angry Skipper as can be found, and we can enjoy together what time we have left.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter. And for those who received a newsletter for the first time with the 3Jan96 edition and may have thrown it away thinking it was junk mail, well it was not. And, I hope that you don't mind your name and address appearing on the roster, because if you hadn't thrown the last newsletter away, you would have read my notification. Well, I hope everybody's happy in any event.

September 24, 1996

Still working on it. New names traced from those given by Freddie Faulkner: John Blair, Luis Lugo-Boneta, Ralph McAninch (If you weren't in D Co, sorry), Don Cappelletti (same message given to Ralph), David Dohner, Nicholas Giamarino.

LZ Illingsworth, Viet Nam
April 1, 1970

One of the most truthful slogans I ever heard in Viet Nam was, "You can never say you've really lived until you've nearly died." "Ignorance is bliss" is good enough for me now. This account, written 26 years later, relates some of the events of one lethal night during one very long, life altering tour of duty. Endless thoughts, feelings and images are resurrected, revealing many eternal, invisible scars, both strong and fragile. It was a time when lengthy boredom was unpredictably perforated by moments of intense danger, permanently altering one's sense of reality. Viet Nam is remembered more for these shorter moments of intense horror than the much longer moments of peace and beauty. Somehow, over time, the human spirit denies enough of one to survive with the other.

After 11 1/2 long hard months of combat in the field with the 1st Cav Division, Delta Company 2/8th, White Skull Platoon, it was finally my turn to work in the rear. So far, I had survived EVERYTHING, maybe I WOULD make it. To finish my tour as a supply Sergeant for my own field buddies suited me just fine, and I had a knack for sending out "special acquisitions," i.e., extra cokes and smokes.

I was offered a choice; either finish my term in Nam, take a 30-day leave and finish my remaining six months as a Drill Instructor somewhere, or extend in Nam for only two more months and then be out of the Army.

What's the catch? There wasn't any. I would be assigned to the 2/8th Headquarters Company in the Rear for the two remaining months, no more field duty, no matter how badly anyone gets wiped out. The ultimate oxymoron - a military guarantee! I knew I couldn't return to the States and train new recruits about Viet Nam without telling the kind of truths that would cost me my E-5 status. So, I extended in Nam and prepared for a 2 month in-country type of farewell "Rear-Ass-Trash" R&R.

Too soon I realized that all the military ceremony and protocol weren't as meaningful to me as it was to certain others. It wasn't long before I was assigned to forward duty on an LZ (Landing Zone). I had been on many before, so it was nothing new. . . famous last words. This particular LZ was called Illingsworth, and it was typical-hot, dirty, crowded and too close to the wood line. In this case, that meant too close to Cambodia.

I usually felt less comfortable on a forward LZ than in the field. In spite of all the hassles, the LZ creature comforts were nice. But, there was something about too many guys doing too many things too close together that made me more aware of other eyes always watching. We were too large a target all the time, so I instinctively took extra precaution. Whether you knew it or not, in Nam you were always short.

Linking up again with my buddy Chris Hughes proved a perfect partnership for sharing all the extras needed for protection. We were especially gung-ho when it came to bunker building and went into the wood line 150 meters away, chain-sawed down large trees, stripped and dragged them back to create the most incredible log fortress imaginable. With a couple dozen dirt-filled ammo boxes and an extra thousand sandbags, we were finally content that even a direct hit by a rocket would have a hard time dusting us off. We were just a couple of paranoid short-timers, like any other.

We were given a 50-caliber machine gun to go with our monster bunker and, naturally, it was one that frequently jammed. After repeatedly testing and adjusting the mechanism, we finally had it working beautifully by the end of the day, never thinking about all the noise we created. We also had about four cases of ammo all linked together because we knew that sooner, not later, we would be needing it.

Until Viet Nam, I had never seen a full moon so bright you could actually read a book at night. Unbelievable and beautiful. The deep heat, the slow stillness and the surreal moonlight would create a black & white still life of profound repose, almost peaceful. Yet, a certain subtle sense attuned you to the perpetual hovering harm, lovely yet lethal.

Late on that clear, hot, quiet night, I was pulling guard by the 50-cal at our bunker, reading a paperback book, when I heard the unmistakable "bloop, bloop" of mortars being fired from the wood line. Instantaneously, I yelled "Incoming," and dove into the bunker as a blinding flash and thunderous jarring roar vibrated my entire body. My buddy Chris was already inside - having been hit before he knew all about it.

Our area was intensely pounded not only by mortars, but rockets as well. Why the rockets? During the day, we had been rather oblivious about the 50-cal machine gun at our location, so Charlie was just as obviously giving us special treatment. He sees everything and sooner or later does something about it. Other guys jammed into our death-defying bunker, and we all huddled there like scared dogs, surrounded by the deafening noise, the claustrophobic heat and the suffocating dusty air.

Just as suddenly as it had begun, it all fell to a dead silence. Our fear erupted further, and we told everyone to get out, now! They all thought we were crazy, but we knew the tactics - Charlie would soon be hand delivering satchel charges into each bunker. We yelled this explanation to them and kicked until they scrambled out.

The fresh air felt wonderful. We were drenched with sweat which, mixed with the dust, created a thin layer of mud on our faces, looking like some primeval war paint. As usual, everything everywhere was completely trashed or gone, the 50-cal looked like a piece of bad modern art. God help those who didn't know what to do now.

26 new men (cherries) had arrived on the LZ earlier that day, and the extreme terror on their pink faces made them easy to identify. I quickly told the ones nearby to stay together, always have a weapon and some frags, keep down dur-

ing the incoming, but when there was no incoming, watch carefully over the berm for approaching gooks, use the claymores and do what it takes. One guy gasped "Are we going to die?" I replied, "If you think like that, you already are. Take it moment by moment, stick together and keep cool. It gets weird." "But, what do we do if we see gooks coming at us?" he desperately asked. "Say 'Trick or Treat' and shoot em!" I replied nonchalantly. He starred, dumbfounded. "That's right, man," I said, "THIS IS IT, but go easy, keep your spirits up, stay alert and take it one gook at a time. Protect each other first, and you all can make it."

Throwing on a flak jacket, I grabbed my helmet and started to jaunt over to an adjacent ammo area when another barrage of incoming slammed me prone. Damn, they were hitting us like I'd never seen before. Closer and closer the hits came, and there was no where to move. I felt trapped and wondered, "After all the countless times I've breathed the breath of death, is this it?" I suddenly flashed on what the view must be like from the tip of an incoming mortar round as it fell, the sight of men crouching, running, seeing them look up into the eyes of the incoming round . . . the raw terror. It's funny what splashes through your mind in a crisis.

Then, once again it all suddenly stopped. This was to be the pattern for the entire night, only there was a strange feeling to all of this. Something was missing. Something I expected to hear, but didn't. All I heard was incoming . . . where was the sound of our outgoing? I looked over at the mortar area and saw none of them firing. Each position was a pile of destroyed equipment, guys scrambling about trying to set up, others helping the wounded. Looks bad! Glancing over at the artillery area, I saw two 155's had been blown over, and another was on fire. Looks really bad! A sudden unusual explosion drew my attention, and I spun around to see a 55-gallon drum of diesel 50 feet in the air spinning and spewing flames like a 4th of July sparkler as it lofted higher, then fell with a flaming explosion on someone's bunker. Looks fucking bad!

Looking across the LZ to see if the 8" cannon was OK, I sighed with relief to see it sitting there stoic and immovable next to a nice large pile of 200lb. rounds. Maybe, it's not so bad after all!

The sounds of every imaginable weapon perforated the night in waves of vicious intensity. F-16 fighter planes roared past at tree top level dropping multiple bombs, rocking the ground with ear shattering closeness, shrapnel whirling everywhere. The ground fire was wickedly intense, but without mortars there were no flares, we couldn't see anything. Darkness during an LZ ground attack is paralyzing. Something had to be done, but what was it? I knew there were some "Willie Pete" (white phosphorous) LAW's (Light Anti-Tank Weapons) at a nearby bunker. White phosphorous at night lit up pretty well because it burns everything it hits. I found the last one, which was a 4-pack, four LAW's in one, pulled out the extension, shouldered it and fired four successive rounds about 100 meters out and 50 meters apart. Immediately, the entire open field lit up, and everything became visible.

My heart froze! The ground was swarming with gooks crawling, running, firing, throwing grenades, coming on fast and furious. I went for the box of frags (fragmentation grenades) I knew were beside my bunker, but they had been blown away during the incoming. Being a serious frag freak, I always kept a couple dozen extras hidden in my bunker, so I jumped in, got them, and never have I thrown frags so far, so fast. The hits produced several secondary explosions from goodies the gooks were no doubt carrying. Steadily, the darkness devoured the remaining fire light. I don't have a good feeling about this!

I noticed an APC (Armored Personnel Carrier) parked nearby with someone on top at the 50-cal. firing at a gook 51-cal in the wood line. It was beautiful and terrifying to watch the tracers dance back and forth in a game of lethal ballistic chess, each trying to zero in on the other's exact location without giving away his own. It's hard to believe that such a slow stream of colorful tracers could be so deadly. Suddenly, there was a loud piercing metallic D I N G ringing louder than all other sounds put together. The man at the 50-cal on the APC leapt to the ground with his hands over his ears and knelt, shaking his head. I realized that the sound had come from the gook's 51-cal bullet hitting the thick steel protective shield of the APC's 50-cal position, ringing it like a bell of death. Better deaf than dead! I later discovered this was my buddy Chris.

Suddenly, the 8" cannon fired, shaking the ground. It felt good to hear, and I turned to check it out. How strange! It wasn't firing at the usual upward angle but was aimed horizontally, slightly above the berm. Weird! And what are all those guys doing on top of the berm? That's crazy. You could easily get hit. GODDAMN! It's crawling with gooks - they're coming in over the berm! Jesus, it is actually happening - a human wave attack!

My first thought was how to kill as many of them as possible. Someone else had already thought of using the 8" cannon, thank God! What else? The quad-50's, which is a set of four 50-cal machine guns mounted on the back of a large jeep. It could pump out more rounds than anything else. I bolted toward the position and as I neared it, I noticed something else very strange; the quad was firing, but the rounds were spinning out at crazy angles, making funny sounds, and the barrels were glowing a deep dark red. I then realized all four machine gun barrels were melting down from nonstop firing! Very terrifying!

Suddenly, the hairs on my neck stood up as everything briefly went quiet, and I felt a small vacuum before the pervasive rush of the loudest, most piercing explosive sound imaginable roared through my body, sailing me horizontal before I knew it. My head was ringing, my body was buzzing, the ground was shaking. WHAT IN THE HELL WAS THAT? Oh God, maybe we are so close to Cambodia that their artillery is hitting us! If they have any more of those, give up right now. There is no way we can fight that!

I looked up to see the sky lit with white smoke and cluttered with thousands of flying objects; weapons, a jeep, ammo boxes, junk, dirt, clothing . . . and people, all floating up, apart and away. Everything was dancing in the sky, dismembering in slow motion right before my eyes - bodies into limbs, into parts and beyond. I froze, unable to take my eyes away from this shockingly grotesque aerial ballet.

Abruptly, the spell was broken as everything began to return to the ground, falling like incoming. I dove beneath a huge 2 1/2 ton truck as the ground was pummeled with endless debris. A huge clang announced something hitting the hood of the truck. Thank God I wasn't lying out there exposed in the open. Gravity can make anything lethal. Imagine dying in Viet Nam by falling garbage!

With a soft thud, a severed left hand, palm up, fell to the ground within arm's reach of my face, the fingers slowly closing, revealing a wedding ring. Oh my God, no! I stared and then turned my head away to the other side of the truck, directly into the face of a gook! "Holy Shit!" I yelled and instantly rolled away from under the truck, up and into a kneel with my rifle aimed and ready to blast him, trash raining down all around me. Something caught my eye, and I quickly glanced up to see the pointed front end of a 200 lb. round of ammo cradled deep into the smashed hood of the truck. That must have been the loud clang I heard. Jesus, that thing could be live! So what's it going to be, a live round or a dead gook?

"Lai dei!" (Come out) I yelled to the gook, "Lai dei right fucking now!" With both hands shaking in front, he crawled out saying "Chiu hoi, Chiu hoi!" (I give up), and I recognized him as one of our Kit Carson scouts, but I didn't trust him . . . I was way over the edge. I viciously pulled him all the way out and noticed he had been hit. He was only wearing thongs, and there was a large piece of jagged metal sticking out the top of his right foot. I knelt to see how bad it was and touched it. It was still sizzling from the explosion, his foot cut nearly in half. It must have been intensely painful, but he seemed calm. The Vietnamese have serious secrets. He also had a long string hanging from his mouth which was tied to his front tooth. What next? He needed help badly, so I instinctively picked him up in one arm, my weapon in the other, casually aimed at him, and zigzagged over to the medics.

The medic's bunker was a surreal salvation army of carnage. The types of wounds were staggering. One medic's face was covered with blood from his own scalp wound as he frantically bandaged a deep puncture wound pouring forth dark blood, the victim's eyes glazed over. Many were crying, moaning, convulsing or lying still, staring at infinity. One guy sat against the bunker holding his own arm, his bandaged stump twitching. The aroma of fresh lethal injuries remains with you forever. I put down the Kit Carson, and he hopped over and sat on some sandbags. I gave him a thumbs-up, he did the same, and then I noticed the huge pile of bodies directly behind him. "Don't even think about it now," I told myself. Only the living can identify the dead.

Father Boyle was administering blessings to everyone, dead and alive. He was a large bear of a man, always good natured and helpful. He dipped his fingers into the water inside a cardboard grenade container, touched their foreheads and chanted a Catholic blessing. I noticed the 45 caliber pistol sticking out of his hip pocket as he looked up, smiled when he recognized me and said, "Bless you, my son." "Thanks, Father," I said. "Hell tonight, eh?" "God is with us," he replied. "Yeah, where?" I thought.

Someone screamed, "GOOKS, GOOKS!!" I instinctively crouched and glanced over to where the 8' cannon was. It was lying on its side at the edge of a huge crater as large as a crater from a 1000 lb. bomb, everything smoldering and steamy. What happened? Something's funny. Did they already use up that huge pile of cannon ammo? Then I understood. The huge explosion had been the entire pile of ammo. I was stunned to realize this and slowly walked over in awe, hypnotically drawn to such unfathomable destruction.

The area looked totally plowed and exuded the acrid intensity of freshly spent ammo. I climbed up to see how deep it was and stumbled over something. Looking down, I saw a flak jacket with something in it. GASP, a body . . . no head, no arms or legs, just the trunk!! GOD! Somebody had bought it bad! I looked further and saw a thigh in the dirt over here, a helmet with someone in it over there, then an arm, a pair of legs. The entire ground was a freshly churned mixture of dirt and bodies!! THIS IS TRUE HELL!!

Stunned and shaking, I slowly knelt and felt myself beginning to seriously crack up when the dirt by my knee spit up into my face. Someone's shooting at me! I instinctively curled into a ball, rolled over sideways and up into a kneeling position, weapon at my shoulder and saw several gooks rushing my way, one firing right at me. I blasted out several bursts, downing three of them before my clip was empty. Quickly ejecting the spent clip, I slammed in another as a gook lunged at me with a raised machete. A machete? I rolled over to my left, up and sprayed his head. Bullets against machetes. Damn, this war is too fucking crazy!

I heard other guys yelling, firing and fighting hand-to-hand. Unbelievable! I went into a slow motion stream of annihilation sequences; full of angry terror, covered with luck and ready to die. I will never know the number killed during this blinding fearless fury. It was survival and vengeance distilled into the madness of massacre. Each moment of death I thought was mine continued to be someone else's. Such a cursed blessing.

I later learned that Peter Lemon was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during this night. (Editor's note: Peter was a member of E 2/8, the only 2/8 Trooper to receive the MOH during the war.) If the whole truth were known, there would have been many more awarded. Those with medals know how little they really mean.

I was turning to go toward some wounded guys when BOOM! I was violently pushed back off my feet as my weapon flew from my hands. Shrapnel had hit my rifle. I slowly slid down through the hot moist side of the crater and checked to see if I had been hit. My ears were ringing, and I was stunned, but OK, so I climbed up and out, finding my weapon cut almost in half by a huge chunk of shrapnel. Lucky again, but weaponless!

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw someone running toward me and looked up into the wild eyes of a gook with a metal engineering stake raised over his head aimed at me. I thought, "This crazy fucker is going to kill me with a stake!" I quickly aimed my useless weapon at him, and his eyes widened slightly, but he didn't slow down at all. I lunged forward, screaming like a madman and jammed the barrel into his throat as his stake fell forward, whacking me on the head and shoulder. Pain and anger triggered me into that zone that I avoid even to this day, and I repeatedly struck him in the neck and head, even though it wasn't necessary. I felt a warm flow down the back of my neck, bringing a headache to go with the ringing ears.

Everything continued to melt together into one eternal nightmare of injury, pain, death and near misses, until I found myself sitting beside a bunker near the berm, giving up. "I don't care. I can't fight any more!" I thought. I had one clip and one frag left, so I sat down there, opened a can of pecan roll and prepared to enjoy my final meal for this lifetime.

I noticed the first early hues of dawn smoldering through the treeline, realizing this long night will soon be past. Maybe, I WILL live to see the day. Then, like a Rottweiler growling deep in the throat, I heard a low rumble in the distance. I leaned over the berm and looked in the direction of the sound to see the tops of some trees shaking, separating from other trees. Something big was coming through the jungle, and it sounded uncomfortably familiar. It was the sound of tanks! Oh No! If I have come this far only to get wiped out by Chinese tanks, then I WILL kill myself!

I found myself staring at the edge of the wood line, the pecan roll stuck like dirt in my throat, waiting to see who it was that would determine this day. The early light brightened slowly, the rumbling increased, dust rising in the jungle, more trees shaking, and moving aside as the raging herd of tracks bulled their way toward the open field. The first track lurched into view, and it was the 11th Armored Cav! I jumped up and screamed "FUCKIN A!" Others were yelling and jumping for joy as more than 20 tracks thunderously emerged from the wood line, bouncing and rocking at high speed, and proceeded to surround the entire LZ. When they had completed the circle, they slowed to a stop and each turret slowly turned out, their barrels facing the jungle. We were safe!!! I stood there and wept the deepest, hottest tears of my life.

The intense relief was soon meaningless, as an even greater horror began. During the night, it was simple to fight for life, but the daylight revealed those who had lost. Once again, the entire night was revisited as those of us who were able, exhausted and still in shock, sorted through the remains of unfathomable slaughter to gather all the casualties for identification. Much of the identifying was simply determined by who was gone, since direct body recognition was generally impossible. The long line of casualties, very few in bags, was well over 100, and the day was full of funereal anguish, uncontrollable sobbing. I have never seen so many men talking and weeping to themselves.

One of the very damaged, beheaded bodies had been identified as me, which I learned the next day in the rear when I walked into a room and found everyone staring at me, gasping, "You're dead!" I wonder what my life would have been if I hadn't stopped and corrected that paperwork.


Standing near me, in extreme shock, was one of only three survivors of the 26 new guys who had arrived the day before. He looked at me with phantom eyes, shook his head and said, "I can't . . . I can't," and walked away. Aching everywhere, stiff, cut, bruised, and with ears ringing, I joyfully found Chris, who was fine, but EVERYONE else was gone. Many men were listed as MIA's because they were completely obliterated by the massive explosion. There was little difference between the survivors and casualties; everyone lost. Two weeks later, I was back in the US., out of the Army.

Over the years, as I reminisce in response to inquiry about Viet Nam, I occasionally mention some of the events of this night. Every April Fool's Day brings me back as well, though for only a brief moment. The funny thing is that each time I return, I recall many, many more and different events from this night. It's endless, and all still there inside my memory, somewhere. I once read that at the moment of death, your entire life flashes before you. I suspect I may need a little more time to allow for that. Better yet, let's just skip the flash back and move on to the next flash.

Lee Weltha (aka Velta)
May 1996

EDITORS NOTE: Lee Velta is currently an opera singer in New York City. A copy of this newsletter will be mailed to MG (RET) Michael Conrad and Father Patrick Boyle at their last known addresses. Remember our "Angry Skipper" Motto: "Remember the bad times once; Remember the good times forever!" Thank you, Lee, for baring your soul and sharing a real BAD time with us all. Please come to St. Louis and have a real GOOD time, one that you will remember forever.

Honor and Courage


Range One India, 10/3/96

LEE WEETHA

CHRIS HUGHES

L2 ILLINGSWORTH



D 2/8 HONOR ROLL

RANK	NAME & HOMETOWN	DOB	DOD	LOCATION ON WALL	
SGT	Richard Arthur Coffey, Los Angeles, CA	21Oct41	04Nov65	3E	17
CPL	Eddie Lee Hill, Jr., Mobile, AL	07Jul40	04Nov65	3E	18
SP4	Terry Allen Rippy, Hammond, OR	30Sep42	22Apr66	6E	128
SGT	Paul William Malec, Summerdale, AL	24Jan37	14May66	7E	59
PFC	Fermin Saldana, Jr., San Antonio, TX	10Feb46	23May66	7E	106
2LT	Michael Douglas Derosier, Fort Walton Beach, FL	16Apr43	19Sep66	10E	117
SSG	Paul Edward Floyd, Jr., Clinton, MA	08May34	14Oct66	11E	73
CPL	Peter Joseph Keller, Jr., Detroit, MI	31Jan45	28Jan67	14E	91
CPL	Donald Francis Yates, Round Lake, NY	12Sep46	28Jan67	14E	94
SGT	William Burton, Jr., Hopkins, SC	02Jan45	01Mar67	15E	125
CPL	Robert Edward Johnson, Highland, NY	14Nov46	01Mar67	15E	128
PFC	Robert Lester Van Gieson, Van Nuys, CA	21May47	12Mar67	16E	71
PFC	Michael Neal Johnson, Brentwood, MD	19Nov47	18Mar67	16E	105
PFC	Ralph Traylor Woodall, Jr., Jesup, GA	14Apr44	18Mar67	16E	108
PFC	Daniel Ivan Nelson, Rutledge, MN	19Oct47	30May67	21E	18
PFC	Charles William Krueger, Menasha, WI	13Jul47	31May67	21E	23
SP4	Terry Russell McComb, Lapeer, MI	01Nov46	05Jun67	21E	59
2LT	Michael E. Bennett, Brentwood, NH	14Apr46	01Nov67	28E	107
SP4	Allan Eugene Follett, Independence, MO	13Nov44	11Dec67	31E	79
SP4	John Paul Paulson, Jr., Neenah, WI	15Aug47	11Dec67	31E	82
SGT	Wyatt Cecil Gordon, Lawrence, IN	03Apr48	31Jan68	36E	4
SP4	Robert Eugene Gardner, Sylacauga, AL	22Sep42	19Apr68	50E	46
CPL	Richard Allan Carlson, San Francisco, CA	30Mar48	24May68	67E	5
SP4	Larry Dean Novak, Platte Center, NE	17Mar48	24May68	68E	5
SGT	Jacob Robinson Weldin, Wilmington, DE	18Aug46	06Jun68	59W	17
PFC	Brian Carl Winner, Detroit, MI	08Sep47	07Jun68	58W	1
			(MIA 04Jun68)		
SGT	Robert James Ross, Charlotte, NC	01Jul47	01Jul68	54W	32
ILT	Harrison E. Woehner, Jr., Minneapolis, MN	07Jul43	18Jul68	51W	9
			(WIA 24May68)		
CPL	Stanley Lloyd Grunstad, Everett, WA	21Apr47	19Jul68	51W	10
PFC	Roger Theodore Fast, Butterfield, MN	14Jan48	19Aug68	48W	54
SP4	Ronald Duane Golden, Superior, WI	22Jul44	20Aug68	47W	7
PFC	Michael John Cromie, Harperwoods, MI	06Apr48	18Nov68	38W	6
SP4	Raymond Joseph Ahern, Jr., Philadelphia, PA	14Jan48	26Nov68	38W	63
SP4	Willie Gerald Jones, Fort Lauderdale, FL	15Nov47	04Dec68	37W	40
SP4	Donald Robert Stoltz, Milwaukee, WI	17Jan48	04Dec68	37W	42
SSG	William Charles Williams, Horton, MS	15Oct46	04Dec68	37W	44
SP4	Elliot Velez-Rodriguez, Vega Baja, PR	29May47	21Jan69	34W	54
CPL	Warren Reed Eskridge, Tangier, VA	09Sep47	28Jan69	33W	7
SP4	Carl Dale Pipher, Canton, OH	31Mar49	28Jan69	33W	11
CPL	James Edmonds, Burlington, NC	12Jul48	05Feb69	33W	62
SP4	Chester Jon Kmit, Williamsburg, MA	11Apr45	05Feb69	33W	65
PFC	Neil Shipp Brown, Salt Lake City, UT	07Aug44	02May69	26W	97
CPL	George Arthur Brown, Whaleyville, VA	19Jan48	12May69	25W	62
SP4	Hugh Henry Sarah, Plymouth, MI	05Aug45	23Sep69	17W	1
CPL	Albert Harold Altizer, Squire, WV	11Apr49	08Oct69	17W	49
PFC	Joseph Henning Benson, Coram, MT	16Feb49	08Oct69	17W	49
SP4	Anthony Jack Carlucci, New York, NY	22May49	20Nov69	16W	98
CPL	Peter Karl Matthei, St. Louis, MO	06Sep45	20Nov69	16W	101
SSG	William Joseph Montague, Valley Stream, NY	10Apr42	12Feb70	13W	2
			(Listed on 29Oct67 Roster)		

PFC	Tony Rava, Mt. Angel, OR	30Aug49	18Feb70	13W	31
CPL	Kenneth Michael Flashner, New Orleans, LA	21Nov46	28Feb70	13W	68
CPL	Francis Louis Ware III, Youngstown, OH	10Sep49	06Mar70	13W	89
SSG	James Cooney, New York, NY	01Jul47	09Apr70	12W	112
(Listed on 29Oct67 Roster)					
CPL	Craig Thomas Waterman, Rockwell City, IA	30Sep49	03Sep70	7W	37
SGT	Mike John Aguilar, Compton, CA	24Jun46	10May72	1W	15
SP4	Oscar Aguilar, Fairfield, CA	05Apr51	10May72	1W	15
SGT	William Arvel Boatright, Abbott, AR	28Dec49	10May72	1W	16
PFC	Steven Edward Bowersock, Lima, OH	25Sep51	10May72	1W	16
SGT	Edward Denzel Burnett, Jay, OK	06Dec51	10May72	1W	16
PFC	Clint Edwin Carr, Alexandria, LA	02Mar53	10May72	1W	16
SP4	Dennis Gyman Dunning, Raymond, MS	11Aug53	10May72	1W	17
SP4	David Cruz Flores, Agana, GM	20Aug52	10May72	1W	17
SGT	Dieter Kuno Freitag, Ft. Dix, NJ	10Sep46	10May72	1W	17
PVT	James Douglas Groves, Maysville, KY	06Jul53	10May72	1W	17
PFC	Dale Lamont Hayes, Detroit, MI	07Mar52	10May72	1W	18
SP4	William Frederic Henaghan, Bethpage, NY	25Nov51	10May72	1W	18
SP4	Frank Theodore Henson, Massapequa, NY	06Oct51	10May72	1W	18
SP4	Donald Edward Howell, Los Angeles, CA	14Nov47	10May72	1W	19
SP4	Freddie Jackson, Cocoa, FL	14Feb44	10May72	1W	19
SP4	Thomas Allan Lahner, Eau Claire, WI	18Jun51	10May72	1W	19
CPT	Kenneth Rosenberg, New York, NY	25Oct42	10May72	1W	19
PFC	David Allen Lydic, Johnstown, PA	08Sep53	10May72	1W	20
SP4	Gary Robert Monteleone, Saugus, CA	27Jul52	10May72	1W	20
PFC	Dean Anthony Phillips, Tiro, OH	14Nov51	10May72	1W	20
SGT	James Christian Jensen, Elsinore, UT	21Jun51	10May72	1W	21
PVT	Jackie Ray, Jackson, MI	19Apr49	10May72	1W	21
SP4	Richard Ridgeway, Bloomington, IL	13Aug51	10May72	1W	21
PVT	Efrain Rivera-Agosto, Sabana Grande, PR	13Jan53	10May72	1W	21
PFC	John Tenerio Sablan, Agana, GM	03Jun53	10May72	1W	21
SP4	Clarence L. Saulsberry, Jr., Chicago, IL	31Dec51	10May72	1W	22
SP4	Raymond Joseph Shiko, Kingston, PA	02Aug53	10May72	1W	22
SP4	David Wesley Sulser, Galion, OH	28Oct51	10May72	1W	22
PFC	Thomas Eugene Wood, Tacoma, WA	16Aug53	10May72	1W	22

ANGRY SKIPPER (D 2/8)
C/O EDWARD P. REGAN
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