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THE VIETNAM YEARS

For most of us life after graduation began with 60 days of leave. We returned home and relished the free time and lack of structure. The absence of reveille formations, cadet drill, SAMI inspections, papers, WPRs, and numerous other requirements seemed odd at first, but we quickly adjusted to a more relaxed and less structured life style. During those 60 days many of us married at West Point or in the churches and synagogues we had attended before going to West Point. Several had story-book weddings in an old Army chapel at Fort Myer and rode in a horse-drawn coach with their bride. Some chose classmates as the Best Man whose duties included planning the bachelor party and, all too often, instigating embarrassing pranks. With our beautiful bride beside us and beneath sabres provided generously by the Hostess's Office at West Point, we posed proudly for photographs in our dress uniforms.

Some of us traveled across the United States or to foreign countries. Ron Walter and Rick Bunn borrowed a pop-up trailer, hooked it to Ron's convertible, and drove through Mexico. Passing through deserts, jungles, mountains, and cities, they arrived in Acapulco and camped on the beach next to the Ritz Hotel, which allowed them to enjoy most of the amenities without the costs. They visited friends near Mexico City, swam in the Pacific, and met many amazing people. Although they were robbed three times (once at gun point), losses were minimal and did not disrupt the adventure. Rick said, "After about a month of playing below the border, we were more than ready to return to the States for a real hamburger and a glass of milk."¹

Looking back on those 60 days, we foresaw a rosy future. Yet, we knew we faced Airborne and Ranger schools and the prospect of serving in Vietnam war. Reflecting on the "war stories" about Ranger School, Jack Lowe said: "The whole Airborne-Ranger period is sort of a Beast Barracks of the Army."² Jack, as well as the rest of us, knew we faced the "real" Beast Barracks, the one with live bullets, in the near future. The Gulf of Tonkin incident (August 1964), shelling and attack on Pleiku Air Field (February 1965), and Battle of Ia Drang (November 1965) opened the way for the United States to deploy significant forces to South Vietnam: elements of the 1st Marine Division (March 1965), 173rd Airborne Brigade (May 1965), 1st Infantry Division (July 1965), 101st Airborne Division (July 1965), 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) (September 1965), and 25th Infantry Division (December 1965).

As we enjoyed our graduation leave, many of us worked diligently to stay physically fit and to follow events in Southeast Asia; others hoped our prior studies and habitual level of fitness we had maintained at West Point would suffice. A handful of us feared the war would be over before we were "in country."

AIRBORNE AND RANGER SCHOOLS

Our Airborne and Ranger training began at Fort Benning, Georgia. Limitations in class sizes for Airborne and Ranger schools allowed only our classmates with initial assignment overseas to report directly to Fort Benning; most completed this training in November or December 1965. Those with stateside assignments had a month or two of duty with our assigned units before going to Fort Benning in October. Almost all of us had our Airborne wings and Ranger tabs sewn on by February 1966.³

Those who went to Airborne School before Ranger School had the advantage of getting in good shape before the more rigorous Ranger training. The Airborne course was broken into three segments: Ground Week, Tower Week, and Jump Week. We learned how to exit safely from an airplane, control a parachute, and make a successful parachute landing fall (PLF). For all the physical demands, we were still required to stand inspection with starched fatigues and spit-shined boots. Many of us quickly tired of the nit-picky morning inspections and had our

boots shined professionally at a nearby barbershop. The school, nonetheless, provided some unforgettable moments, such as watching Gary Kadetz plummet to the ground with a “cigarette roll” and his somehow miraculously avoiding serious injury. We also remember our receiving a hard sales pitch for encyclopedias during an evening of wining and dining in a local steak house. By the time we graduated, jumping out of an airplane seemed as simple and easy as using an encyclopedia, but most of us never made another jump.

Ranger School proved far more challenging. Its physical and mental demands tested our stamina, toughness, and dedication. We spent three weeks in Fort Benning, three weeks in the mountains near Dahlonaga, Georgia, and three weeks in the swamps near Eglin Air Force Base. Recondo training at Camp Buckner had given us a taste, but only a taste, of what Ranger School would ask of us. We navigated across rough terrain and unfriendly swamps and endured numerous patrols, including one of three days and another of seven days. Many of the patrols, on which we regularly rotated being squad leader, culminated with a raid on an enemy position or an attempt to rescue an American POW. Some of us were on patrols that failed to recover air-dropped C-rations and had to survive without food for several days. A number of our classmates, such as Phil Cooper, Chris Needels, and Kala Kukea, excelled in this environment.⁴

Of the many tales that originated in Ranger School, none had more “eye witnesses” than one involving Sonny Ray. At the end of the Fort Benning phase, an alert for a seventeen-mile forced march came at 0300 hours, followed by our packing our gear and moving out in total darkness. A downpour soaked us shortly thereafter. At the end of the march, while sitting in a ditch awaiting further instructions, Sonny looked down and exclaimed, “No wonder my feet hurt. I put my boots on the wrong feet!!” He later explained that he had put his boots on in pitch-black darkness and that, while his feet had hurt from the beginning, he had expected them to hurt. He said, “After all, we were on a seventeen-mile road march.”⁵

All of us, at one time or another, experienced something memorable in Ranger School, some amusing, others not so much. Phil Cooper’s wife, Darlene, wrote, “We became close friends with John and Sandy Funk during Ranger School. Sandy was a beautician and when she heard that nail polish was good for chiggers, Sandy sent him back to camp with painted fingernails and toenails.”⁶ Then there was the Tactical Officer, known as “Murph the Surf,” who challenged the assembled Rangers, most of whom were our classmates to step forward and fight. No one broke ranks. “Murph the Surf’s” contempt was palpable, but that night, Mike Thompson visited him and accepted the challenge. The next morning the bruises on “Murph the Surf’s” face suggested Mike had definitely gotten the best of him.⁷ Tom Abraham had a different type of story. He wrote: “Most memorable event at Ranger School was the river crossing. Ranger 5 went from December through February, the coldest part of the year. I was chosen to take the rope across the water so everyone else could cross. After I got to the other side, in the freezing cold, the sergeant yelled, ‘Come on back. It’s called off for today. Too cold!’ You gotta have a sense of humor.”⁸

Notwithstanding evidence to the contrary, the Ranger cadre did have a sense of humor. Barrie Zais wrote: “My Ranger School class #2 was mostly classmates. In the Benning phase we were given live goats, chickens, and rabbits, as well as raw vegetables to prepare for dinner. I put one of the white rabbits inside my shirt and carried him as a pet for the remainder of Ranger School. Toward the end of the Florida phase, the cadre became aware of the rabbit, and at graduation they presented him with a Ranger tab mounted on a plastic hospital bracelet.”⁹

Amidst the challenges at Ranger School, there was plenty of danger. Boris Borkowski stepped onto a hornet’s nest, had a severe reaction to the stings, and went into shock. He had to be medevaced out of the field.¹⁰ Jerry Ledzinski stepped off a “cliff” in the pitch-black darkness and fell 25 feet. After bouncing off the ground below, he yelled to the other members of the patrol “I’m okay--be careful guys there’s a little drop-off here!” Jerry contracted pneumonia during the Florida phase but pushed on despite a raging fever. Not until the end of

the course did he seek medical assistance.¹¹

After finishing Airborne and Ranger, almost all of us went to our first assignment, not the branch Basic Course. The decision to forgo the Basic Course apparently stemmed from a suggestion by our Commandant (BG Stilwell) to the Superintendent that recently graduated infantry officers bypass the Basic Course, go to Airborne and Ranger schools, and then proceed to their first assignment. The Commandant also suggested that attendance at the Basic Course by recent graduates in other branches be greatly reduced.¹² The Superintendent passed the recommendation up the chain of command to Department of the Army. To everyone's surprise, Department of the Army expanded the Superintendent's initial recommendation, and almost none of us went to the branch Basic Course. The one notable exception, at a time when Air Defense Artillery was part of Field Artillery branch, concerned those Field Artillery officers who had an Air Defense assignment as their first assignment. These classmates went to a three-week accelerated version of the branch Basic Course.¹³

For almost all of us, Airborne and Ranger schools served as our Basic Course. This may have benefitted Infantry and some Armor officers, but it created special challenges for Field Artillery officers and forced them to work hard to overcome their lack of basic knowledge and skills in their branch. Mike Applin said, "I suspected when we left West Point, and know now, that Spizzerinctum is no substitute for adequate branch training."¹⁴ He added, "I can't tell you how many times I was told by superiors that I was a second-class citizen because of my lack of Fort Sill training." Mike expressed his gratitude to the artillerymen, most of whom were Korean War veterans, for mentoring him.¹⁵ Skip O'Donnell echoed Mike's complaints when he said his not having attended the branch school "jeopardized" his field artillery career. He was grateful to attend a six-week "refresher course" at Ft. Sill.¹⁶ Russ Campbell also complained: "When I was notified that I would be going to Vietnam in the 101st Airborne Division, I was so alarmed that I immediately requested to go to the Artillery Basic Course at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. After being in a Howitzer unit in Germany, I was well aware that my four days of artillery training in Camp Buckner was hardly sufficient preparation for going into combat with the 101st. Can you imagine? ... I would have been more dangerous to our guys than the VC and NVA. Thanks goodness my request was accepted, and I went to Ft. Sill."¹⁷

Some of our Field Artillery classmates were unable to attend an abbreviated course. John Mogan said he "took the Basic Course by extension while doing OJT."¹⁸ John Shuford told what happened to him. "I was force-fed years of experience and knowledge in a very short time by the best army officer I have known—Major (and eventually Lieutenant Colonel) Donald Farmer. He was commissioned on Pork Chop Hill and expected to retire not having achieved his dream of commanding a battalion in combat. He died commanding a battalion in Vietnam. When we were introduced, he told me that he despised West Pointers and had no use for them. But he gave me a chance. I learned a lot and commanded a nuclear capable 8-inch self-propelled Howitzer battery for the last six months of my tour [in Korea]."¹⁹ Ric Shinseki, who later transferred to Armor, learned the basics of calling and adjusting fires while in a ship sailing to Southeast Asia. After he became Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, he often expressed his thanks publicly for the schooling he received from some very professional and competent NCO's.²⁰ Other classmates (most notably Dan Benton, Joe DeFrancisco, and John Pickler, all of whom reached three-star rank) also overcame their not having attended the Field Artillery Basic Course.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT

After Airborne and Ranger schools (and Basic, if we attended), we scattered across the face of the globe. A small number of us served in the Dominican Republic. The American intervention began in April 1965; sporadic fighting continued until the declaration of a truce in August. Dick Williams arrived there shortly after his marriage on July 31 and before he had attended Airborne and Ranger schools. After serving as a "leg lieutenant" in the 82nd Airborne

Division in Santo Domingo for a brief time, he went to Fort Bragg and Fort Benning to complete Airborne and Ranger schools and then returned to Santo Domingo and the 82nd, where he remained until July 1966. Dick wrote: "I was stationed in downtown Santo Domingo as a platoon leader in C Company, 1st Bn 504th Infantry (Abn). Our mission was to keep the loyalists separate from the rebels and to secure the power plant on the Ozama River. Most of the activities involved riot control and other people-control activities. I worked closely with the Marines and the Brazilian Army in the vicinity of the Embassy and other downtown areas. I got there after the primary action was over. All we had were a few snipers and bombings. So, in February 1966 we moved the Battalion to the western mountains, near Haiti, where we did a lot of training."²¹ Bob Sterba served with the Military Advisory and Assistance Group (MAAG) in the Dominican Republic. Bob wrote: "As I walked into the mandatory happy hour at Fort Campbell on Friday, April 1, 1966, I was met at the door by my company commander. He said that I was going on six-months temporary duty to Santo Domingo, leaving tomorrow and did not have to stay for the remainder of Happy Hour. I was one of 13 infantry lieutenants and captains with Spanish on their records who were sent."²² Bob remained in Santo Domingo until May 1969.²³

For many of us Germany was our first assignment. A few traveled to Europe by "surface carrier," which turned out to be a six-day cruise on the USS United States, the finest and fastest ship on the seas at that time. Russ Campbell noted, "Now, that was a posh trip."²⁴ We arrived late in 1965 when Germany was still recovering from the war and farmers still ploughing their fields with oxen. The Germans had removed much of the debris from World War II, and Volkswagens and Mercedes zoomed down the autobahns. With an exchange rate of five Deutsche marks to the dollar, we could have a nice meal with wine or beer for only a few dollars, and we could enjoy German culture and visit historic sites without emptying our wallets. It was not uncommon for bachelors to date attractive frauleins whose fathers had fought in World War II.

When we arrived, most units were at 100% strength with their full complement of senior officers and NCOs. With the Cold War at its height, we prepared and trained for an attack by Warsaw Pact forces. The major training areas at Grafenwöhr, Baumholder, and Wildflecken, as well as small local training areas, quickly became familiar to us. None of us relished the early-morning, unannounced "alerts" which occurred about once a quarter and required us to be in our units and vehicles ready to move within two hours. We recognized, however, the importance of getting our units assembled and dispersed in the event of a surprise conventional or nuclear attack by Warsaw Pact forces.

On those rare occasions when we had some free time, some who served in West Germany traveled to West Berlin to visit East Berlin and witness life behind the Iron Curtain. Bob Bradley had lived in Berlin as a twelve-year old when his father served in the Berlin Brigade and he emphasized how difficult it was, before the wall was erected, to locate the border between East and West Berlin. He noted, "I used to ride my bike to East Berlin."²⁵ Although the erection of the Berlin Wall during our Beast Barracks had stopped the flow of East Germans to West Berlin, American soldiers and their families still had access to East Berlin and could cross through the wall that surrounded West Berlin. After exchanging "West Marks" for "East Marks," we could enjoy the opera, ballet, and East Berlin's finest restaurants and see the rubble and damage from World War II, long lines at grocery stores, and the shortage of consumer goods.

As platoon leaders in the Berlin Brigade, Bob Bradley and Tom Mushovic served as Officers of the Guard at Spandau Prison where the Nazis Albert Speer, Baldur von Schirach, and Rudolf Hess were held. Tom described his first tour of duty: "I was selected to do the change of guard with the Russians and lead the first American shift. The men for my change of command ceremony were chosen from the battalion based upon their height and weight. They were all about six feet two inches tall and weighed about 190 pounds. We rehearsed until we could do it in our sleep. I suspect the Russians did so, too; the change was flawless. I suspect

that if it wasn't, I might have been the first from our class discharged from the Army."²⁶

Within a few months, however, everything changed as numerous personnel were reassigned to the U.S. on short notice to build up the training base and prepare soldiers and units for Vietnam. Those of us remaining in Germany quickly occupied positions of responsibility far beyond what we expected in our first years of service. John Wattendorff wrote: "Because of the significant shortage of experienced officers in combat engineer units in Germany in 1966-7, I was able to gain experience in roles that I would not ordinarily encounter until much later in my career. I served as a platoon leader, assistant battalion S-3, company commander and battalion XO during my first assignment--with less than three years commissioned service. I even served a short period as acting battalion commander. The real highlight was representing our battalion at division headquarters on major field training exercises and serving as the combat engineer advisor to the division staff and commander. Our wartime mission--to counter the potential Soviet threat to invade West Germany--we took very seriously."²⁷ Bob Doughty said: "I went from being a tank platoon leader with no experience to being a battalion S-3 and XO with no experience. The first time I ever saw a battalion move I was in charge of the move, and the first time I ever saw a court martial, I was president of the court. Thank heavens for the law course we took as cadets!"²⁸

Doug Kline wrote, "Quick promotions to 1LT and Captain only meant that we were thrust into more demanding situations for which we weren't really prepared. By 1967 I was the A Battery commander, and was authorized roughly 100 soldiers and 4 officers. On one occasion, our battery roster had 34 soldiers and 1 officer (ME!)! Keep in mind I had six M109 155mm Howitzers to man and keep combat ready, nuclear weapons stockpiled at a separate storage area, and Battalion Duty Officer once a week (since we had to have an officer on duty 24 hours a day and there were only 10 officers in the battalion, including the LTC Bn CO and the Maj XO/S-3 who didn't pull duty)! As a nuclear-capable unit, we also had to have an emergency action message Red and Blue Team on duty at all times. To spice things up, three times a year I had to redeploy my whole Battery to guard our nuclear ammo storage site for a week at a time. Those were the days!!"²⁹ Steve Ellenbogen encountered not only the personnel turbulence associated with the Vietnam build-up but also the turbulence engendered by Charles de Gaulle's decision to withdraw France from the integrated command of NATO. Steve was assigned to the 97th Engineer Construction Battalion near Verdun, France. About nine months after he reported to his unit in November 1965, many of the experienced officers and NCO's left the battalion, and he became a company commander. Because of France's withdrawal from the NATO's integrated military structure, his battalion moved from northeast France to Pirmasens, Germany, shortly after he assumed command. Steve wrote, "I was in way over my head, but it was a great experience, and I got to make mistakes in a non-hostile environment."³⁰

Despite the turbulence, those in Europe faced some real world contingencies. Ray Woodruff served in the 8th Signal Battalion in Bad Kreuznach, Germany, from December 1965 to December 1967 and wrote: "Chuck Eckart and I were both on jump status in Germany when the Israeli War broke out in '67.... We went into quarantine that night. When Chuck and I were at the Division TOC..., we found out that one of us was going to make the combat parachute jump into Wheelus AFB in Libya and one of us would ride in on the airplanes after the base was secure. As the CO of the Signal Company with the airborne platoon in it, Chuck would rightfully have been the guy to jump. I was not going to let that happen without a fight, so we got a little hot with each other in the TOC. The Battalion CO literally grabbed both of us by the ears and took us out into the hall and told us that he would make the decision, not us. We would have needed about 40 C-130s and the USAF had about six available. We did not need to go anyway, since the war was over so quickly."³¹

Harley Moore faced a different type of challenge in 1966 when he commanded D Company, 3rd Engineer Battalion in Munich. He wrote: "That company was the engineering unit for a NATO air mobile force. We went on a war games exercise in northeastern Greece then

crossed into Turkey for another one. We airlifted all our equipment from Munich to Thessaloniki and then back from Istanbul. Finding planes large enough to take my bulldozer, bucket loaders, lowboy truck/trailers, and 5-ton dump trucks was a real challenge. There were both weight and size issues. The bulldozer blade had to go in a separate plane from the body--because of the weight. It took a week to move each way because of Air Force fleet limits. Today, of course, you drive a bunch of this equipment into a C-5A and away you go." Given the shortage of officers, Harley was allowed to take the commander of C Company, Ken Yoshitani, with him and have Ken be an acting platoon leader in his company. Harley wrote: "Only time I outranked that Star Man."³²

Classmates in Alaska also encountered numerous challenges in their first assignment. Marty Johnson commanded a mechanized infantry platoon and an airborne platoon with few sergeants and soldiers. Soon however, new draftees arrived. Marty wrote: "With so few sergeants I was assigned to develop a NCO academy from which we picked squad and team leaders. We seemed to have a number of highly educated soldiers, one of whom had PhD's in Electrical Engineering and Ornithology.... They did a good job until we starting getting sergeants rotating back from Vietnam. I spent two years [1965-1967] in Alaska as platoon leader, company commander and battalion S-3. I also led a rescue team that conducted searches for lost hikers, hunters and college students who were unprepared for the rigors of even summer weather on the glaciers and in the mountains. We never found anyone alive. As I look back on those two years in Alaska, the education I got from the senior NCOs was superb and formed a basis for all of my leadership experiences since. The army was in transition from volunteer to drafted soldiers, and the challenge was to get rid of those who were causing lots of problems so that we could focus on preparing those who remained for service in Vietnam.... Life in Alaska (as it was throughout the Army) was overshadowed by the certain knowledge that everyone would soon be going to Vietnam. That and the challenges of military operations in such an unforgiving climate motivated us to learn as much as we could from every experience."³³

Like those of us assigned elsewhere, our classmates in Korea endured considerable turbulence. As the American presence in Southeast Asia increased, senior NCO's and experienced officers departed for Vietnam or stateside training units. Amidst the draw-down, the mission and the challenges in Korea remained the same, but simple tasks became very difficult. John Malpass wrote: "I was a company commander [in Korea] as a 2LT. My only other officer was another 2LT I outranked by one day. Each company in my battalion had one or two officers. One day the Division Commanding General flew in and inspected my company (MG George Pickett--great grandson of the Civil War Pickett). He tore me up--especially my mess hall. He gave me two weeks to square it away--or else! I was saved by my 2nd Division Engineer company commander classmates--Bruce Gailey, Terry Ryan, Dan Christman, et al--who came to my rescue, poured cement, brought in dirt, and helped me build stuff. General Pickett was so impressed, he went back and brought the Corps CG with him for another tour."³⁴ Don Rowe emphasized "the unrecognized hostilities in Korea" while he was there from January 1966 to February 1967. He explained, "For seven months as a 2nd Lt company commander in the DMZ in Korea we conducted patrols, sweeps and manned outposts against North Korean infiltrators." He added, "For domestic political reasons we did a great disservice to many young men who served in Korea during the late sixties, because at least for those of us stationed in the DMZ it was very much a hostile combat situation."³⁵

After serving in Germany and Fort Sill for a year, Gene Parker arrived in Korea in late 1967 to join a nuclear-capable Sergeant Missile battalion that was supposed to have a full complement of officers and NCOs. Because of severe personnel shortages throughout Korea, however, many of the battalion's personnel were reassigned once they arrived. Slated to be a recon and survey officer, Gene initially became a battalion S-4 and subsequently Headquarters and Headquarters Battery Commander for I Corps artillery. Despite the personnel turbulence,

he enjoyed the assignment in Korea which was then a “desperately poor” country. He recalled seeing a farmer move his large sow to market on the back of his bicycle and added: “When first driving through Seoul, I was struck by the number of people who were wearing cast-off/stolen military clothing. Since the North Koreans were as crazy then as now, there was continual threat of small unit operations. Throughout the city of Seoul and in the countryside, there were sandbagged check points with armed South Korean soldiers.” Clear evidence of the threat appeared in January 1968 when 31 North Korean commandos infiltrated into South Korea and got within a few hundred yards of the “Blue House,” the presidential residence, before they were discovered. In the ensuing gun battle three American soldiers and dozens of South Korean soldiers and civilians were killed.³⁶

As we performed our duties and awaited orders for Vietnam, whether for our first tour or subsequent ones, we were involved in many different things. Tom Abraham was the 215-pound all-Army wrestling champ in 1966 and placed second in the Inter-Service Tournament. Before going to Vietnam, he also coached the Iraqi Army wrestling team for two months. While Tom was in Baghdad, an Iraqi Air Force colonel led an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Iraqi government. Tom wrote, “The presidential palace was adjacent to the American Embassy, so my first exposure to combat was quite interesting.”³⁷ Bill Zadel served for six months in a Marine battalion at Guantanamo. He wrote: “Our basic task was securing the base’s perimeter (watching fences) and keeping a battalion of Marines fit and prepared for battle should a Cuban attack come. During my six months there we had several ‘alerts’ caused by communist activity, endured a direct hit by Hurricane Inez, and conducted a 25-mile training hike on the base with full field gear.”³⁸

Fred Grates, who had chosen Medical Service Corps before graduation, was detailed Air Defense Artillery (supposedly for two years) and assigned to a Nike Hercules missile battery in Western New York. Here he met the “brown-eyed Italian lass” who became his wife. He also caught the “aviation bug and a yearning for a little more ‘excitement.’” Fred wrote: “I knew a little about The Army Medical Department’s responsibility for med evac and thought they might have a few ‘openings’. In less than 90 days my branch transfer and flight school assignment were done.” Fred completed “primary” flight training at Fort Wolters, Texas, and advanced training at Fort Rucker in Alabama. He also convinced his “Italian lass” to marry him before he went to Vietnam. He wrote: “I managed to obtain a three-day pass and we were married in her home town of Niagara Falls, New York, in August of 1967. To add insult to injury I transported this wonderful young lady who had never been farther south than Philadelphia to a new home in a military trailer park in Daleville, Alabama. Can you picture the culture shock?”³⁹

Some of us had “dream assignments” in the Vietnam years. Rick Bunn served in 1966 as the commander of one of the Hawk (Air Defense Artillery) batteries on the island of Tokashiki, 25 miles off Okinawa in the East China Sea. He wrote, “I later became the senior of the two commanders and therefore became the Island commander—a dream assignment for a young First Lieutenant.”⁴⁰ After serving for a few months in the 3rd Armored Division in Germany, Step Tyner was reassigned in March 1966 to Buenos Aires where he joined the Escuela Militar de Equitacion, the school where the Argentine Army trained its Olympic riders. At the end of the course Step rode to sixteenth place in the Argentine Army equitation championship. He left Buenos Aires in December 1966 for service in the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg and Vietnam.⁴¹

Although many of us had looked forward to a first assignment in exotic places such as Germany, Alaska, or Korea, most of us remained in these locations for only a brief period. Because of the disastrous experience of the Class of 1950 in the Korean War, where so many new, inexperienced graduates were killed in battle, Department of the Army did not allow us after graduation to volunteer or be assigned directly to Vietnam. Once we reported to a unit somewhere else in the world, however, we could accompany that unit to Vietnam or volunteer to be transferred to Vietnam. Several of our classmates, such as Arpad Kovacs, volunteered for

Korea and then immediately submitted requests for intra-theatre transfers to Vietnam.⁴² Eight to nine months after graduation our list of assignments, the ones we had so carefully pondered and chosen, already had numerous changes. A year after graduation the list barely resembled the original one.

BUILD-UP FOR VIET NAM

The build-up for Vietnam swept many of us out of our initial assignments to the training bases in the United States. Some of us, such as Fred Smith, went from Korea to training bases in the United States. Fred wrote: "Training 200 plus recruits every eight weeks [at Fort Campbell] was a straightforward task. Our job was simple, take the raw young men and get them physically fit, able to march and shoot straight, some first aid, and basic infantry combat skills and send them to AIT [Advanced Individual Training]. Our duty was to get them ready for Vietnam. Virtually all of the NCO's were Vietnam Veterans. The war was in high gear and we took this mission very seriously."⁴³ John Concannon was on orders to the 25th Infantry in Hawaii but was diverted to the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Lewis where he trained troops and then deployed with them to Vietnam.⁴⁴

Other classmates remained in their stateside units but also became embroiled in the rapid preparation for Vietnam. Jack Lyons was assigned to a cavalry squadron at Ft. Carson, Colorado, which was only a "skeleton force" and had only a few NCOs. Jack wrote: "In the spring of '66 we were designated to conduct AIT for Scouts and Tankers to get them ready to go to Vietnam, once they finished basic training somewhere else. So we had to form cadres and prepare training in all sorts of areas. I conducted that training both at Carson and later on TDY at Ft. Irwin, California. We conducted tank training in the desert long before Wes Clark turned it into the high tech facility it is today. We did that for several months, through one cycle, and started to prepare for the next, when I decided that I'd volunteer for Vietnam (since I was training guys to go). I had orders within three weeks, left Irwin, cleared Carson, had a few weeks of leave, and was back in California to fly to Vietnam. I arrived in Camp Alpha [on Tan Son Nhut Airport in Saigon] exactly one year to the day after we had graduated."⁴⁵

After serving in Vietnam, some classmates returned to the United States to train soldiers before being reassigned to Southeast Asia. Tom Abraham's first assignment was at Fort Hood, followed by his serving in the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam from August 1966 to August 1967. After returning to the U.S. he was assigned to Fort Polk. Tom said, "Truth be told, I enjoyed myself at Polk. I had an AOT company and I enjoyed preparing those kids for combat."⁴⁶ He soon transferred to Military Intelligence, went through special schooling, and attended Vietnamese language school in El Paso, Texas. He again received orders for Vietnam, but in late 1969 those orders were cancelled.⁴⁷ His series of assignments and schooling was not uncommon among our classmates.

Other classmates contributed to the activation of new units for Vietnam. Bill Tredennick played a key role in the activation, training, and deployment of the 8th Battalion, 4th Artillery. With only four months to prepare the 175mm gun battalion for deployment, he reported to the 6000 area at Fort Sill in March 1967 when the battalion included only himself, a major, a supply officer, and a supply clerk. Bill said, "The battalion grew rapidly with the receipt of both men and equipment. The first SP4 to arrive became the acting Sergeant Major and the first five PFCs became acting First Sergeants." In April 1967 most of the officers and NCOs reported to the battalion and then some 350 cannoneers arrived from AIT at Fort Sill. By early July, the battalion had 100% of its equipment and a full complement of 515 officers and men. After much preparation, the battalion deployed on July 24, 1967. The battalion's guns and equipment moved by rail to Houston, then by ship through the Panama Canal to Vietnam, while the men traveled by air to Tacoma, Washington, where they boarded a troop ship that carried them across the Pacific to Da Nang. After marrying up with their guns and equipment, one of the firing batteries completed a fire mission that night. The battalion ended up at Dong Ha near the

DMZ with the mission of providing support to the marines there. Bill said, "While registering our first gun, we hit an NVA POL dump. We all ran out to see the smoke coming from the NVA POL dump. That was a good beginning for us."⁴⁸

The training environment in the United States sometimes bore little or no resemblance to the environment in Vietnam. Tom Henneberry described some of the challenges he faced at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, while training an infantry company in the 196th Light Infantry Brigade for Vietnam. He wrote, "Ft. Devens back then was notorious for its lack of adequate training facilities, especially for an Infantry Brigade. We did Advanced Infantry Training at Camp Edwards on Cape Cod, but the real laughter was doing Jungle training (in advance of our deployment to Vietnam) at Fort Drum, New York, from February through May, 1966. Most of the time the snow was about three to four feet deep amid frigid temps. One particularly cold night out in the boonies the temperature dropped well below zero, and I had to rotate my troops through our command tent throughout the night to avoid frostbite. To add insult to injury, the day we left to return to Ft. Devens, May 19, it snowed."⁴⁹

Preparation for Vietnam did not always go smoothly. Don Parrish described his experiences. "The 1/82nd FA (155 towed) was activated on 10 January 1968 at Fort Lewis, Washington. I was the battalion commander for about four days until a major arrived. Then I was the A Battery commander for the next year. The 125-man battery had an experienced battery commander, XO, First Sergeant, Chief of Firing Battery, Motor Sergeant, Mess Sergeant, and Supply Sergeant. The balance was 'instant' NCO's, AIT graduates, and lieutenants from the Basic Course." In April the 212th Artillery Group arrived from Germany, and Don's battalion was attached to them. Don continued, "They forced us to conduct training appropriate for West Germany. I clearly remember having to build up my mess truck to their specifications. The worst thing was having to pass a European style training test. We had sufficient information from the Americal Divarty on the skill sets that we needed in Vietnam like being able to shoot 360 degrees and do helicopter operations (slinging/tie downs). Instead, we practiced railroad loading. Finally, we were required to become prefix 5 (nuclear) qualified. In the limited time to train, this seemed to me then, and now, as a colossal waste of time."⁵⁰ Sixteen years later Don commanded this same battalion and, needless to say, did not make the same mistakes.

Amidst a deluge of unexpected challenges, we learned an incredible amount and made what we thought were important contributions. Dave Bodde expressed this sentiment when he described his experience with the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg in 1967-1968. For a time, while he was a captain, he served as a battalion S-3 and another captain, a few months senior to him, served as the battalion commander. Reflecting back on this time, he emphasized how junior officers had been given responsibilities well beyond their experience. "And so we made do with what we had: did our best, learned quickly, invented what we did not know, and made our mistakes. A truly remarkable time and place."⁵¹

Knowing we were enroute to Vietnam sooner or later, we treasured our time with our new wives and young families. And as we moved from assignment to assignment, many of us drove across the United States several times, often traveling in cars without air conditioning on an interstate highway system that was only partially complete. The per diem and travel allowance for a permanent change of station permitted us to travel a leisurely 250 miles a day, and as we plotted our route from motel to motel, we often chose accommodations with a swimming pool and attached restaurant. After almost fifty years, we remember the long drive but we remember the wonderful evenings and nights best of all.

VIETNAM

Among the earliest arrivals in Vietnam were the soldiers in the 25th Infantry Division, who were flown from Hickham Air Force Base in Hawaii to Pleiku Air Field. Dick Coleman was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, and when he reported to his battalion in Hawaii, he

was informed his battalion was “alerted for deployment to Vietnam.” One week later he was on a C-147 with his platoon enroute to Pleiku in the Central Highlands.⁵² Also in the 25th Infantry Division, Barrie Zais wrote: “We were alerted and started flying out to Pleiku on Christmas Day [1965]. In my battalion, 2nd Bn, 35th Infantry, there were five of us. The platoon leaders in company B were Ray Pollard, Bob Selkis (WIA), and Mike Glynne (KIA). In company C were Doug Davis (KIA) and I.”⁵³

Some classmates arrived in Vietnam in units that had been filled to full strength for deployment, while others arrived with stateside units that initially had been “drawn down” in order to provide full-strength units to Vietnam and then filled to full strength for deployment to Vietnam. Summarizing the experiences of a battalion filled to full strength, Hugh Kelley wrote: “In April [1966], the 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry [in the 101st Airborne Division] was redesignated the 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry, to be assigned to the 173rd by June 1966. The battalion was quickly brought to full strength. Bill Connolly (WIA), Mike Deems, Frank Probst (WIA), Bob Stowell (WIA), and Jim Wood (WIA) were already in the battalion as platoon leaders and had trained throughout the spring in preparation for the deployment.” After an automobile accident in Clarksville, Tennessee, created an opening for a rifle platoon leader, Hugh (WIA) joined the battalion and arrived in Vietnam with the advance party in mid-June 1966.⁵⁴ He wrote, “It seemed like the last ticket to the war.”⁵⁵ Marv Jeffcoat (WIA) joined the battalion later, thereby increasing the number of our classmates in the battalion to seven. Six of them were subsequently wounded and received purple hearts, and six of them served multiple tours in Vietnam.

As we landed in Vietnam for the first time, we did not know that some of us would serve multiple tours in Southeast Asia. For example, Bill Browder spent one year in the 4th and 1st Infantry Division’s artillery, one year in MACV as a HQ MACV J-3 Ground Liaison Officer, and one year as an advisor in MACV.⁵⁶ In his first tour he was an AXO and XO in a firing battery and was “involved in firing 30 to 50 thousand rounds of artillery.” He added, “We were mortared so many times that I lost count.”⁵⁷ In his second tour he was stationed with the 14th Special Operations Wing in Nha Trang and was responsible for coordinating between Headquarters II Field Force and the 5th Special Forces. He spent a great deal of time as an aerial observer and received two air medals for combat flying, as well as “honorary membership” in the 5th Special Forces. In his third tour, he was a MACV advisor to the 5th ARVN Division just north of Saigon and served as the headquarters company commander of the Division Combat Assistance Team for six months and then as a member of a Regimental Combat Assistance Team. After the Regimental teams were disbanded, he spent four months in I Field Force as an operations officer. Bill noted that the U.S. was withdrawing its forces during his third tour and observed, “It was sad to leave those people to their inevitable fate.”⁵⁸

Our experiences in Vietnam varied greatly, depending on when and where we served and what we did “in country.” Those of us serving in 1966 and 1967 shortly after the American build-up often found ourselves in heavy combat against main force enemy units. Hugh Kelley was wounded in Operation Cedar Falls (January 8-28, 1967), the largest American ground operation of the war. Two army divisions, plus an infantry brigade, airborne brigade, and an armored cavalry regiment participated in the battle. Bill Connolly commanded a rifle company in the 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry during the battle for Hill 875 in Dak To district of Kontum Province (November 19-24, 1967). This was one of the most intense battles that the 173rd Airborne Brigade fought during the war. There were times, however, when we had very little contact with the enemy. In the aftermath of the Tet offensive in February 1968 and the death of thousands of NVA and Viet Cong soldiers, for example, we often found ourselves doing more moving and searching than fighting. Yet, during this same period a huge battle occurred around Khe Sanh in northern I Corps.

Our experiences also depended on the region of Vietnam in which we served. With the country being divided into four Corps Tactical Zones with I Corps being in the north and IV

Corps being in the south, operations in the Central Highlands around Pleiku in II Corps, for example, differed significantly from those in the Mekong Delta in IV Corps. And serving along the coast differed dramatically from serving in the Central Highlands. Our experience also depended on whether we were serving in an American unit or serving as an advisor to the South Vietnamese. As advisors, we were far more likely to speak Vietnamese, participate in pacification operations, or get to know the Vietnamese people. In summary, depending on the year, location, and duty, we experienced many different “wars” in Vietnam.

Wherever we were or whatever our responsibilities were, we had similar reactions when we, as Civil War soldiers described it, “saw the elephant.” Our first experiences in battle revealed the chaos and the unpredictability of combat, and we learned quickly to make do with the people, skills, and weapons we had. A month before Ed Menninger’s death in March 1969, he wrote a lengthy account of his combat experience, which was displayed in Thayer Hall so that cadets might gain further insight into what they could expect upon commissioning. Ed wrote: “Since I have been here we have been in about a dozen contacts, only three being classified as serious. Recounting war stories does very little; however, any doubts about your ability to react properly when the time comes should be forgotten. I’ve found fire fights very analogous to jumping: once the door is open, especially if I am jump-mastering, all apprehension goes because I am kept busy, but once the effortless ride to the Drop Zone is over and I’m standing on the ground my heart is pounding as though I’ve just run five miles. I had no special training on calling in artillery, gunships, or air strikes prior to or after arriving in country. But when I found myself in the middle of a fight, my job made me all but forget the inherent danger, and common sense brought the fire support in on target. I was a bit shaky when it was all over, but then you’re entitled to be.”⁵⁹

CLASSMATES WHO GAVE ALL

Gary Kadetz was the first of 25 classmates to die in Vietnam. He was killed on May 19, 1966, by enemy fire during Operation Wahiwawa while acting as a forward observer with Company A, 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry. The combat took place in the Iron Triangle 30 miles north of Saigon. A soldier who was with Gary when he died said, “He was an outstanding FO. He could drop artillery rounds 25 yards from us. He was brave. He was going forward knowing the enemy was there and died with a mic[rophone] in his hand.”⁶⁰ Joe Koz wrote Gary’s obituary: “We remember well the difficulty Gary had in learning Russian because of his Long Island accent. But as was typical of him, he overcame this problem and eventually even enrolled in advanced Russian courses. He also volunteered to fight in the Yearling Open boxing tournament at Camp Buckner in the tough heavyweight division. He lost in a close match, but it was not because he quit--as usual, he gave it all he had. Gary was very active in football as a lineman for four years, participated in track as a shot putter, belonged to the Russian Club, and was an active member of the Jewish Choir.... We can still recall the beatings he would take as a third team lineman taking on the first team in football to better prepare them for the big game the following Saturday. Not once would he complain or quit!” The obituary concluded, “Gary Kadetz’s desire to follow the ‘sound of the guns’ was no accident. He was very patriotic and felt strongly that it was his duty to fight if our Nation was engaged in a conflict. He felt pride in defending our freedom and in preserving the freedom of other nations like South Vietnam. In doing this, Gary made the ultimate sacrifice--he gave his life for his country!”⁶¹

Bob Zonne was the last of our classmates to die in Vietnam. In his second tour Bob served as an infantry company commander in the 25th Infantry Division, and during his last months in country he was the division CG’s representative to the Field Force commander. This duty required him to travel daily between Cu Chi and Long Binh. In April 1970 the helicopter on which Bob was traveling crashed into the Dong Nai River north of Saigon, and Bob died in the crash. In his first tour Bob had served as an advisor to several Vietnamese Ranger battalions, and he had developed a great affection for the Vietnamese people. Even though he stood head

and shoulders above them because of his tall stature, he did not shrink from his duty and spent his entire first tour in the field in Tay Ninh province near the Cambodian border.⁶² Those of us who knew Bob as a cadet will always remember his strong sense of duty, quiet faith, and love for fast cars.

We also lost our First Captain Bob Arvin. Bob was killed in September 1967 when he was serving as an advisor to a Vietnamese Airborne battalion. In an attack on an enemy position, the entire left flank of the battalion was overwhelmed by enemy fire, and Bob, his counterpart and two radio operators were left alone. Following Bob's death, he was promoted posthumously and awarded the Silver Star, and the citation explained what happened after he and the others were left alone: "Undaunted by the perilous circumstances, Captain Arvin led the group forward to engage the enemy. In doing so, one of the radio operators was wounded. Although wounded himself, Captain Arvin, with complete disregard for his personal safety, moved through the enemy fire to the man and dragged him to a relatively protected location. Returning to the group, he began directing repeated armed helicopter gunship strikes as all elements of the battalion now engaged the enemy. Then, heedless of the increasing volume of enemy fire, Captain Arvin established a landing zone and supervised the evacuation of the wounded. Refusing evacuation himself, he returned to the front to continue to advise and assist in the conduct of the battle." During this final portion of the battle, Bob was killed by enemy fire.⁶³

Of the 25 classmates we lost in Vietnam, we lost seven in 1966, 11 in 1967, five in 1968, one in 1969, and one in 1970. Like Gary Kadetz, Bob Zonne, and Bob Arvin, our classmates died in a variety of circumstances. For example, in Operation Paul Revere II in the Ia Drang Valley, Doug Davis was part of a relief force attempting in August 1966 to assist two companies under strong enemy pressure. After his unit came under heavy contact, he established a perimeter and tried to recover the bodies of some U.S. soldiers outside the perimeter. Under heavy fire, he was ordered to pull back. As he was repositioning a machine gun in another attempt to recover the bodies, he was killed by a mortar round. In June 1967 Tony Borrego was serving as an advisor to a Vietnamese battalion that was operating with elements of the 173rd Airborne Brigade and 1st Cavalry Division. Seriously wounded in an ambush south of Dak To in Kontum Province, Tony died five days later. Eight other American soldiers died in the ambush.⁶⁴

Some of those classmates who died in Vietnam believed strongly in the need to fight the war. Killed in February 1968 while leading his men in an assault against an enemy position, Bob Keats believed he was fighting for lofty goals. He wrote: "I am in a fight to save the ideal now. I shall be until the day I die. The world can only be saved by people who are striving for the ideal. I know we shall win; it can be no other way." He concluded, "The fight goes on, and will go on until it is won. There can be no reneging on responsibility."⁶⁵

Every member of the Class of 1965 honors the memory and service of our classmates who made the ultimate sacrifice. After Chuck Hemmingway was killed while serving as an advisor, the Vietnamese battalion commander, who greatly respected Chuck, wrote a poem entitled "Memory to a Friend" and posted it in his headquarters. The poem said:

"You lost your life, why did it end?

I will remember you, my friend.

I'll write your name in our history.

A courageous soldier who died for liberty."⁶⁶

COMBAT OPERATIONS: INFANTRY AND ARMOR

Most of us, especially those of us in the combat arms in U.S. units, fought the war at the company and battalion level. Allied units were scattered widely across South Vietnam in order to control large areas and to increase chances of finding an elusive enemy, and we often found ourselves in dense jungle vegetation or in isolated fire bases far from division or brigade

headquarters. We were lieutenants and captains during the war, and as platoon leaders and company commanders, we participated in numerous “sweeps” or “search and destroy operations,” sometimes as part of a company or battalion operation and sometimes as part of a much larger force involving multiple U.S. and Vietnamese battalions and regiments/brigades. When we initially encountered an enemy force, we often did not know whether it was a few Viet Cong or a multi-battalion main force unit. Whatever the size of the enemy, we used maneuver and firepower to concentrate maximum force against him. Some operations inflicted few casualties on the enemy and resulted in our losing some very fine American soldiers. Other operations succeeded in inflicting huge casualties on the enemy before he managed to break contact and slip away, often across the border into Laos and Cambodia. All of us were dismayed by the opportunity enemy commanders had in Laos and Cambodia to fill their units with replacements, resupply them with weapons and supplies, and infiltrate them back into South Vietnam. Asked to describe his most memorable experience in Vietnam, Norm Boyter wrote: “As Assistant Brigade G-3, planning and then executing a brigade-size operation into Cambodia from Tay Ninh area after a total of almost two years of pursuing the VC/NVA to the border and having to stop [on the border] as they escaped.”⁶⁷

Amidst a myriad of different operations and experiences, a pattern of similar experiences existed for those of us serving in the various branches. Jim Hardin described his experiences as an Infantry officer: “I was Commander of C Company, 1/16th Bn, 1st Infantry Division [in 1967]. We were based out of Lai Khe and conducted operations in War Zones C and D and the Iron Triangle. Our Missions were Search and Destroy and Road Security. The Missions had three basic elements: Find, Fix, and Destroy the enemy. Finding the enemy, either Viet Cong or North Vietnamese Army units, was the most elusive aspect. Both used the jungle effectively and the VC also blended well with the local population. For operations in the jungle our tactic was to make contact with the enemy with the smallest force possible and then to engage him with superior air and artillery firepower. For the most part this worked well. Our casualties were minimized and greater losses were inflicted on the enemy. Finding and engaging the enemy within the local population was more challenging. We conducted searches of villages and interrogated the inhabitants. Some villagers were enemy sympathizers, and others were intimidated by the enemy so information on enemy location was difficult to obtain. Sometimes there would be contact with the enemy in populated areas. The engagements would have to be done carefully, usually with small arms only so as not to injure or alienate the local civilians. Our successes against the enemy in villages and hamlets were limited. In some cases we destroyed property and relocated people, and I think in the end this did more harm than good.”

“Besides mission accomplishment,” Jim said, “my greatest concern was taking care of soldiers. I wanted each soldier to return home alive and well. This was a formidable task. Each new soldier was given training on in-country tactics and operations. Lessons learned were taught, and more experienced soldiers passed on their knowledge. Basics were continuously emphasized: don't walk down trails; don't go to the same places. Use different routes. Take immediate action when fired upon. Use all available firepower. The Company lost three soldiers while I was in command, three too many, but overall I think we effectively limited casualties. Two of the KIA were killed by booby traps, or IED's in today's terms. The third was killed when our forward base was attacked by rocket fire. These type of losses severely impacted morale because there was no immediate enemy to strike back against.” Jim concluded, “Overall the soldiers in my command performed exceedingly well. They did what was asked of them and accomplished their mission with great courage and skill. I was proud and honored to command and to serve with them.”⁶⁸

A realistic portrayal of life in the Infantry appeared in the documentary “The Anderson Platoon.” Pierre Schoendoerffer, a French war correspondent, followed Joe Anderson's platoon in late 1966 through six weeks of operations near An Khe in the Highlands of II Corps. Joe was a platoon leader in B Company, 1/12th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division. The documentary showed

not only the infantry's experience during the war but also how American culture permeated the soldiers' day-to-day life. Along with images of soldiers being transported in helicopters and engaging in combat, the documentary, accompanied by Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots are made for Walking," showed them walking through rough terrain, cutting their way through brush, and wading mountain streams. The documentary also showed soldiers' eating cold C-rations, receiving mail from home, attending religious services in the field, and being evacuated when they were wounded or killed. "The Anderson Platoon" received an Oscar in 1967 from the Academy for Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and an International Emmy award in 1968 from the International Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

Our Infantry classmates participated in many different types of operations. They became especially proficient at airmobile operations. The helicopter became the symbol of the war, especially as a vehicle to ferry troops and supplies on the battlefield. Many of us planned and executed operations that depended on the helicopter's mobility to transport heavily burdened infantryman into harm's way. Such operations sought to surprise or trap the enemy and often did so. The Infantry also rode and fought from armored personnel carriers and in the Delta from assault boats with riverine forces. As for Airborne operations, Bob Guy made a combat parachute assault with the 173rd Airborne Brigade on February 22, 1967. While serving as the S-3 Air of the 2nd Battalion during Operation Junction City, he dropped into an area north of Tay Ninh during Operation Junction City. Bob recalled, "We jumped from 1000 feet into an old, dry rice patty complex that was quite vast. Contact was light and only a few casualties occurred from jump injuries. The thing I remember best was the heavy drop that followed right behind the troop drop. The C-130's came in quite low and dropped artillery pieces, ammo and ration pallets, as well as a few vehicles strapped to pallets. Some chutes didn't open until just before the load hit the ground and there were some flat C-rations after that drop. Overall, it was a memorable experience and the only combat jump of an American unit during the Vietnam War."⁶⁹ Tom Abraham participated in the same parachute jump. He noted that the jump was "uneventful," but over the next two weeks two lieutenants who succeeded him as commander of his rifle platoon were killed, as were most of the soldiers in his platoon.⁷⁰

The Infantry frequently provided security for fire bases, headquarters, airfields, downed helicopters, etc. Tom Barron wrote about one of his experiences during his second tour in Vietnam, when he was in command of C Company, 1/22 Infantry: "One morning I walked the company in to secure a 155 Howitzer battery that had just moved up the road, and lo and behold found that its commander was my Beast Barracks squad leader, Class of 1963. He had been unkind to me as a new Plebe, which I reminded him about, but told him that if he made it up to me, we'd do our best to keep his battery from being overrun that night. It did work out alright, as he seemed to have become a much nicer person in the intervening years."⁷¹ While commanding an Infantry company in the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Harry Dermody provided security for a firebase in Quang Nam Province in I Corps. A large enemy force hit the fire base for nine days, and, as Harry said, "Things got tight." He added, "We were able to a resupply of ammo and food on the ninth day."⁷²

Other important missions for the Infantry included conducting local or long-range reconnaissance patrols. Bob Guy commanded Company L, 75th Ranger Battalion in 1969-1970. He said, "We operated in I Corps (the northern-most tactical area in South Vietnam), and our Ranger teams often operated a great distance from other friendly units. The primary mission was reconnaissance, and we were required to keep 50% of our 6-man teams in the field at all times. This was a major challenge due to DEROSs, casualties, injuries, UCMJ, etc., but the men performed magnificently in a very dangerous and challenging tour of duty. We were often working the Khe Sahn area and beyond in 1970 and all along the Laotian border. Lots of activity in that area as NVA were headed down the Ho Chi Minh trail in large numbers, and many were entering South Vietnam into the I Corps zone. Our teams gave early warning of the NVA entering into South Vietnam in the I Corps area. We also worked the A Shau Valley and

made a classic raid operation on March 31, 1970 to destroy roads and disrupt NVA truck traffic on the valley floor.⁷³

More so than any other branch, the Infantry performed an incredible variety of operations and tasks. Tom Croak was a platoon leader of a Scout Dog platoon.⁷⁴ After finishing Airborne and Ranger schools, he went to Jungle Warfare School in Panama prior to reporting to Fort Benning and his scout dog platoon. Fortunately for him, he had an experienced cadre of NCO's who had had long careers with scout dogs, and he and his platoon eventually joined the 9th Infantry Division in the Mekong Delta. He quickly learned that the dogs could not differentiate between people based on their racial or ethnic background but could differentiate between people based on their scent, which was affected by diet. He wrote: "My job was essentially a dispatcher. We sent individual handlers with their dogs on various patrols. I would say our results were mixed. The handlers really had to understand the capabilities of the dogs. For example, they did not work well with ARVN forces. They were distracted by the Asians around them. They did not work well in high grass. They got claustrophobic, just like in the Snoopy cartoons. A dog does not stop for trip wires, but they certainly find them, with tragic results."⁷⁵

One of the most unpleasant tasks of the Infantry was securing an objective or area after it had been seized. This included clearing any tunnels the enemy dug for protection or to conceal their presence. Frank Probst was one of those who had the courage to go into tunnels in search of the enemy. While Frank was a platoon leader, his unit discovered a Viet Cong staging area, which consisted of a large complex full of supplies and a tunnel. Always a leader, Frank entered the tunnel with his platoon sergeant following closely behind him. The tunnel turned out to be filled with methane gas. Frank said, "Next thing I know, I see a fireball coming. I only had time to think 'Aw shit!' Guys on the outside said it blew out both ends of the tunnel at the same time."⁷⁶ Frank and his platoon sergeant were badly burned and never returned to their company.

Some of us occupied infantry positions even though we were not infantry officers. As an armor officer, John Harrington commanded an infantry company in the 9th Division in Tan An Province. He wrote, "My most interesting combat moment would have to be the time the company command group and a platoon were dropped in the middle of an NVA company in the Plain of Reeds. The NVA were dispersed and hiding in tall grass. Firing broke out and a running gunfight began. We fortunately were more concentrated than the enemy, and they never got going. A member of the platoon killed an RPG gunner who was aiming at the battalion commander's low flying C&C [command and control helicopter], which endeared my company to him for the rest of the tour. He saw the whole incident unfold. My command group captured three NVA as we fought our way through the grass. Eventually the rest of the company got inserted into the battle, and we always had fire superiority over the enemy. The battle ran from one afternoon through the next morning. It turned out that we killed an NVA regimental commander who was trying to escape an encirclement. Personally, I lost a few teeth to some shrapnel and finally left in the morning on a medevac. I was back with the company that afternoon."⁷⁷

Despite the jungle and the sometimes rugged terrain, armored units proved valuable in the war. Keyes Hudson commanded G Troop, 2nd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. He replaced a troop commander who had been seriously wounded and was the fourth commander of the troop in five months, one of whom had been Jim McEliece who was evacuated with wounds. The troop had platoons of eight ACAV's (M113 with cupola, turret-mounted M2 50 caliber and two pintle-mounted M60 machine guns on the rear corners), a mortar section of three M113-mounted 4.2" mortars, a command section of one ACAV (on which the commander rode) and one M577 command track, and a maintenance section of two ACAVs. The troop had many missions including rapid reaction, road security, bridge security, and road clearing. Routine resupply proved challenging, especially in the jungle. The troop had to make a clearing large enough in the jungle for Chinook helicopters to bring in and retrieve

fuel and water bladders, ammunition pallets, and food and mail.

Keyes wrote: "For the eight months that I commanded G Troop we spent only two days in base camp, and one week as post reaction force for Long Binh; the rest was in fire bases or most often in the jungle. Our most frequent, almost daily, mission was to RIF--recon in force. This was the ultimate application of the regimental commander COL [George] Patton's philosophy to 'Find the Bastards and Pile On!' It was conducted sometimes in rubber plantations, but most often in the jungle. The 11th ACR had proven that armor was not road bound in RVN, and our soldiers had become expert at maneuvering in even the deepest jungle. For these mission, we always had a tank platoon cross-attached for 'jungle busting'. Although the tanks did not have blades like the Rome plows that were mounted on bulldozers, the M48's could still crush most vegetation, and the ACAVs could maneuver over the 'bust'. The ACAV crews learned to negotiate the crushed vegetation, occasionally throwing tracks off their road wheels and then 'walking' the track back on without having to break and reconnect it.... The typical RIF order was a set of coordinates bounding an area of operation. The task was to maneuver throughout that area 'looking for a fight.' Thanks to the sound dampening effect of the jungle, every fight was a meeting engagement. The AO generally moved or expanded daily."⁷⁸

ARTILLERY

Artillery proved especially valuable in Vietnam, since operations rarely occurred outside an umbrella of artillery coverage. Like the infantry and armor, the employment of artillery depended heavily on the tactical situation and terrain. John Mogan described how the Field Artillery (FA) operated: "Infantry Brigades typically had an FA Battalion in Direct Support with three organic FA Batteries each dedicated to an Infantry Battalion, often in a Task Force relationship. Airmobile FA batteries contained six M102 105 mm howitzers and were most often moved by helicopter along with essential fire direction elements and ammunition. Other support elements traveled overland if road networks were available, and as the tactical situation allowed. Primary considerations in the choice of forward FA Fire Support Bases were adequate support of maneuver units in anticipated Areas of Operation (AO), mutually supporting fires from other FA units and the defensive strength of the firebase location itself."

"The firebases," John said, "were frequently co-located with the Infantry Battalion Jump CP/TOC and had the equivalent of an Infantry company for perimeter security. Howitzers were positioned in the circular 'star formation' with one gun in the center. This 'base piece' was used for registration procedures and self-illumination of the firebase area in the event of a ground attack or probe. An additional two-gun platoon of 155mm howitzers sometimes augmented this light artillery. Perimeters were secured with concertina wire, claymore mines, trip flares and, on occasion, the placement of a howitzer in the direct fire mode.... Typical missions involved preparation fire for combat assaults, close contact support, navigational assistance, and harassment and interdiction (H & I) fires on suspected infiltration routes. Other heavier and longer range FA was often available from 155mm, 175mm and 8 inch units with Reinforcing or General Support missions. Marine Corps artillery and Naval gunfire were also available in select situations."

John concluded, "Teamwork of all FA observers, fire direction and firing units was critical to the effective employment of FA firepower in conjunction with the Infantry organic indirect fire assets. The key player in the coordination of this effort was the Fire Support Officer (FSO), an experienced artilleryman who was part of the Infantry Battalion Command Group. The FSO advised the Infantry Battalion Commander on support for various missions, planned fires and personally initiated and directed fires from multiple [artillery] units during combat assaults, which were orchestrated from the Command and Control helicopter. The FSO also often worked with the Air Force Forward Air Controller (FAC) to coordinate the delivery of close air support."⁷⁹

John was in the Hué region during the Tet offensive. He and his battery had driven

through Hué the day before the offensive began and received an assault the first night. He stated, "Experienced NCOs had positioned our howitzers for direct fire and self illumination and provided essential support to the infantry perimeter which held and generated a large body count. During the next two months we experienced many airmobile moves to various firebases in support of clearing operations around Hué and the old 'Street Without Joy'. Adverse weather conditions frequently limited our air support, and on one occasion we were subjected to a rare daylight ground assault on our position by VC emboldened by our apparent lack of gunship support. Once again my veteran NCOs saved the day with direct fire 'beehive' and 'Killer Jr' which was a technique to lob a low charge 105mm round with a time fuse set to explode over the approaching enemy. In spite of intense operations and frequent contact, our casualties were surprisingly light."⁸⁰

Our classmates in the artillery also served as forward observers and liaison officers. John Seymour wrote: "As an artillery liaison officer attached to the infantry battalion commander's staff, I was in the unique position of being directly involved whenever any of our infantry companies were engaged. I worked for three different battalion commanders, one of whom was KIA and the other two were medevac'd to the U.S. with their injuries. Sitting in a command and control helicopter a thousand feet over the action resulted in five shoot downs, many seconds of panic and a lifetime of memories."⁸¹

ENGINEERS

As for the engineers, they earned their reputation as "combat engineers." Fred Smith served in the 19th Engineer Battalion in 1968-1969. The battalion was located on four LZ's from Bong Son, to Tam Quan, to Duc Pho and was thus located on the borders of I and II Corps. The battalion's primary mission was the upgrading, paving, and maintaining of national highway QL 1. Fred noted, "From July 1967 to October 1969 the 19th suffered 86 KIA mostly on QL 1, a very dangerous, contested, expensive, and memorable stretch of road." Each day the engineers swept the road for mines and cleared it for vehicular traffic. Fred wrote: "The mine sweep was a planned platoon combat operation complete with gun trucks, dusters, preset artillery coordinates, communication, usually an observation and gun support helicopter, and a designated reaction force. Security walked off the road right and left. Thirty pairs of eyes looked for danger from snipers, mines and ambushes. During my ten months on that stretch of road the 19th Engineers experienced hundreds of enemy incidents including 80 mines detonated, 150 mines detected, three hundred incidents of hostile fire, ambushes, sniper fire, harassment and two major NVA attacks. We removed hundreds of obstacles including barricades made of bamboo, piles of earth, stones, and rubble. These were filled with wire, metal, propaganda, mines and booby traps. The main problem with our mine sweep and road construction was that the enemy knew where the engineers would be every day, opening the road, completing the bridge, building the road, continuing the paving. We were a convenient target."⁸²

Engineer officers also fulfilled a wide variety of other engineering responsibilities. Kent Brown commanded one of only three Port Construction companies in the Army and built four badly needed rock-loading piers and a 1200 foot "sheet-pile bulkhead."⁸³ Dave Bodde served in an Engineer brigade between Cam Ranh and Nha Trang and did "land clearing" with 30 D-7 dozers outfitted as Rome plows.⁸⁴ Bob de Laar was responsible for maintaining the main supply route to the 1st Cavalry Division's headquarters in northern Binh Dinh Province. At one point he had to replace a bridge three times after the Viet Cong had destroyed it and he ran out of timber to repair it. He wrote, "Every try to use a chain saw while in a rubber raft in a flowing river?"⁸⁵

Duncan MacVicar described one the “nearly impossible” missions he was given. He wrote: “We were to build a bridge over a river in the infamous Iron Triangle in just a few hours, in time for some tanks to pass. I got myself some helicopters, arranged for security, mobilized a platoon, reconnoitered the site, and called the bridge company to order the superstructure of an M4T6 bridge. Our task force flew to the site, led by helicopter gunships and infantry. We prepared the site, met the superstructure that arrived via a really big helicopter, and filled in the bridge's treadway. No sooner did the final piece of that bridge fall into place than the tanks appeared, very happy to see us. What a day!”⁸⁶

The Engineers made a special contribution to the welfare of the Vietnamese people. Ken Slutzky wrote, “As an engineer company commander in Vietnam, our mission involved keeping a main supply road open, building a new bridge, and operating a rock quarry. Along the road was an orphanage that was run by a [Catholic] nun. We used our equipment and personnel to help her build an addition on that orphanage and to turn a steep hill into a soccer field for the children to play on. This was not part of our primary mission, but this was by far my most rewarding experience in Vietnam.”⁸⁷ Tony Pyrz, who served in the Air Force, had a similar story. He wrote: “On some Sundays in Vietnam, a bunch of guys from our Civil Engineering Squadron made regular trips to an orphanage on the outskirts of Saigon. It was rocketed by the bad guys. Many orphans were killed or injured. We took some of our heavy equipment to the site to help recovery efforts. The guys brought food, water and money. It brought to the fore the impact of the conflict on the Vietnamese and the generosity of our Airmen.”⁸⁸ Other classmates in the engineers also tried to help the Vietnamese. Duncan MacVicar wrote: “In Vietnam, one day my unit was present when the VC dropped mortar shells on a village. With very few medical supplies, we tried to tend to the hundred or so badly injured civilians until help could arrive. It was the worst day of my life.”⁸⁹

SPECIAL FORCES

Some of our classmates served in the Special Forces, which did not exist as a separate branch at the time. Dick Smoak wrote: “When I arrived in RVN, I was immediately assigned as XO of an A-Team despite no Special Forces training or experience. The usual complement of an A-Team was a captain commanding officer, a lieutenant XO, and ten highly skilled senior sergeants. Some A-Teams had a third officer, a civil affairs/psyops lieutenant. My first A Team, A-332, was in III Corps astride the main VC route between War Zones C and D. Our mission was border surveillance and interdiction of infiltration routes, such as that between War Zones C and D. Our indigenous strike force of four companies and one recon platoon was mostly ethnic Cambodians from the Delta, which had been part of the Khmer Kingdom. The Cambodians were members of the Khmer Serei national liberation movement which was dedicated to overthrowing Prince Sihanouk. The Civilian Irregular Defense Group program, of which most A-Teams were part, relied upon minority groups (such as the Montagnards, Nungs, Cambodians, certain religious sects) that were not assimilated into the RVN military. They were paid gunslinger wages by Special Forces....”

“A Vietnamese Special Forces team,” Dick said, “was located with us. The Vietnamese team CO was nominally in command of the camp, but the Americans were really in control. Unfortunately, the VN SF officers were too often corrupt, taking a cut of the wages of the Cambodians and Montagnards or the wages of ‘phantoms’ on the company rosters. On the other hand, many of the sergeants of the Vietnamese SF teams were excellent soldiers. Many had served in Colonial, Vietnamese, or even French parachute battalions during the French Indochina War.”⁹⁰

Steve Morrissey served as the commander of a Special Forces A Team at Dong Xoai, located north of Saigon, close to the Cambodian border. His outpost had been overrun by the NVA the preceding year and consisted of a dozen US Special Forces soldiers, a few Vietnamese Special Forces, and about 200 Montagnard soldiers, plus their families who lived in an adjacent village. His mission was to gather intelligence on NVA infiltrating into Vietnam from Cambodia. Steve said, "Helping to keep the peace between the Montagnard soldiers (and villagers) and the Vietnamese Special Forces, neither of whom liked one another, afforded me the opportunity to deal extensively in local 'international relations and politics.' The Montagnards especially liked the Americans, probably because we paid them and showed them American cowboy movies, which they loved. They were also, within limits, good soldiers." He added, "Except for resupply missions and VIP visits (including a memorable one by Martha Raye), we were very much on our own. We planned and conducted constant patrols which consisted of several US Special Forces and between 5 and 50 Montagnards. The toughest challenge of these missions was, after making contact with the NVA, to disengage successfully." Like many of us, Steve was especially thankful for firepower support from a nearby Vietnamese artillery firebase, Americans helicopter gunships, and US Air Force aircraft.⁹¹

AIR SUPPORT

Some of our classmates provided important aerial support to us and other soldiers and marines. While serving as a fighter pilot in the Marine Corps, Ron Butterfield flew the F4B with Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 115. He wrote, "I flew 337 sorties during those 13 months."⁹² Dave Kuhn wrote: "I was assigned to the 18th Special Operations Squadron and stationed at Da Nang Air Base. The plane we flew was a Fairchild/Hiller AC 119K. It was the third version of a cargo ship converted into a side-firing gunship. The first was the AC-47 or Spooky. Then came the AC 119G referred to as Shadow. Our plane was referred to as Stinger. Today, all former gunships have been replaced by the AC 130 gunship. The AC 119K had significantly more armament than its predecessors. Specifically, it had two 20mm Gatling gun cannons in addition to four 7.62mm mini guns. Its target acquisition equipment was also much more sophisticated with a NOS (Night Optical Site) and a FLIR (Forward Looking Infrared) camera."

"Like all our predecessors," Dave said, "our primary mission was the support of Troops in Contact, and we would be diverted anytime there was a call for help in our sector. Most of our missions, however, were flown at night, completely blacked out, low and slow over Laos attempting to find and destroy truck traffic on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. When we would find any truck traffic (usually with the use of the FLIR), we would set up a firing circle, flying at 30 degrees bank and firing out our left side. The rounds would be aimed at the base of the cone. With the ability to fire up to 4,000 rounds a minute and using high explosive incendiary ammunition, the effect on the ground could be pretty devastating. I don't remember the exact figures, but in the year I was there, our squadron accounted for well in excess of 1,000 trucks destroyed and about 2,000 trucks damaged."

"Our success," Dave concluded, "led to the NVA taking counter measures to try to impede us. First came 23mm and 37mm anti-aircraft artillery. That became so intense that we could generally only make one circle, or less, before we had to break off the attack. To counter the AAA, we started being accompanied by F-4's experienced in FLAK suppression. The success of the F-4's caused the NVA to bring in SAM missiles. It got pretty hairy just before I left. We also flew cover during the incursion into Cambodia. Despite all the hype, that was like a vacation for us as all we had to contend with was small arms fire."⁹³

Within the U.S. Army, aviation was not a separate branch. Aviators who were

commissioned officers faced a substantial challenge in spending half their time in a branch such as Field Artillery or Infantry and half their time in aviation assignments. Bill Reisner, for example, was a Signal Corps officer who was a helicopter pilot. Bill served in the 121st Assault Helicopter Company in IV Corps from December 1967 to November 1968 and logged a total of 1,192 hours in the air. He also received the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with 37 Oak Leaf Clusters.⁹⁴ Other classmates also served as aviators and often came under heavy fire. Bob Clover wrote, "There is nothing like returning from one mission with 85 bullet holes in your helicopter and an equal number in your wingman's helicopter...."⁹⁵

Ron Williams vividly remembers an operation in October 1971 by his air cavalry unit against an NVA regimental size R&R camp across the border in Laos, near Dak Paha. With intelligence from one of the unit's "Kit Carson" scouts, who were former NVA or Viet Cong, an aerial team consisting of a scout bird and two Cobras struck over a long distance and caught several hundred enemy soldiers on a sand bar along a small meandering river. After the two Cobras struck, the scout bird flew back over the target and reported, said Ron, "that there no possible way to count the dead and wounded, but that the sand was covered with bodies and the buildings were on fire." Ron and the others returned to their home station and no follow-up strikes occurred. Ron wrote: "It is hard to get your mind around the fact that you participated in an action that killed several hundred soldiers. When the Air Force does it, they do it from several thousand feet and they bomb a target area, not men. When we do it we actually see the men and frequently can see their facial expressions. There is a significant difference here. When we got home, team lead made his report; Skeeter [the scout bird] reported what he saw on his last pass and the mission was never mentioned again."⁹⁶

Army aviators flew more than helicopters. Mert Munson said, "Flying light aircraft over the southern part of South Vietnam was the best job I had in the Army."⁹⁷ As the pilot of an O-1 Bird Dog, he flew numerous observer missions over the southernmost tip of Vietnam. He acknowledged: "Looking for V.C. in IV Corps at that time was like looking for a needle in a haystack. I was always hoping to find a lucrative target that I could destroy with rockets, or with artillery fire, but that seldom happened. The V.C. knew to stay out of sight, and they were very good at staying outside of areas covered by artillery fire." Mert noted, "Risk of encountering ground fire was not great, but an engine failure would have led to death or capture."⁹⁸ He also flew a prototype quiet airplane, designated the QT-2. He said, "The QTs were indeed quiet. At one thousand feet altitude, if there was any ambient noise at all, such as people talking, wind in the trees, etc., the QTs could not be heard. Nor were they visible at night with their running lights off."⁹⁹ The "highlight" of Mert's flying the QT-2 was finding fifteen sampans moving in column along a river. Since the plane had no armament and no windows from which something could be dropped, and he could not get Air Force, Navy, or artillery support, he had no way of destroying them. The sampans continued sailing down the river.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

As Mert's experience demonstrates, finding the enemy proved to be one of the greatest challenges of the war. Given the elusiveness and mobility of the enemy, the success of many operations in which we participated depended on the quality of the intelligence on which the operation was based. And many of our classmates became involved with the collection, assessment, and distribution of intelligence at the battalion, brigade, division, and higher levels. Intelligence came from many sources: aerial observations, long-range patrols, ground sensors, radio intercepts, prisoner and Hoi Chanh interrogations, agent reports, etc. At the tactical level, intelligence sometimes came from discoveries of such things as enemy base camps, weapons

stockpiles, and freshly prepared but unused grave sites. Those of us who used the intelligence were sometimes pleased at its accuracy but other times appalled at its inaccuracy.

Several of our classmates participated in the gathering of intelligence. Tom Ferguson wrote: "Throughout my Vietnam tour (June 1966 - February 1968), I served in the 131st Aviation Company (Aerial Surveillance) based at Hué-Phu Bai, a large company of approx 350 men commanded by a major. Tasked directly by J2, MACV, the 131st Avn Co (AS) flew round-the-clock reconnaissance and surveillance missions with OV-1 Mohawks (twin engine, fixed wing, turboprop aircraft) over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and nightly missions up the coast of North Vietnam about halfway to Hanoi. Our recce missions over Laos were classified Top Secret at the time because of the political sensitivity of the target area (Laos was officially neutral); the missions up the coast of NVN were classified Secret."¹⁰⁰ Ed Armstrong also contributed to the intelligence effort. He said he had "three covert flying/ground tours" in Southeast Asia and wrote, "I bailed out of broken airplanes twice and once out of a perfectly good airplane to run a ground mission."¹⁰¹

One of the most challenging tasks in South Vietnam was obtaining human intelligence (HUMINT). In his second tour in Vietnam (the first in the Signal Corps and the second in Military Intelligence), Bob Anderson focused on gathering HUMINT while serving in 1970 at Bac Lieu in IV Corps with Detachment C, 4th Military Intelligence Battalion, which was located near the 21st ARVN Division. Bob wrote: "As the Commanding Officer of Detachment C—a clandestine collection unit, operating under a cover name, all personnel in civilian clothes—my principal duty was to lead the unit effectively in the performance of its mission." He added, "I planned, organized, directed, and controlled the collection of HUMINT by officers and enlisted men of Detachment C...." Asked how he had provided a "steady stream" of information that resulted in the destruction of Viet Cong tactical units and in the neutralization of Viet Cong intelligence efforts, Bob responded, "I did this through the interrogators/translators in my unit who interrogated enemy prisoners, translated captured documents; from case officers who gathered intelligence using intelligence assets/sources and methods; and from the work of my Counterintelligence officer/enlisted men—all of whom prepared intelligence information reports on enemy units' locations, personnel, capabilities. Such reports also identified enemy operatives and infrastructure of COSVN [Central Office of South Vietnam] which were then neutralized...." The steady stream of information, he said, "came from captured enemy soldiers held by the 21st ARVN Division—upon my unit's interrogation—as well as captured documents we translated; from Chieu Hoi detainees I interrogated; from liaison with Allied intelligence agencies.... And, of course, from the agents that my case officers ran." As for countering enemy efforts, Bob replied, "Enemy HUMINT would, on occasion, 'turn' one of our agents to become a double agent. I countered this by checking information the suspect gave against information other agents provided, and by use of polygraph. Agents no longer deemed reliable would be terminated from further service." Bob emphasized: "I kept my unit working cohesively to fulfill our unit's mission of providing accurate, reliable, timely intelligence to IV Corps supported units and to higher echelons, e.g., MACV J-2."¹⁰²

Several classmates worked primarily in counterintelligence. Rich Boerckel served as the Chief of Counterintelligence in the 4th Military Intelligence Detachment of the 4th Infantry Division in Pleiku in 1968-1969. His most memorable, and scariest experience, occurred in an effort to find a Russian helicopter that was supposedly operating in the 4th ID's sector at night. He spent more than a week at a forward operating base, waiting for the Russian helicopter to cross the border from Laos. After radar identified the Russian helicopter, Bob was supposed to fly in a helicopter toward it, drop a flare, and take a photograph of the intruding Russian aircraft. One

night, he and the crew were scrambled into significant ground fog and almost crashed when the helicopter pilot got vertigo and put the chopper into a steep climb. To make matters worse, the copilot took over the controls, put the chopper into a steep descent, and red-lined every instrument on the panels. Fortunately for Rich and the crew, the pilot regained control and returned the aircraft to base camp. As the crew exited the aircraft, however, the control rotor (small rotor on the side of the tail) fell off the helicopter. Rich wrote, "Did I say scariest moment? Probably deathly frightening would be more descriptive without getting crude!"¹⁰³ Rich never got a photograph of the Russian helicopter, and fifty years later he acknowledged never obtaining any "corroborating" intelligence for the "bogeys."¹⁰⁴

UNSUNG HEROES

To those of us on the sharp edge of the fighting, the unsung heroes of the war were our classmates who served as signal corps, quartermaster, transportation, and medical corps officers. During the war few of these officers made their way into the news, but their presence made our lives easier and added considerably to the combat capability of Allied forces in South Vietnam. With regard to the Signal Corps, those of us in country became accustomed to wonderfully effective communications. In his first tour in Vietnam, Bob Anderson served as the forward area signal center platoon leader in the 1st Air Cavalry Division from July 1966 to June 1967. Frequently located in mountainous terrain, he faced many challenges as he established and maintained communications between the division's headquarters and MACV and also between the division's headquarters and combat brigades and battalions conducting airmobile combat operations.¹⁰⁵

Bob Axley described his experiences as a Signal Corps platoon leader: "We were airlifted by Chinooks to an LZ about 40 kilometers from Bien Hoa to establish the base camp for the 3rd Brigade [of the 4th Infantry Division]. While the infantry secured the perimeter, my platoon quickly did what we were trained to do: lay land lines for telephonic communications and establish a signal compound with switching equipment and with radio links to battalions within the brigade and with links back to division Headquarters close to Pleiku. We were at this base camp for about four months before turning the compound over to other U.S. forces and moving to an area just outside the Michelin rubber plantation near Cu Chi, where we repeated the process of creating a new base camp. Little did we know that the area around Cu Chi would later be famous for the Viet Cong tunnels that riddled the area. At both base camps we would occasionally have small arms fire from the perimeter, and mortar attacks, but during the six months I commanded the platoon I didn't lose a single man or single piece of equipment."¹⁰⁶

Steve Bliss commanded three supply, support, and transportation companies at Cam Rahn Bay and Chu Lai. He wrote: "In June, 1967, I was assigned to the 96th Supply & Service Battalion, stationed at Cam Rahn Bay, Vietnam. Cam Rahn Bay had a natural, deep water port and an airfield and became one of the major logistics support points for the US war effort, which had been expanding for more than three years.... Although I was a First Lieutenant at the time, I was immediately assigned as the Company Commander of the 74th Supply Company, as were several other First Lieutenants, because the unit had a shortage of Captains.... The 74th had approximately 90 men assigned and was responsible for the management of repair parts for the various types of combat and other equipment being used in the theater. In total, we managed more than 10,000 different items, and did so with the most rudimentary technology imaginable. I definitely could have used the laptop computer I am using to type this."

"The repair parts," Steve said, "were delivered from the port in 'conex' containers. Since most of the parts were individually packaged and could be quite small in size, opening and

processing the contents of even a single container was a daunting task as they could literally contain over 1000 packages each. Each one then had to be manually recorded onto a stock record card for accountability and placed in the correct storage location in the wooden storage shelves in the warehouses. Simultaneously, we were also receiving high volumes of requisitions for these items from our customers, which were principally Army units in the II Corps area. Upon receipt, a stock picker would find the item in its storage location, 'pull it', prepare it for shipment including all required packaging and documentation, and then move the item to a shipping point where it would be turned over to a transportation unit."

After a captain arrived to replace him as company commander, Steve moved to Chu Lai in I Corps, where he commanded companies in the 94th Supply and Service Battalion and the 23rd Supply and Transport Battalion. The 94th Battalion provided support to the three light infantry brigades that were part of Task Force Oregon; the battalion was redesignated the 23rd Supply & Transport Battalion when the 23rd Infantry (Americal) Division was activated in Chu Lai and the three independent light infantry brigades became divisional brigades in that division. Before Steve's battalion was redesignated and reduced 40% in size, his company had a strength of 225 and provided class II and IV supplies, Class III packaged products, Class III bulk (MOGAS, Diesel, JP-4), Class IX (repair parts) and laundry, dry cleaning, bakery and graves registration services. He also provided support to other brigade-sized units that moved in and out of southern I Corps. Steve wrote: "Incredibly (to me anyway), the 101st [Division] actually underwent an IG inspection shortly after their arrival in our area of operations."¹⁰⁷ He described his soldiers as "outstanding and a source of inspiration."¹⁰⁸

We also appreciated the outstanding medical care we received. Some of us would not be alive today without the skills and dedication of medics, nurses, and physicians in Vietnam. One of those who made an important contribution in this area was Dave La Rochelle. After Airborne and Ranger training and service as an Air Defense Artillery headquarters battery commander, Dave changed to the Medical Service Corps in 1967 and attended schooling at Brooke Army Hospital in San Antonio, Texas, before being sent to Vietnam as a combat medic and assistant battalion surgeon in March 1968. Dave wrote: "Ho Chi Minh's birthday May 13, 1968 was when Camp Eagle in Phu Bai was attacked by sappers, who blew a hole in the wire about 50 yards from my tent and penetrated our sleeping area with grenades, RPG's and small arms fire. I was greeted with an RPG shot through my tent, just above my head, which happened to bounce off the top layer of a three-layer sand-bag fortification. Since our Battalion Surgeon had decided to go AWOL (he did not come back from R&R), I had my first combat medic experience that night, and helped many brave medics run around assisting the wounded. I set up the triage area, kept the body bags in one location, treated some of the wounded and directed the more seriously wounded be evacuated to the Med Evac area. (All this with eight weeks of training at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas a month before rotating to RVN.) Our unit suffered 28 KIA's, including two new lieutenants from USMA '67 who had just arrived at the 2/502 'Widow Makers' that day." Dave added, "Even though Medics were 'noncombatants,' they were the most highly decorated soldiers in our battalion for bravery under fire. They also had the highest mortality rate."¹⁰⁹

We also respected and appreciated the medevac pilots who came to our and our soldiers' aid, sometimes in the worst possible and most dangerous circumstances. In his year as a medevac pilot, Fred Grates had over 800 "combat" flying hours, flew 1,100 missions, and evacuated almost 3,000 patients. He and Tom Genetti, who had been roommates for two years at West Point, met briefly in Long Binh in February 1968 to renew their friendship. Fred was a medevac pilot and Tom an infantry company commander, and as their meeting ended Tom

gave Fred his call sign and jokingly told him to come quickly if he heard it. In May, while on a dust-off mission, Fred, who was the co-pilot of the helicopter, received an emergency call from a radio operator who said his company commander had been wounded. From the call sign, Fred recognized that the company commander was Tom, and he urged the pilot, an officer senior to him, to rush to Tom's aid. Amidst the still ongoing fight, the medevac helicopter landed on a Saigon street and Tom, along with a dozen other wounded soldiers, was loaded onto Fred's helicopter. As Tom was being loaded onto the helicopter, Fred banged on the door to get his attention, and Tom, despite a severe injury to his arm, responded with a big grin.¹¹⁰

ADVISORS/SERVING WITH VIETNAMESE

As advisors, we faced very different challenges than those who served in American units. We usually functioned at the battalion level with ARVN or at the province or district level with quasi-civilian officials. Vietnam had forty-four provinces and 250 districts with a province corresponding to an American state and a district to a county. Under the districts were the villages and hamlets. The province chiefs, who were almost all military and did not command ARVN units, generally dealt with pacification, civil affairs, refugees, local security, etc. Although the province chiefs controlled some regional and popular forces, these forces often lacked discipline, training, and basic items of equipment. ARVN units usually were better equipped, trained, and disciplined than the regional and popular forces, and the better ones sometimes performed superbly on the battlefield. The worst ARVN units, however, performed poorly. While advisors to ARVN units usually dealt with a clear chain of command, advisors to province and district officials usually did not. A sometimes bewildering interlacing of military, civilian, Red Cross, and CIA officials confronted American advisors. Those who advised the 2nd ARVN Division in Quang Ngai Province, for example, had more clearly identifiable counterparts and channels of authority, logistical support, and relationships than those who served as advisors to province and district officials.

More so than those in U.S. units, advisors were much more apt to speak Vietnamese, participate in pacification operations, and get to know the Vietnamese people. As lieutenants and captains, we visited our counterparts' homes and met their families; we developed a special affection for their children and grieved with them when a member of their family was tortured or killed by the Viet Cong. As advisors to Vietnamese battalions, we worked side-by-side with our counterparts, ate and slept with them, advised them on the conduct of operations, provided access to American air power and artillery, and cared for them and their men the best way we could when they were hurt or wounded. We watched some of them command their units and perform their duties with great competence and others demonstrate unfathomable incompetence. Some of them were vehemently anti-communist while others simply wanted the war to end and did not care who won. Many of them sacrificed their lives in defense of their country while others enriched themselves through graft and corruption.

Having served as an advisor to a Vietnamese airborne battalion, John Johnson offered a very positive assessment of his counterpart, the battalion commander: "My counterpart was a veteran of the French Colonial Army. He had parachuted into Dien Bien Phu as part of the French Army's failed attempt to relieve the surrounded base. When I joined him, I had about a year's experience as a platoon leader in the 82d Airborne Division. Nevertheless, he accepted me personally and professionally. I have never met a better soldier or person."¹¹¹

Barrie Zais served as Senior Advisor to a Vietnamese battalion in the 1st Infantry Division, in northern I Corps. Barrie wrote: "My personal experience was entirely positive. The finest soldier of any army, MG (later LTG) Ngo Quang Truong, commanded the 1st ARVN

Division. Our Corps Commander, 24th US Corps, was LTG Richard Stilwell, the Commandant in our cadet days. My counterpart, LTC Le Huan, commander of the 4th Battalion, 1st Regiment, was the most admired and fastest rising young officer that I encountered. He was my age, 26 years old, and spoke perfect English. He was a Vietnam Military Academy graduate and the youngest battalion commander in the Vietnamese Army. His battalion was also regarded by many as the best in the Vietnamese Army. Our neighborhood was the A Shau Valley, and our enemy was almost exclusively the North Vietnamese Army. The battalion fought well and won almost every battle. I coordinated helicopter support, gunships, medevac, and resupply, as well as some artillery, and all close air support. I did not tell the Vietnamese how to fight; they knew that. In May 1969, we were part of an 11 battalion (6 Vietnamese from 1st ARVN Division and 5 US from the 101st Airborne Division) air assault into the A Shau [Valley], Operation Apache Snow. The most significant action of this operation came to be known as Hamburger Hill. Our battalion fought well. But what was obvious to me was that the ARVN would have no chance to stand alone against the NVA. They were just too dependent upon U.S. equipment, ammunition, logistics, and air support. I tried to make their logistics system work but that was too much for a lowly battalion advisor." Barrie concluded: "In March 1970, the division went into Laos without advisors as part of the disastrous Lam Son 719 invasion. LTC Le Huan was killed, and all but 79 soldiers in his battalion were killed or wounded."¹¹²

As a Marine, Bill Zadel was assigned to MACV rather than III Marine Amphibious Force and served as an assistant battalion advisor to the 39th Vietnamese Ranger Battalion headquartered in Da Nang. He wrote: "We were constantly in the field undertaking several combat operations as the I Corps reaction force for the Vietnamese Army. At 6'4" I was surrounded by Vietnamese Ranger counterparts who stood between 4'8" and 5'4" tall. I was a big target, to say the least. In the field, I usually went with my U.S. radio operator with the battalion's lead company commander as we moved through the jungles or uplands. I had a number of counterparts wounded as we moved together. I was convinced that I was the target and the Viet Cong/NVA were bad shots. I wrote in letters to my wife that I had learned to run full speed in a 'duck walk.' The year I spent in Vietnam was one of the best in my life. It's not that I wasn't often frightened—I was. But I felt that I was doing what I was meant to do. One unfortunate result of the time was losing Jack Hutton in an operation against a numerically superior force of NVA regulars in northern I Corps. He was a great officer and a friend."¹¹³

Bob Doughty was the senior advisor in 1968-1969 to the 1st Squadron, 4th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Quang Ngai Province, in southern I Corps. The "squadron" was in fact a troop with three platoons, each with four M-113 armored personnel carriers armed with one caliber 50 and two .30 caliber machine guns, and a mortar platoon. Bob's counterpart, the troop commander, was one of the most highly decorated soldiers in the Vietnamese army, having been wounded several times, including once while Bob was his advisor. He worked directly for the commanding general of the 2nd ARVN Division, an armor officer, and the troop returned frequently to the ARVN compound at night to secure the division's headquarters. Often accompanied by the division's Ranger company, the troop occasionally ran sweep operations, but it usually laagered near a regimental-sized operation and acted as an assault or reserve force when one of the battalions made contact. On numerous occasions the troop rushed to reinforce an infantry battalion or a regional/popular force unit that had encountered a large or deeply entrenched enemy force. This meant the troop worked with most of the infantry battalions in the 2nd Division. Bob found that the regimental and battalion commanders varied greatly in quality and aggressiveness. The most impressive regimental commander had fought with the Viet Minh against the French but had become disillusioned with them after the partition

of Vietnam and moved south.¹¹⁴

Some of us who were assigned to province or district advisory teams tried to get our assignment changed to an American unit or to a Vietnamese tactical unit. In April 1968 Dick Williams was assigned to Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development (CORDS) in Bac Lieu Province in IV Corps. After receiving his orders, Dick tried to get himself reassigned to a division and, after failing to do so, prepared himself for service as an advisor by attending the Military Assistance and Training Advisory (MATA) course at Ft Bragg, which included the Vietnamese language course. He also attended the Civil Affairs School at Ft Gordon. Formed in May 1967, CORDS sought to improve the effectiveness of the Vietnamese government at the province and district level. Dick said, "In addition to a concerted effort to improve the RF and PF forces, economic actions were pursued to improve the living conditions of the locals, especially in the rural District levels." After six months Dick was transferred to a HQ MACV training directorate to run a training center in Bac Lieu. Dick said: "My team consisted of a Captain (Dave Haines '66), a Master Sergeant, a Staff Sergeant (Weapons), a Lieutenant, and three interpreters to cover the languages and dialects of the region (Vietnamese, Cambodian and Chinese). We had a training load of about 600 trainees at any one time. The soldiers we produced were RF and PF soldiers who went back to their Provinces, Districts and Villages. I would hope that the percentage of VC in our group of trainees was low. Training followed the normal cycles of basic skills, weapons training, then tactical field exercises that sometimes became the real thing. It was an interesting experience, to say the least."¹¹⁵

One of the challenges facing province and district advisors was getting Vietnamese leaders to be more aggressive or increase pressure on the enemy. Thom Powers served as an advisor to Vietnamese regional forces in the Mekong Delta (IV Corps) from October 1968 to March 1969. With a team made up of two officers (Captain/Lieutenant), a senior NCO, and a medic, he and the other Americans lived in the Vietnamese compound, initially in a tent and later in a pre-fabricated house which was delivered by helicopter and assembled by them. They could get US canned goods and frozen meat from a tiny American commissary at the province's Headquarters, and they, Thom said, ate "pretty well." Thom wrote, "The regional forces were roughly like our National Guard troops. They were a level below the South Vietnamese regular forces, but more capable than the popular forces that were guarding bridges, etc. Our task was to try to make them a more capable operational unit. It was evident that the war in our part of the Delta was much friendlier than other parts of the country. It was difficult to get them interested in frequent patrolling. In five months our compound was mortared once or twice, and our interpreter opened an ammo can found floating in the canal which had a booby-trapped grenade. He had to be evacuated, but came back later. We suspected that the chiefs on both sides coordinated patrols so they stayed out of each other's way." Thom concluded, "We really didn't make much progress raising the readiness level of the troops. The officers had been in the military for years and were resistant to change. They were satisfied with the slow pace of the war in their area."¹¹⁶

Pete Becker served as an advisor to the 277th Regional Force Company in Tay Ninh Province in III Corps. He wrote: "During my six months or so with the 277, I endeavored to get them to conduct joint operations (primarily recons and sweeps) with US units operating out of Tay Ninh Base Camp. I was successful in this, and by the time my tour was up, they were coordinating their own operations. In the several fire fights we engaged in they were fearless and very professional. Night ambushes in our local village were conducted by the book with excellent light and noise discipline." Not everything, however, went as he expected. He said, "My second lieutenant counterpart had a serious malaria relapse, and I had to medevac him out

for treatment. For about a two-week period I was the de facto company commander and held morning formations utilizing the lieutenant's US-educated daughter (high school exchange student) as my interpreter. During this time, we continued our field operations (without the daughter)." When part of the village burned down by accident, Pete convinced a U.S. Army Engineer company to loan him a bulldozer and operator. He said, "We leveled the burned area and cut in new, level streets and drainage ditches. I then scrounged building materials from the base camp's engineering yard and rebuilt the village. For that, the village (which had a number of VC sympathizers) wanted me to be their mayor. Wouldn't that look good on a resume?" He concluded, "What a place! Pretty countryside if it had not been torn up by the war."¹¹⁷

As advisors, some of us encountered acute disharmony and unbridled corruption among the Vietnamese. Pete Lounsbury served as an advisor at Plei Do Lim about 30 miles southeast of Pleiku in II Corps. There were about 600 Regional Force soldiers at Plei Do Lim, four companies of Montagnard soldiers, and a Vietnamese camp commander and camp staff. Pete wrote: "The first thing I came to realize was that the Camp Commander, Dai'uy [or captain] Lin, and his Vietnamese camp staff had a dislike for and distrust of the Montagnard soldiers they commanded. The soldiers felt the same about the Vietnamese. The four Tieu'uys [or second lieutenants], who commanded the companies were pretty good soldiers and had been in the French Army but were still pretty young men.... They would go on patrol operations regularly but the Vietnamese Commander and staff would not venture outside the camp unless it was to go to Pleiku in a jeep--usually with one of us. We had a small outpost about five kilometers north of the main camp, a little outpost called DeGroi build by the French. It was a horrendous little place infested with rats and other critters. I stayed there several times. We kept two platoons there and rotated them weekly. Also had a squad on a high hill dubbed Mortar Mountain as an LP/OP about two kilometers east of the camp. Although the Montagnard soldiers were pretty primitive, they were fearless fighters and very honest. I never had to worry about stuff being stolen by them. The same could not be said of the Vietnamese. One evidence of the graft of the Vietnamese commander was when we changed the MPC [Military Payment Certificate] paper money we used in country in October 1968, he had about \$450,000 in MPC that he wanted me to exchange. We obviously could not and would not make the exchange. I never knew where he accumulated that kind of cash. He threw the worthless paper on the ground...."¹¹⁸

As advisors, we sometimes became involved in very large operations involving U.S. and Vietnamese forces. Bruce Clarke served as the advisor to the Huong Hoa District Chief in Khe Sanh village and was present during the Khe Sanh battle, which began on January 21 and ended on April 7, 1968. In an interview years after the battle, Bruce said: "On 20 January Captain Nhi [his Vietnamese counterpart] and myself and a patrol of about fifty men set out, went southwest of the district headquarters, and set up a little patrol base. We were doing a reconnaissance to see if there was any sign of any North Vietnamese activity. While we were there, we received an urgent radio message relayed from the marines through the Special Forces saying, 'Get out of there. Move out now!' Being the obstinate young captain that I was, I said, 'Why? Who is telling me to do that? They don't have the authority to tell me to do that.' And I then got the message back, 'Move out!' Well, I knew the voice on the other end of the radio, so I knew that we had probably better get out of there, and we did. About thirty minutes after we left the area, a B-52 arc light, dropping tons of 500-pound bombs, pummeled the area. Well, this was very important because if we had run into the force they were trying to bomb, we probably would have been eaten for lunch. Everybody except us knew the North Vietnamese were coming. They [U.S. intelligence] had radio intercepts as far back as October, early

November of 1967. They knew from radio intercepts who the units were; they knew when they were coming, almost to the day. But nobody bothered to tell us. This would suggest that maybe in the overall scheme of things we were expendable. And I have to say that it was probably the case because they didn't want what they knew about the North Vietnamese plan to get back to the North Vietnamese. And therefore they didn't want to tell us." In the subsequent eleven weeks of the siege of Khe Sanh Bruce occupied a bunker on the northwest corner of one of the forward operating bases and then moved to the 1st Cavalry Division. He assisted the Americans in their planning for Operation Pegasus, which included a leap-frog advance up Route 9 toward Khe Sanh.¹¹⁹

Years later Bruce remained passionate about the United States' having missed an opportunity for defeating the NVA around Khe Sanh. He believed the U.S. could have driven NVA forces from Khe Sanh, pursued them into Laos, and turned south into the A Shau Valley. In one interview he argued that President Lyndon Johnson's announcement on March 31, 1968, of a partial bombing halt of North Vietnam kept the United States from taking advantage of this opportunity. He argued, "That decision at that point, when the United States signaled its desire to no longer win the battle on the ground in Vietnam [was especially important]. A decision had been reached that we were not going to reach a military victory. We were going to try and negotiate an escape from Vietnam."¹²⁰

STRATEGY AND POLICY

As lieutenants and captains, we did not take part in formal discussions over policy and strategy and policy in Vietnam, but as aides and staff officers, we listened, and sometimes offered comments, during many important discussions. Bruce Clarke had such an opportunity when he worked with the 1st Cavalry Division as it planned its move toward Khe Sanh. Others among us had similar opportunities when we served as aide-de-camps to division and assistant division commanders in Vietnam. Dick Smoak had such an opportunity in 1968-1969 as a general's aide, first to LTG Stilwell and then LTG Melvin Zais at XXIV Corps.¹²¹ Numerous others had similar opportunities. Bob Axley served as aide to the CG of the 1st Signal Brigade in Vietnam and then as aide to the CG of strategic communications in the Pacific Theater.¹²² Jack Lyons served as aide to BG James Hollingsworth, who was Assistant Division Commander of the Big Red One.¹²³ Sandy Hallenbeck was an aide to the assistant division commander in the 1st Cavalry Division in 1968-1969.¹²⁴ Chris Needels and Billy Mitchell served as aides to Brigadier General Bernie Rogers, the assistant division commander in the 1st Infantry Division.¹²⁵ Pat Kenny served as aide to the USARV Engineer (or, United States Army Vietnam, a corps-level support command) at Headquarters, USARV while Bob Higgins served as aide to the USARV Chief of Staff.¹²⁶

In truth, our responsibilities as aides kept us focused on much more immediate matters than policy and strategy. Mike Connor was an aide to Major General Harris Hollis, CG of the 9th Infantry Division, in 1969. Mike wrote: "MG Hollis was one of the finest officers I ever knew. He was a superb leader and tremendous war fighter. We were shot down during one of the biggest air assault operations of the war when we trapped an NVA regiment in Long An in July 69. During the day we moved six battalions into place in a single day of all-out air assault operations. Quite a show. Flying low over the battlefield got us hit. Fortunately I had the pilot auto rotate on the 'correct' side of the river and we walked away without a scratch instead of landing directly in the middle of the NVA regiment.... General Hollis was cool as a cucumber, armed with only his .32 cal general officer pistol. I, on the other hand, was frantic trying to get some one's attention to get us out before the NVA got us. I didn't want to be remembered as

'the guy who got the CG killed'. Fortunately the gods smiled at all of us that day."¹²⁷

Some of us continue to have regrets about the way the war was fought and about our failure to be more vocal in expressing our reservations about strategy and policy. George Ruggles wrote: "On an Operation in the Plain of Reeds in the summer of '67, our [artillery] battery had a visit from General Westmoreland. I reported, and since we wore no rank, he asked if I were the battery commander. I said I was, and we had the usual 'everything is just fine, sir' talk. I still fault myself for not saying something like: 'It's good to see you again, General' or some such comment. I'm sure once he realized the connection, he would have asked me for the straight scoop, which was that we were not going to win this war with our conducting big operations, touching off a thousand rounds, counting a few bodies, and then going back to base camp. We needed to hold some ground, otherwise the VC would just come back in at night and retake the villages. But I didn't and I still feel bad about that; not that I could have changed the war by myself, but I should have done better."¹²⁸

Others among us had an opportunity occasionally to play larger roles than the ones normally accorded captains. Paul Kantrowich described his experiences during Tet 1968: "When Tet blew open on January 31, 1968, I was the operations advisor for MACV that night as a young captain in the command center out of Tan Son Nhut. I coordinated all fire power, air power, med evacuations, artillery strikes, ARVN, ROK [Republic of Korea] and Ranger team movement in conjunction with different agencies. When I forcefully advised the reserve tank company to charge to the SW corner (since we were being overrun), the commanding general (an Air Force four star) called and demanded to know why tanks were running over his flower gardens! I politely told him I didn't have time to discuss the matter and hung up on him. Fifteen minutes later he came to the operations center and 'braced me' until he realized the seriousness of the situation. A little levity during a difficult time is always nice to remember! That night I immediately called the three US divisions surrounding the outer shell of III Corps and got them hell bent towards Saigon. I also got chewed out by my bird colonel senior advisor for not going through him in this matter."¹²⁹

As staff officers, we often had the opportunity to do analysis, contribute to studies, or make recommendations that influenced important strategic and political decisions. Dave Mastran had his opportunity as a computer programmer in the Air Force. He wrote: "Since I was the person responsible for simulating the air war operations on a computer in Vietnam, and since there weren't computers in Korea or World War II, I must have been the first person to program a computer to simulate combat operations while actually serving in a war zone."¹³⁰ Dave explained: "I was part of a special team assembled by the Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force in 1968 to evaluate McNamara's Wall--a series of seismic and acoustic sensors air dropped over the Ho Chi Minh trail. My job was to create a computer simulation of truck convoys moving down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and Air Orders of Battle bombing these convoys. Relying on trips to a secret airbase in Thailand, Bomb Damage Assessment reports, and interviews with pilots, I was able to obtain data on the number of trucks destroyed as a function of the type of aircraft attacking the trucks, the number of trucks reported in the convoy, and the foliage cover of the route where the convoy was detected."

"I was able," Dave said, "to compile the frequency distribution of the number of trucks in a convoy by time of night, the likelihood the convoys would be detected by Forward Air Controllers given the foliage cover and rate of sensor reports that were and were not confirmed, and the likely number of trucks destroyed when the convoy of a specific size was attacked by a specific type of aircraft (e.g. F-4, A-26, B-57, etc.). I also had the take off times of each of the aircraft sorties in the Air Order of Battle, the time on station of these aircraft, the number of

bombs they could carry (number of convoys they could attack), and the number and type of Forward Air Controller on station by time of night. The computer simulation was called the Steel Tiger Interdiction Model and was written in GPSS, a computer simulation language. With my rifle leaning against the card punch machine, I actually programmed the model at times in a flak vest and helmet while working at Tan Son Nhut Airbase or at the MACV computer center. I had an entire IBM 360 model 65 to myself for a couple of months to run the simulations. Later I had a Lieutenant reporting to me who also helped maintain the model.”

“I was called back,” Dave concluded, “to the Pentagon mid tour to brief the results which basically said we could not stop the NVA convoys from the air alone. The convoys traveled at night and we could not fit enough planes safely in the airspace to destroy enough trucks to stop the resupply campaign. We had to put in ground teams to stop the convoys, but that was politically infeasible.”¹³¹

LIFE IN VIET NAM

Whether at the strategic or tactical level, the friction of war, as articulated by Clausewitz, made the simplest tasks difficult to accomplish. Chuck Nichols wrote: “When I arrived in Vietnam I was assigned as the Battalion Maintenance Officer. My experiences in that position were probably more memorable than all the things that happened while a company commander in the second half of my tour. There was the night when one of our AVLBs got on the soft shoulder of the road and threw a track to the inside just north of Go Dau Ha (nicknamed ‘go to hell,’ a favorite place for ambushes). I was asked to retrieve it and told by the Assistant S-3 that a platoon of infantry would meet me at the Cu Chi gate to provide security. After waiting for over a half hour for my security I called back to the Battalion Headquarters for status. Next thing I know a dump truck with about a dozen cooks and clerks show up along with one dozer tank (sans dozer) to provide security. We winched the AVLB out of the ditch and launched the bridge onto a low-bed trailer to permit connecting the VTR to the AVLB with a tow bar. After we cut the track we headed back to Cu Chi with our ‘security.’ Part way back I heard an explosion to the rear of the convoy. A command detonated mine had taken out the low-bed trailer and blown a one foot diameter hole in the bridge treadway. We dropped the trailer for recovery the next day and proceeded on towards Cu Chi only to encounter a brush roadblock less than one kilometer further on. I called back to Battalion and received permission to recon by fire with my jeep mounted 50. After about a minute of fire with no return fire I had the VTR drop its blade and clear the roadblock. The next morning one of the mechanics found a note in Vietnamese stuck on the side of the VTR telling Americans to go home.”¹³²

Whatever challenges we faced or whatever our wartime accomplishments may have been, we did not lose our sense of humor. Jay Vaughn said: “As our rifle company deployed from Ft. Lewis to Vietnam, we junior officers thought it would be good if the company had a mascot. It fell to me to acquire Clarence, the cowardly boa constrictor from a pet shop in Portland, Oregon. Classmates Ron Kolzing, Dave De Moulpied, and Jim Helberg were very much part of this adventure. The boa lived with us in our Tacoma apartment until we deployed. At one time Ron Kolzing and I were called on the carpet in front of the apartment manager showing cause why we should not be evicted because of Clarence. I carried the snake on board the troop ship, USS Walker, in my cadet gym bag. Once we were out to sea, I opened the bag and Clarence shot out and up into the overhead pipes, where he wrapped himself in a ball and would not be moved. He stayed there for most of the voyage. Getting him down required help from Dick Collins, who was handling the rear end of the snake while I handled the head. Dick suffered a serious snake crap shower that resulted in his walking into the ship's

showers, clothes and all. Clarence was discovered by the UP and API reporters on hand at Quin Nhon to meet the first elements of the 4th Infantry Division arriving in Vietnam. Our company was chosen as the honor company to come ashore to be greeted by General Westmoreland and other dignitaries. We spent the night before the ceremony in a GP medium tent that also housed the reporters. Clarence got out of his bag and slithered into their end of the tent causing all manner of mayhem as reporters scrambled over each other to escape from the tent. The snake gave these reporters the angle they were looking for to report the arrival of the 4th Infantry Division. Articles about the seasick serpent coming ashore dominated their reporting and got me in serious trouble with the division commander when he arrived in country. The snake was my companion as pay officer as he rode in that same gym bag filled with MPC [Military Payment Certificates] notes to pay the soldiers in hospitals. We had many adventures together, some under fire and some due entirely to poor judgement on my part. When I returned from Vietnam, Clarence stayed behind in his pen in the C Company [1/22 Infantry] orderly room."¹³³

Throughout our many adventures and experiences in Southeast Asia, our reputation as cadets followed us. Art Adam wrote: "I was the battalion commo officer and adjutant when Major Lewis Sorley was the battalion XO. On one occasion when I was delivering 'paperwork' to Major Sorley at his forward location, I stepped into his bunker to find a visiting U.S. Army Major by the name of 'Zimmer' from Korea, there to do a study. Major Sorley, who happened to have been my English 'P' at West Point introduced me to Major Zimmer, who happened to have been my 'Juice P.' Zimmer greeted me with a recognizing stare and said to Sorley, 'Adam, he's your commo officer? He was in my last section juice!' Sorley came to my rescue: 'That's okay, he was in first section English.'"¹³⁴

We sometimes encountered other people from West Point, such as Reverend Jim Ford who arrived at West Point during our Plebe year and became Cadet Chaplain during our First Class Year. John and Dave Vann had an especially close relationship with Chaplain Ford that began during our plebe year when their father was in a serious plane accident in the Swiss mountains. Chaplain Ford provided prayers and comfort during the trying period before they learned their father had miraculously survived the crash and endured several days in a blinding snowstorm before being rescued. John wrote: "In the following years, Chaplain Ford appeared several times in my life. I have a special memory of Vietnam when he visited our battalion (1st/18th Infantry, Big Red One) in the midst of a firefight. I was S3 Air and was actually taking fire in a Light Observation Helicopter when he landed at our night defensive position and asked if there were any West Point grads in the battalion, LTC (later General) [Richard] Cavazos, our commander, told him 'John Vann' is in the helicopter up there taking fire. He prayed and greeted me with a big smile when I landed safely. Repeatedly at Founder's Day, at weddings, at friend's homes, we saw Chaplain Ford, and each time it was like a '65 reunion. He'd ask about my father, my brother, classmates, Vietnam, and always made a point of telling us how special our class was to him."¹³⁵

Such encounters with classmates and friends from West Point heightened our interest in the Army-Navy game. Ray Woodruff remembers "The Big Game" that was played between Army and Navy personnel in 1968 along the Mekong River near My Tho in Vietnam. Lee Atteberry also participated in the "skins and shirts" game that was played in tennis shoes and combat boots on the city's soccer field. According to Lee, the Army team, aware of the importance of "terrain appreciation," made good use of six or seven water-filled craters left in the field by VC mortar rounds. Lee observed, "I don't remember the final score—just that we won big—but I do remember how the game ended. Simple handshakes were exchanged, and

everybody got back into their jeeps and trucks and returned to the war.” He added, “The game had a real ‘Catch 22’ feeling. The players appeared out of nowhere, had a spirited game and, just as quickly, dispersed afterwards. I don’t think the outcome ever made the ‘Stars & Stripes’ sports pages, but we did coin a name for the game based on the condition of the field: ‘The Mortar Bowl.’”¹³⁶

At such events and other unexpected locations we often encountered our classmates. Dan Christman wrote about his personal encounter with Emory Pylant: “Emory...was the ‘old guy’ as a Vietnam combat engineer company commander when I arrived in 1969 in the 101st [Division] as the ‘new guy.’ Emory was literally heading to Da Nang for his DEROS, but he spent hours with me on a landing pad, instructing me on the intricacies of sling-loading combat engineer equipment for insertion into firebases. No requirement to do that—except the love and respect of a classmate.”¹³⁷ Duncan MacVicar told of another unexpected encounter with a classmate: “One day in Vietnam, I was on a mission in the highlands near the Cambodian border. Much to my surprise and shock, the bamboo parted nearby, and out stepped the ugliest man imaginable. He was not in uniform, but he was as heavily armed as anyone I'd ever seen. I thought I was a goner. But he looked me over and went on his way, so I supposed he was on our side. The bamboo parted again and again, and others followed. But then the bamboo parted and out stepped Jerry Ledzinski! Now, there's an unexpected reunion with an old friend!”¹³⁸ Leo Kennedy wrote, “In RVN when I was supposed to coordinate ARVN artillery with some US unit, I had a grid coordinate where I was supposed to meet a U.S. Liaison Officer. So, I'm waiting and waiting and then along comes a jeep and Mike Thompson, who I hadn't seen since graduation, jumps out. The war just stopped for us for a while we caught up with each other during our unexpected meeting.”¹³⁹ Dick Coleman wrote, “Tommy Carll, our classmate, was a memorable hero to me. He was the ‘Recon Platoon Leader’ for our battalion, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division, and placed himself in harm’s way on numerous occasions. I will always remember listening to the radio of his various exploits. A true Hero!”¹⁴⁰ Edd Luttenberger (x-65) was serving in the AG Section of Headquarters MACV as a Billeting NCO when John Swensson, who also worked in the AG Section, convinced him to apply for a direct commission. In February 1969 Edd went from Staff Sergeant to Second Lieutenant and not long thereafter graduated third in his Officer Basic course at Fort Benning. After flight school he returned to Vietnam and served with the 242nd Assault Support Helicopter Company out of Phu Loi, covering all of III Corps and, according to Edd, “parts of Cambodia.”¹⁴¹

Our association with our classmates was not always a happy occasion. On the eve of the Tet offensive, Lee Atteberry was pulled out of an operation in the Mekong Delta to serve as an escort officer for the body of Chuck Wuertenberg.¹⁴² Bob Frank wrote: “While on an operation in the Mekong Delta, my unit was laagered at Cai Bay. While monitoring the command channel, I came upon Pat O'Toole's last radio transmissions. Pat was a Special Forces advisor to a CIDG (Civilian Irregular Defense Group) operating in the Plain of Reeds. His unit was on patrol when it encountered a seriously larger formation. As the combat intensified, Pat was calling for fire support and air support. Overwhelmed, the CIDG force started to melt away, leaving the command group to stand and fight. Pat perished that day and I, unfortunately, had to stand by and listen to the final moments of his life.”¹⁴³ Keyes Hudson also told a sad story: “On 8 November 1968 I flew up to Loch Ninh airfield to visit our classmate John Hays who was CO of B Troop. We sat in his CP and discussed ACAV engines, his parts needs and, of course, how our classmates were doing. Our chat was interrupted by a call to a firefight a few kilometers away. I radioed our squadron CP that I was going to ride along with John, but the squadron XO was there and replied, ‘Oh, no, you're not. Get your ass back here

immediately, and that's a direct order!' When I got back to the CP, he told me to be patient, I would get my chance. That evening (without reporting) I went out on a boat [sic] patrol with our classmate Paul Renschen, CO of A Troop. On return to the CP we were informed that John had died in the firefight."¹⁴⁴ Years later an ACAV vehicle with "B6 1/11 ACR" was placed in front of the Patton Museum in John's honor.¹⁴⁵

OUR SOLDIERS

As lieutenants and captains, we had strong friendships with our classmates but we also had strong relationships with the American soldiers under our command. Dick Collins, who was killed in action on November 5, 1966, wrote a letter August 20, 1966, to his wife and said: "At night I mingle with my troops and talk to them. I go from foxhole to foxhole on the perimeter and talk and joke and listen. They know they might lose me to staff or general's aide and they have all asked me not to go. They are afraid they might get another lieutenant in my place. I have had my men individually come up to me and say they will go anywhere in combat as long as I am their leader. They go around telling everyone else that they know they will come back alive because Lieutenant Collins is their platoon leader. I have known them for several months now, and I know each of them well. It would really tear me up for one of them to get killed. And of course some will. They have so much confidence in me and like me so much it is hard to leave them."¹⁴⁶

Tom Abraham described his experiences as a platoon leader in the 173rd Airborne Brigade in 1966-1967. He wrote: "I had a rifle platoon for 5 months. This was by far the best and most meaningful job I ever had. I asked each of my men to write me a letter and tell me about themselves, which they did. I got to know them quicker that way. We were always in the field, stopping back at base camp in Bien Hoa for only a day or two in between missions. I always got my platoon in a huddle like before a football game, and we said the Lord's Prayer. It wasn't long before I knew I had earned the respect of my men, and there was no question who was in charge. I felt good about that."¹⁴⁷

Despite our strong relationship with our soldiers, we had to deal with numerous disciplinary problems, especially after 1968-1969. The problems included drug abuse, racial tensions, and "fraggings." By 1971 half of the soldiers in Vietnam acknowledged having used marijuana, about a quarter having used narcotics such as heroin and opium, and a third having used other psychedelic drugs.¹⁴⁸ Although much of the drug abuse and racial tension was concentrated in rear areas, some problems appeared in the field, especially in fire bases. The number of soldiers tried and convicted of insubordination increased some fifty percent from 1968 to 1970, and the number of fraggings doubled.¹⁴⁹ Such incidents occurred worldwide and were not limited solely to Vietnam or to the U.S. Army. Bob Frank noted that when he was a patient in 1969-1970 at Walson Army Hospital at Fort Dix, the chain-of-command "did not dare to go into the barracks without their .45s!"¹⁵⁰ Growing public disenchantment with the war, winding down the war, rapid overturn of personnel, and hemorrhage of experienced officers and NCO's from the armed forces created an environment of doubt, disrespect, and disobedience. Many of us served on courts-martial, either on the board or as defense counsel or prosecution, to try soldiers accused of violating the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Despite the widespread presence of such problems, the notion of U.S. forces in Vietnam dissolving into an armed, undisciplined mob is false. Steve Bliss, who commanded three companies in Vietnam, including companies from the 94th Supply and Service Battalion and then 23rd Supply & Transport Battalion in Chu Lai wrote: "I did not have any significant disciplinary challenges.... My soldiers were surprisingly well behaved.... Given the draft and

attitudes at the time, that was surprising. I will say that my most challenging day in command was the day we found out that Martin Luther King had been assassinated. More than 50% of my company in Chu Lai was African American, and they were rightly upset about it as we all were. I had to work hard to keep them on an even keel."¹⁵¹ Some of our classmates had little or no exposure to chronic disciplinary problems. Barrie Zais wrote: "I served in four divisions in Vietnam over a two year period from 1965 to 1970. I never saw any indiscipline, any instances of bad behavior, any racial tension, or any indications of drug use. I guess I was in the wrong, or right, places."¹⁵²

When we recall our time in Southeast Asia, we tend to remember the sacrifices, not the infractions, made by soldiers during the war. Dick Smoak spoke for all of us when he wrote, "The deaths and injury of my young American soldiers were the source of frustration and pain for me, which I have never forgotten."¹⁵³ Fred Smith wrote: "The men of the 19th Engineers were smart, well trained, brave, and they persevered. They always showed initiative and worked well as a team. They were good troops. I remain very proud to have served with these men and am proud to say I was a Combat Engineer in Vietnam."¹⁵⁴ Steve Harman wrote: "Lost one signal soldier during my command. My most memorable experience was writing a letter (which I had to translate into Spanish) to that soldier's mother."¹⁵⁵ Dan Donaghy said his most memorable experience occurred while he was "an Infantry company XO, watching a young troop, who was waiting for a helicopter to meet his wife on R&R, get into battle gear to be with his squad who had just been caught in an ambush moments before. Twenty-nine were killed, forty-seven wounded that day. He did not get to go."¹⁵⁶ We also remembered the families that suffered from these losses when we were in the United States and acted as survival assistance officers. Jim Webb wrote, "This was a very humbling and emotional experience as I most often was helping a teenage widow."¹⁵⁷

Reflecting on the war in Vietnam, Preston Hughes said his most memorable experience was "leading men who answered their government's call even though they may not have wanted to or may not have believed in the war's justness or necessity." He explained, "When I think of Vietnam and the soldiers who served there, I remember that many of them, especially during my second tour (1969-70), didn't want to be there and didn't believe in 'the cause'. One in particular was an outstanding soldier in my artillery battery. He was killed in an accident when excess powder being burned caught some grass on fire. In the grass was a claymore mine left by a unit, apparently several weeks earlier. It exploded. He was the only man killed or injured during my time as battery commander."

Preston explained, "The accident happened around Thanksgiving 1969. I wrote the letter to his family. You can imagine how hard that was. His mother responded by sending a huge box of cookies for the battery, for his friends. For years thereafter, I communicated annually with his father and mother, in Montana, until both passed away. After they died, his sister e-mailed me and asked for more specifics about how her brother died. I told her. She was understanding, thanked me for my honesty. What a huge tragedy--not just his death but the whole Vietnam thing. Yet hundreds of thousands of soldiers like this young man answered their country's call---and thousands paid with their lives, including some of our best and brightest classmates. Looking back, I know now that it wasn't worth it."¹⁵⁸

Like Preston, Ken Yoshitani remembered one particularly painful loss. He wrote: "As Company Commander, I very often accompanied my platoons in their execution of missions. Our [engineer] Company had the responsibility of sweeping the access road to the 9th Division base camp (Dong Tam) and flying over the access road every morning to report back the craters created the night before. One day, when I was with the sweep teams, the sweep team

missed a mine which was detonated by the weight of my jeep. I lost my driver. As I called the dust-off for my jeep driver, an 18 years old kid from somewhere on the east coast who miraculously survived but lost both legs, I just felt complete loss and enormous regret.... Although during my command I lost two KIAs and more than two dozen WIAs, I never felt the personal responsibility as I did with losing my jeep driver."¹⁵⁹

Despite our having to deal with disciplinary problems, we had great respect, and still have great respect, for the soldiers who served with us or under our command. John Mogan stated, "I have fond memories of those young troopers and their selfless service."¹⁶⁰ Bob Axley wrote, "My assignment as a platoon leader was the most rewarding of my short career. As all of us were who were in positions of command, I was responsible for all aspects of the lives of 40+ men in harm's way, from training them for a year before deployment to getting them in-country, to performing our mission in support of an infantry brigade in combat. It was tremendously humbling to be entrusted with this and tremendously rewarding to see them be successful. When I think of the men I served with, I am constantly reminded of the words we all heard General MacArthur use describing the American serviceman as he accepted the Thayer Award our plebe year. At his finest, he is truly 'noble.'"¹⁶¹

Harry Dermody described one particularly outstanding soldier who had served under his command while he was as a company commander in the 196th Light Infantry Brigade on a firebase in Quang Nam Province in I Corps. A large enemy force hit the fire base for nine days, and, as Harry said, "Things got tight." He added, "We were able to get a resupply of ammo and food on the ninth day. Everything was kicked out the door of Hueys as they passed over the hills about six feet up. In the mess that was kicked out were Mermite cans with some hot food. The soldiers hadn't seen hot food for a while and were looking forward to whatever was in the cans. As we brought individual soldiers off the line to get some food, it took a while but they patiently waited their turn. Like all company commanders, I had two radio operators. One was a little guy not over 5'8" who was tough as nails and as good a soldier as I've ever had. He was one of the last to eat because he had to stay with me. When we were down to the last bit of food, I told him to get something. As he got to the last can that had one steak left, he tripped just as he took the steak, and his mess kit went into the mud. The young soldier dug through the mud, picked up as much as he could, washed it off with water from his canteen, sat down next to me, and ate every mouthful without saying a word. To me this is the American soldier. It was a little thing, but he never complained, did what he had to do, and made the best of a bad situation. This incident is something that I think of when I asked myself why I stayed in the Army."¹⁶²

While maintaining focus on our mission, we did everything we could to ensure the well-being of the soldiers who served under us. Dan Steinwald echoed this sentiment in his describing his most significant achievement in the Vietnam era. He wrote: "All of my men survived multiple combat encounters and returned home."¹⁶³ When asked about his most memorable experience in Vietnam, Jerry Merges responded "Bringing my platoon back with minimal injuries and no casualties."¹⁶⁴

Paul Renschen wrote: "I served two full tours in Vietnam, 1968 and 1971. During the second half of my first tour I was the Commander of Troop A, 3rd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. That was a troop of about 180 men mounted in machine gun-carrying armored personnel carriers. We were in the jungle or the rice paddies almost continuously. We never dropped a mission, and I lost only one man on my watch. My second tour I was a Cobra pilot and a Platoon Commander or an XO. As the Platoon Commander I flew almost every day. During my time as XO we ran short of experienced Cobra Pilots so I flew more days than I did

not. I logged over 700 combat hours, 21 Air Medals worth, in a single tour. Most of our missions were hunter-killer, a single scout helicopter down low and a single Cobra above him for protection. I never lost a scout. During the entire year there was only one man lost on any mission that I had anything to do with. That was only two men KIA in two years in real combat organizations. I don't think there is anything else in my life that I am more proud of."¹⁶⁵

As commanders, we faced numerous challenges as we trained and motivated soldiers, but none of us faced a greater challenge than the one Dick Smoak faced. After serving one tour in Vietnam with Special Forces, he commanded a training company in the U.S. and then returned to Vietnam to serve with the 101st Airborne Division. A day or two before Dick arrived at the 3rd Battalion, 187th Infantry, Company A in the battalion was overrun with severe casualties. Dick wrote: "I was immediately ordered to take over A Company. The company had been attached to a 25th Infantry Division battalion near Cu Chi and was in a cordon of a village in which a VC main force battalion had been trapped. A Company's sector of the cordon was in an open rice paddy with no cover and with frontage far greater than the company could effectively man. Facing destruction, the VC had broken out after midnight by overrunning A Company, which sustained 37 KIA (including the Company Commander, the younger brother of our classmate Hal Jenkins) and 60+ wounded. I picked up the survivors in the field and took them to Cu Chi for four or five days, where we received approximately 75 brand new replacements, all of whom were E4 and below and new in-country--no new leaders. One lightly wounded lieutenant had stayed with the company, there were a few surviving E5s, and a sergeant first class from the company rear took over as first sergeant. In the 4 or 5 days, the new troops learned which squad they were in and zeroed their weapons, and we rejoined the battalion, which was just beginning to construct a new firebase, FSB Pope. A Company was assigned one-half of the perimeter and worked frantically constructing fighting positions with overhead sandbags and a double barrier of concertina wire. The positions were completed just in time, because the second night FSB Pope was attacked by two VC main force battalions. It was a very long night, and the new soldiers acquitted themselves well. My only casualty was my nice, young artillery forward observer, who was killed in the initial VC mortar barrage which hit in the middle of the artillery battery, where he was visiting after dinner. A Company continued to operate in the Cu Chi area, with frequent enemy contacts, until the battalion rejoined the 101st in I Corps in October [1968]."¹⁶⁶

SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

As the list of awards we received demonstrates, our largest and most important contributions, whether as advisors or members of U.S. units, were made at the point of the spear. Since some of our classmates who received awards for service in Vietnam did not provide or provided incomplete information about awards to the Association of Graduates, the listing of awards for our classmates in The Register of Graduates is not complete. Nonetheless, the awards listed in The Register demonstrate clearly that we distinguished ourselves in Southeast Asia. In addition to the 127 Purple Hearts noted in The Register, our classmates received one Medal of Honor, four Distinguished Service Crosses, 94 Silver Stars, 5 Soldier's Medals, 175 Bronze Stars with "V" device for valor, 455 Bronze Stars, and 50 Distinguished Flying Crosses. We also received numerous Air Medals and Commendation Medals. Of these awards, Buddy Bucha received the Medal of Honor, and Keyes Hudson, John Hays, Ron Riley, and Bob Stowell received the Distinguished Service Cross. John Harrington received 3 Silver Stars. Joe Koz and Steve Darrah received 5 Distinguished Flying Crosses, and Reg Dryzga 4. Walt Divers and Mike Connor received 4 Purple Hearts, and Bill Beinlich, Don Erbes, and Jim

Wood received 3 Purple Hearts.

Buddy Bucha received the Medal of Honor for his “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action” on March 16-19, 1968, while serving in Company D, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry, 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division in Binh Duong Province. The citation reads: “Captain Bucha distinguished himself while serving as commanding officer, Company D, on a reconnaissance-in-force mission against enemy forces near Phuoc Vinh. The company was inserted by helicopter into the suspected enemy stronghold to locate and destroy the enemy. During this period Captain Bucha aggressively and courageously led his men in the destruction of enemy fortifications and base areas and eliminated scattered resistance impeding the advance of the company. On 18 March while advancing to contact, the lead elements of the company became engaged by the heavy automatic weapon, heavy machine gun, rocket-propelled grenade, Claymore mine and small-arms fire of an estimated battalion-size force. Captain Bucha, with complete disregard for his safety, moved to the threatened area to direct the defense and ordered reinforcements to the aid of the lead element. Seeing that his men were pinned down by heavy machine gun fire from a concealed bunker located some 40 meters to the front of the positions, Captain Bucha crawled through the hail of fire to single-handedly destroy the bunker with grenades. During this heroic action Captain Bucha received a painful shrapnel wound. Returning to the perimeter, he observed that his unit could not hold its positions and repel the human wave assaults launched by the determined enemy. Captain Bucha ordered the withdrawal of the unit elements and covered the withdrawal to positions of a company perimeter from which he could direct fire upon the charging enemy. When one friendly element retrieving casualties was ambushed and cut off from the perimeter, Captain Bucha ordered them to feign death, and he directed artillery fire around them. During the night Captain Bucha moved throughout the position, distributing ammunition, providing encouragement and insuring the integrity of the defense. He directed artillery, helicopter gunship and Air Force gunship fire on the enemy strong points and attacking forces, marking the positions with smoke grenades. Using flashlights in complete view of enemy snipers, he directed the medical evacuation of three air-ambulance loads of seriously wounded personnel and the helicopter supply of his company. At daybreak Captain Bucha led a rescue party to recover the dead and wounded members of the ambushed element. During the period of intensive combat, Captain Bucha, by his extraordinary heroism, inspirational example, outstanding leadership and professional competence, led his company in the decimation of a superior enemy force which left 156 dead on the battlefield. His bravery and gallantry at the risk of his life are in the highest traditions of the military service. Captain Bucha has reflected great credit on himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.”

A former classmate, Jim Gardner, who resigned when we were plebes, also received the Medal of Honor. Jim was killed in action on February 7, 1966, when an enemy force in a series of strongly fortified bunkers pinned down his platoon with intense fire. Charging across an open rice paddy, Jim destroyed several bunkers with hand grenades and, as he advanced against the last bunker, was mortally wounded. He staggered forward and, in a last valiant effort, destroyed the bunker and its defenders with a grenade. The citation read, “Although he fell dead on the rim of the bunker, his extraordinary actions so inspired the men of his platoon that they resumed the attack and completely routed the enemy.” Jim’s “conspicuous gallantry” not only reflects the highest traditions of the U.S. Army but also demonstrates for the Class of 1965 the highest ideals of its motto, “Strength and Drive.”

Bob Stowell’s heroism exemplifies the courage of our four classmates who received the Distinguished Service Cross. Bob received the award for his exceptionally valorous actions on

March 3, 1967, while serving with Troop E, 17th Cavalry, 173d Airborne Brigade. His troop conducted Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrols for the 173rd, and Bob was leading a patrol on a mission to capture a prisoner deep in War Zone C, northwest of Saigon on that day. The citation reads: "When Lieutenant Stowell's unit triggered an attack on two insurgents using a heavily traveled Viet Cong trail, the enemy gathered in increasing numbers, trying to pin down the patrol and surround it. As the hostile presence grew to squad strength with several machine guns, Lieutenant Stowell radioed for gunship support and organized his men for a move to a landing zone. The patrol members were forced to fight their way to the helicopter pickup point. He fearlessly remained behind his men and single-handedly staved off the constant Viet Cong attacks from the area. When he grouped his men into a tight perimeter for the landing zone, the enemy force poured an awesome amount of fire onto them. Lieutenant Stowell appeared contemptuous of the danger, and moved about fearlessly guiding artillery and air strikes in ever-tightening circles around his position. When the evacuation helicopter came in, he again demonstrated his courage and concern for his men by remaining on the ground until all of his men were on board. Although Lieutenant Stowell received serious stomach and chest wounds early in the firefight, his men did not learn of them until they were flying out of the area." Bob had taken three rounds to his torso, getting knocked down each time and getting back up to direct his men and coordinate air and artillery support.¹⁶⁷ Like our other classmates who received the Distinguished Service Cross, Bob distinguished himself by his extraordinary heroism and his fearless leadership under extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances.

As for the 127 Purple Hearts, we usually earned them the hard way. Art Adam expressed the attitude of many of us toward being wounded-in-action. He said he had three "John Kerry" wounds, but none required anything "more than cleaning up and some tape and gauze." He observed, "We have classmates who suffered real wounds and many whose families were wounded forever. I may have been among many such heroes, but I wasn't one of them."¹⁶⁸ Larry Clewley described events surrounding his being wounded. He wrote: "Survived two ambushes while a forward observer for an infantry company. First ambush involved three companies in column. I was in reserve when both FO's of the other companies were killed and I directed artillery for the others. Second ambush was a U-shaped ambush and I was wounded. We were eventually surrounded. Medevac lifted me out by cable while under fire."¹⁶⁹ Mack Gill wrote: "I was wounded twice in Vietnam as a rifle platoon leader...in the fall of 1966.... I did not receive a Purple Heart even though on one occasion I was evacuated to the 67th General Hospital and spent several days while recovering from a Gun Shot Wound to the upper left portion of my skull. After several days I returned to my platoon."¹⁷⁰ Roger Frydrychowski described being ambushed while he was a platoon leader for a reconnaissance platoon. He wrote: "[T]he RPG's hit my lead track and small arms fire raked us. I was standing in the back hatch of the second track when shrapnel from one of the RPG's hit me in the head knocking me out and down in my track. I remember waking and wiping the blood from my face. I wasn't out long. I heard the firefight ongoing and saw my RTO, who had been inside the track, just about to stand and return fire. Realizing that although he knew radios he was a terrible shot, I pushed him back down, got up and back into it. Three of my men were killed in action." Roger concluded, "We remember being scratched by shrapnel and punji and being blown back or knocked over without an afterthought of a medal. At times, though we may have considered the attack by red ants to certainly qualify, most of the officers...with whom I served...were not concerned with ribbons and avoided the prospect of the 'three and out.' I am sure that this attitude was not restricted to this unit alone."¹⁷¹ Ric Shinseki was wounded twice, the second time seriously enough to have been medically discharged from the Army.¹⁷²

Among those badly wounded was Bob Frank, who spent ten months in Walson Army Hospital in Fort Dix, New Jersey after being wounded in a firefright in July 1969. One of the most admirable things about Bob is that he could have retired at that time with a significant disability, but he chose to remain on active duty and continue to serve. The lucky ones among us later had the privilege of serving with Bob at West Point, Fort Leavenworth, Frankfurt (Germany), and Washington, D.C.¹⁷³ Phil Harper's spine was crushed by a collapsing bunker in Vietnam. Despite his severe disability, he became a role model for all of us in his refusal to feel sorry for himself or to wallow in grief. Making all of us proud, he became a champion of an organization called Paralyzed Veterans of America.¹⁷⁴ Complications from his wound eventually cost Phil his life in 1991. Jack Terry lost a leg when he stepped on a mine in Vietnam. After extensive hospitalization and recuperation, he continued to jog and ski, as well as participate in several other sports. In the NYC mini-marathon, he ran the five miles in 75 minutes.¹⁷⁵ He eventually suffered, however, from the effects of Agent Orange. He wrote: "I remember assembling my [infantry] company at the Tam Ky Regional Airport and noticing four 'Otters' loading barrels of some strange liquid into their wing pods. I asked one of the airmen what they were up to, and he told me, 'This is Agent Orange, which we drop on the Highlands to rid the VC of jungle coverage.' Little did I know that I would later in life get Parkinson's Disease, one of the now listed diseases and ailments caused by Agent Orange."¹⁷⁶ Thanks to assistance from the Castle Point VA Hospital, Jack attended our forty-fifth reunion and received a standing ovation.

Another classmate who earned the highest respect of the Class was Bob Jones, who was a prisoner of war from January 18, 1968, to March 14, 1973. As an Air Force first lieutenant, Bob was shot down on his 33rd mission over Hanoi. While he was attempting to destroy the Bac Giang power plant 25 miles northeast of Hanoi, a MiG 17 shot down his F4 Phantom, and he and his copilot were captured by North Vietnamese militia. After being beaten and stripped of their flight suits and boots, the two were "hog tied" and transported in the back of a jeep to the Hanoi Hilton. Upon arrival, Bob was separated from his copilot and did not see him again for five years. He was placed in a 7'x7' cell with two concrete bunks, and torture began almost immediately. Bob believed the North Vietnamese were telling the prisoners, "We're in charge here. You're not telling us [what we want to know]. We can make you talk." He believed the Vietnamese wanted to show the prisoners they could break them and do whatever they wanted to do to them. Bob added, "I mean they can make you talk.... You think you're John Wayne and you're gonna die before you say something. That's not true because someone's in the room screaming and then all of a sudden you realize it's you." Bob said, "They want a name of everyone in your flight that was flying with you that day. Well, you have to summon up the courage, at least I did, to make up stuff to just tell them." Bob said, "I told them Mickey Mantle. I was flying with Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra. I was flying with the New York Yankees that day." Following the initial torture, Bob said, "You would go in for an interrogation maybe once in a while just for an attitude check...."¹⁷⁷ Bob thought he was fortunate never to have been tortured by Cuban guards, who were particularly vicious and killed several of the prisoners.

For about eight weeks Bob remained in solitary confinement. He was then placed in a cell with another POW and later in a four-man room. Eventually, he ended up in an eight or nine-man room. He and the other POWs were fed very little, and Bob suffered from hepatitis and dysentery. To fill the empty days, he did memory exercises, a technique taught in survival school, and also did math and physics problems in his head. When he was with a larger group of prisoners, he took part in classes on subjects such as foreign languages. After the failed Son

Tay raid in November 1970, the North Vietnamese grouped larger numbers of prisoners together in two main facilities, one near Hanoi and the other near the China border. With no outside news, he and the other prisoners near China knew something was happening when they were moved back to Hanoi and started receiving better food. By the time he was released, Bob had lived in six different camps.

Everyone in the Class celebrated when we watched Bob on television step off the C-141 at Clark Air Force Base. With the main effort coming from Dennis Lewis, the Class had a "Welcome Back to the World Party" in Warren, Ohio, on April 27, 28, and 29, 1973. Labe Jackson also threw a special party later for him in Louisville. Amidst the hearty welcome, Bob said that he had drawn strength from memories of the character of close friends and classmates. He later wrote, "Our class, for many reasons not the least of which is Vietnam, is still very close with a brotherhood and camaraderie very seldom seen in other groups. Certainly for me and for many others, the 'never give up' attitude helped us all through difficult times."¹⁷⁸ All of us knew that he was a very special member of the Class of 1965 and considered ourselves fortunate to have him as a friend. As a small token of our respect, the Class presented Bob a new Class ring since his original one had been taken from him when he was captured. The ring was graciously reproduced and donated by L. G. Balfour Company, the maker of all our Class rings.

FOND MEMORIES

Of the many things we remember about the Vietnam years, one of the most pleasant, if not the most pleasant, is the week we spent on Rest and Recuperation (R&R). Of the various official destinations (Honolulu, Hawaii; Bangkok, Thailand; Sydney, Australia; Manila, Philippines; etc.), married personnel tended to go to Hawaii and unmarried personnel elsewhere. For those of who were married, coordinating the trip and the arrival of our wife proved complex, for unless we had access to the Military Affiliate Radio System (or, MARS, a ham radio system that handled written messages and "phone patches" allowing us to communicate with our families), we could only communicate by mail or by recorded messages sent as mail through the postal service. Going on R&R was a thrill, but both husbands and wives had some anxious moments enroute to the R&R destination because they knew interrupted flights or tragedy could disrupt their much-anticipated reunion. Such a tragedy befell Doug Davis and Bonnie MacLean who had had a whirlwind romance after being introduced by Pat O'Connor's mother. After Doug shipped out to Vietnam in January 1966, they planned on being married in Japan during Doug's R&R and coordinated the details through the U.S. mail. Bonnie had her wedding dress packed and ready to get on the plane when she learned Doug had been killed in action. Instead of meeting Doug in Japan, Bonnie traveled to Bisbee, Arizona, and with Doug's family met his casket at a train station.¹⁷⁹

Other classmates and their beloved ladies were more fortunate. Anne Harman, Steve's wife, wrote: "Steve and I met for R&R in Oahu, Hawaii in June of 1967. I remember taking a bus to the airport and expecting him to be right there. Instead, I stood on the tarmac with lots of other girls and watched as hundreds of men deplaned--all in fatigues--they all looked alike! We finally found each other and went to the hotel--a brand new hotel called the Outrigger. At the time it stood out along the shoreline as the tallest building around. We did a lot of sightseeing--took tours provided by the hotel. On one tour of the North Shore, the bus was so full one of the drivers took us around in his personal car. We had the best time--saw everything around the island and even got to meet the driver's family at his home. Years later we went back to Hawaii and had a hard time finding the Outrigger--it was dwarfed by all the newer hotels!"¹⁸⁰

Darlene Cooper, Phil's wife, wrote: "Phil was able to get a week in Hawaii during the winter of '67. I was teaching in New York; my babysitter was a great seamstress so she made several 'summer' frocks for me to take to Hawaii. I flew to Seattle to meet up with the wife (Mary) of a sergeant (Bob McClure) in Phil's company who had befriended me, and we flew to Hawaii together. Never saw Mary and Bob the whole time we were there, however. Never saw much of anything but the hotel room! I remember asking the high school physics teacher if it was alright to take a bottle of our favorite champagne on the plane. That was the days of TWA, and I got first class treatment, as did all the servicemen being flown to R & R."

"We stayed," Darlene said, "at a hotel near Waikiki beach.... We ate out every evening and enjoyed trying different ethnic foods every night. To me, it seemed like the people were so very friendly and that things did not seem very commercialized. We rented a car for a day and toured the island. He bought me a bright pink bikini and took lots of snapshots to take back with him--I was skinny in those days--no time to eat with a toddler and a baby. And we bought matching dresses for our girls. He was so skinny, and it was so hard to say good-bye to him again. When he left Seattle originally, he had left me with a thirteen month old daughter, a three-day old daughter, and our car. That was it. I got the \$90 apartment deposit back and drove home to western New York. Leaving Phil this second time was even harder than the first time, but I was so glad that we were able to meet."¹⁸¹

THE TURBULENT 1960S

The tranquility and joy of R&R provided only a brief respite from the war and from the domestic turbulence that swept across the U.S. in the late 1960s. Riots in Detroit in July 1967 and the march on the Pentagon in October 1967 set the nation on edge, but after the assassination in April 1968 of Martin Luther King, Jr, a period of even greater civil unrest, violence, and political turbulence ensued. Riots broke out in more than one hundred American cities, including Washington, D.C. With the assassination of Bobby Kennedy in June 1968 and clashes between police and demonstrators at the Democratic Convention in Chicago in August 1968, the U.S. seemed to be coming apart. And so did the effort in Vietnam. Even though the Viet Cong and NVA lost thousands in the Tet offensive, which began on January 31, 1968, the offensive demonstrated the limits of American power in Southeast Asia and dealt an important psychological blow to the American people. News of the My Lai massacre of March 1968 magnified the effect of that blow and raised even more troubling questions about the conduct of the war.

Some of us had key vantage points from which we could watch turbulent events unfold in the United States. Steve Aron was the aide-de-camp for the Commanding General of the U.S. Army Intelligence Command's Intelligence School at Fort Holabird, Maryland and traveled with him to the sites of several of the tumultuous events of 1967. According to Steve, "the tragedy in Detroit was not a riot and the media event at the Pentagon was not a march." After touring the site of the 1965 Watts riot in Los Angeles and, a few days later, the site of the 1967 Newark riot, the CG and Steve were in Michigan in July 1967 when word came that "Detroit was on fire." Steve and a driver drove all night to transport the CG to Detroit. Steve wrote: "In the early hours of that morning, there was no riot in Detroit. Whoever of the so-called rioters had been out the night before were no longer on the streets. There was smoke rising from many separate locations. Driving to it, the place resembled a scattered forest fire in the outskirts of a city. Many police and fire trucks were in evidence; sirens were frequent. The National Guard troops were either in place or arriving. Within a day or two the President sent in several battalions of the 82nd Airborne. The Airborne troops were orderly and disciplined, with NCO's in

evidence at every post, and were generally just more military in their demeanor than the National Guard units that were sometimes an embarrassment, and gave little evidence of command or supervision.... There was little military activity. The soldiers were showing a presence in what was a police action, or, more accurately, a fire department action.”

“My observations,” Steve said, “may be misleading, as I was mostly engaged in assisting the efforts to organize scattered information coming into a makeshift headquarters. From what I could observe there was no large group of people attacking the police or seizing control of buildings. Instead, in a foretaste of what is now so common, there were angry people who burned and looted. The scattered events were haphazard, and seemed to be motivated more by rage and frustration than anything resembling a riot. It was a racial tragedy, with most involved being black and most of the harm being done to black residential and business areas. The people killed and injured were less likely to be rioters than looters; many burned and damaged buildings were small stores. Without the presence of the police, firemen and military, much of the area would have become rubble.” Steve concluded, “It was an outpouring of rage by angry, frustrated people who, as the man in the movie said, were ‘mad as hell and not going to take it any more.’”¹⁸²

Step Tyner also served in Detroit. As commander of Co. B, 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment in the 82d Airborne Division, Step and his company were alerted on July 22, 1967, for deployment to Detroit. Keenly aware that 35-40% of the 82d consisted of African-American soldiers, Step assembled his company and described the “delicate and difficult duty” the country was depending on them to do. Step wrote: “I stressed that we would be protecting lives and property and restoring Detroit to the ordinary citizens, White and Black, rich and poor. I pointed out that we were not going there to inflict pain or degradation on anyone, and that we would observe the civil rights of everyone with whom we came into contact, even those we had to apprehend and detain. I said and repeated and repeated yet again that ammunition would be held by NCOs and only issued when the need was imminent, and that no one would lock and load, let alone fire, without specific orders from an officer known to them....”

Step continued, “In closing, I asked for a show of hands: ‘Who here is from Motown?’ More than a dozen hands went up, both white and Black. A nod to the first sergeant, and he and the platoon sergeants got the Detroiters off to the side and as the rest of the company began to load the trucks, sent these ‘guides’ to the pay phone with stacks of quarters. Throughout our deployment, our troopers from Detroit gathered intelligence, spread mollifying messages, encouraged their friends and relatives to stay calm and off the streets, and alerted us to the peculiarities of that urban terrain and its culture. As for the residents of the East Side (the center of our area of operations was the intersection of Connor and Jefferson avenues), they could not have been more welcoming, seeing in us a disciplined force with no axe to grind, a decided change from both the police and the National Guard, at least as they had experienced those two forces. Our foot patrols invariably returned laden with cupcakes and other treats made and bestowed by local housewives and delivered to the fierce-looking paratroopers (both chin-straps down!) by shy little girls in their best church dresses, although I had to draw the line when local businessmen began handing out Four Roses [whiskey] and cartons of cigarettes!”¹⁸³

Steve Aron also witnessed events in Washington, D.C. He wrote: “The so-called March on the Pentagon in October 1967 was surely significant as a public demonstration in opposition to the Vietnam war, but it was really just a well-organized media event. In modern parlance, it was a staged photo opportunity. By any definition, there was no march involved. It was a bunch of people wandering around, a crowd being herded--to some extent controlled--by a number of organizers with bull horns, on a short walk across the bridge from the Lincoln

Memorial to the Pentagon. Again I was only an observer, this time on the steps of the Pentagon at the entrance across from the north parking area. The Intelligence Command was involved in reporting the activities of the demonstrators; I was not involved with the Military Police units in formation at the steps of the Pentagon. The marchers took a long time to arrive, as they stumbled along to the big building. The reports of their number range from 50,000 to several hundred thousand. In any event, there were a lot of people.”

“When they came close to the Pentagon,” Steve said, “the demonstrators were confronted by many MP’s holding rifles, without fixed bayonets. I never confirmed the fact, but I was confident the weapons were not loaded. There were no real confrontations, but a lot of jeering and comments made for a sad spectacle. Generally, the MP’s took no action; civilian police and federal marshals were the ones who arrested and physically abused some demonstrators. Apart from a few old timers, it was a bunch of civilian kids insulting a bunch of other kids in uniform. I, of course, was older and wiser--at age 24, but, as a professional soldier on the way to flight school and Vietnam, I was probably not an objective observer.”

“At one point there was a ‘break-in’ to the building,” Steve concluded, “when a few of the demonstrators briefly got into an outer corridor of the Pentagon. I cannot recall if I saw it happen, or was just told about it, but the word among those nearby was that one of the reporters had opened one of the doors and let the demonstrators in. As anyone familiar with the Pentagon well knows, to breach the defenses by getting into that building was not exactly the storming of a citadel. It was more like breaking into an empty football stadium. And, of course, along with 20,000 employees of the place, the demonstrators could have walked into the same unguarded corridor on any business day the previous week.”¹⁸⁴

Other classmates also became embroiled in the turbulent events. Lloyd Briggs was alerted to go into Washington, D.C., with the 82nd Airborne Division on April 5, 1968, the day after Dr. Martin Luther King had been assassinated. Lloyd was commander of an artillery battery in the 1st Battalion, 319th Artillery which was severely reduced in strength because of levies for Vietnam. Lloyd wrote: “We hit the streets on patrol about 4 in the morning of April 6. Assigned to the Northeast sector, probably the hardest hit neighborhood in Washington, we watched as the rising sun revealed the damage. Burned out buildings, looted storefronts, streets emptied by a strict curfew, all reminded me of newsreels of bombed out Berlin I had seen as a kid. But it wasn’t the capital of Nazi Germany I was looking at, it was the capital of my own country. The days were spent patrolling accompanied by two D.C. policemen. One was white and one was black. They were to deal with any interactions with civilians, avoiding if possible confrontations between soldiers and the civilian population. Having been on duty for 72 hours straight at that time, they were rather short on patience with the curfew breakers and drunks who seemed to be the major problem as things quieted down.”¹⁸⁵ With the end of active rioting, Lloyd’s battery was relocated to the women’s gym at Gallaudet College where it remained for about a week before returning to Fort Bragg.

Other classmates also witnessed the turbulence in American cities in the late 1960s. Bill Zadel got a close-in view of events surrounding the Democratic National Convention in 1968 while serving as Assistant Officer in Charge of U.S. Marine Corps Recruiting Station in Chicago. He wrote: “In order to ‘gain exposure’ and advertise our cause we decided to stage a very public swearing-in ceremony for over 100 USMC recruits in The Chicago Civic Center Plaza in downtown Chicago. The day we chose for the ceremony was right in the middle of the 1968 Democratic National Convention taking place in Chicago. The guest list included Senator Everett Dirksen and Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley. I was the master-of-ceremony. As luck would have it, the largest of the convention’s riots in Chicago took place the night before our

induction ceremony. My boss, a USMC Lieutenant Colonel, was called early in the morning and told in no uncertain terms by the Commanding General of the USMC Recruiting Command that he did not want us to 'make the wrong kind of headlines' during our ceremony. The ceremony was a success and took place without incident, but with many unexpected viewers from the Chicago Police Department."¹⁸⁶

Whatever the motivation of the demonstrators, the antiwar protests bothered most of us, particularly when we remembered the sacrifices of our soldiers and ourselves. When asked about his most memorable experience, Ric Horst emphasized the "disgust" he "felt for the lack of support our country showed for those who served."¹⁸⁷ Art Hester wrote, "I was amazed at the intensity of the anti-war protests, particularly on college campuses. I attended Stanford in 1969-1970, and there seemed to be huge protests on campus every day. The protests at Cal-Berkeley received the bulk of media coverage, but the Stanford protests, especially against ROTC activities, were particularly troublesome to me."¹⁸⁸ Mike Huston wrote, "My most memorable experience was when I returned from Vietnam and landed at Travis Air Force Base outside of San Francisco and was told that I had to change out of my military uniform and into civilian clothes before I could leave the base because of all the anti-war protesters in the San Francisco area. Not a happy experience after having spent a year in a combat area."¹⁸⁹

Antiwar sentiment sometimes created disharmony in our relationships with our classmates and our families. Some members of our Class had strong reservations about the war and were vocal to their opposition to the war. We do not know how many of our classmates left the service because of their anti-war beliefs, but we know some did. Several of our classmates testified in April 1971 before the "Dellums Committee" in the House of Representatives on war crimes, the nature of the war, and problems with "body count." All of our wives were affected by antiwar sentiment regardless of their views on the war. Our wives who opposed the war had no restrictions on what they could say or do, and an unknown number of them participated openly in anti-war demonstrations. At least one classmate said he had to choose between staying in the Army or staying with his wife. Whatever our wives' views on the war, they sometimes confronted antiwar sentiment in unexpected places. Diane Doughty, who taught third grade in Bellevue, Washington, while Bob was in Vietnam, wanted her students to work on a craft project to decorate food trays for soldiers recovering from wounds at the regional V.A. hospital. Her principal called her into his office and told her not to do this project as the people of the community would not support her doing it.

ON AMERICAN CAMPUSES

Those of us who were assigned to ROTC duty or attended graduate school in the late sixties and early seventies sometimes had unpleasant experiences with those opposing the war. Others encountered outright hostility and violence. Bob Harter reported that he "vacated the ROTC building at Eastern Michigan multiple times because of bomb threats."¹⁹⁰ Paul Singelyn, who had a colonel as the head of his ROTC detachment, wrote: "His policy was for each member of the department to take one course, each semester, our choosing. This resulted in our walking around campus, randomly, in Dress Greens, showing the flag so to speak. While we were not greeted with 'high fives', we did attract attention and a few comments, but I never felt threatened. I was always the old man in class. During the height of the anti-war protests, our building was hit by a molotov cocktail, resulting in minor damage. Our offices were 'hit' with a student 'sit-in' one morning. A student mob swarmed into our offices, with the apparent intent of trashing the place, but we wouldn't leave, and each of us defended our office in place. After a few minutes of verbal jousting, the day turned into an informal seminar about war and the

military. Over the hours, they tired of standing around, and drifted away. I ended up enjoying the 'give and take' with what turned out to be a bunch of decent kids who were mostly ignorant and confused."¹⁹¹

Bill McKemey wrote about his experience with ROTC at Cornell: "Because Cornell was a land-grant university, ROTC had to remain on campus; so the administration was able to forestall some of the actions that took place at other Ivy League schools. The student body was largely apathetic. There were a couple of times we chose not to wear our uniform to work; but they were very rare. The same was true of the USN and USAF folks. The faculty was more hostile; actually rude might be a better term. We had a hard time getting our courses approved for credit, but eventually won that battle. You had to learn which department heads you could work with and those you should avoid. The same held true with the administration. I never believed that universities were more bureaucratic than the military. But we got through it largely by being responsive to the university hierarchy and proving that we really were good at what we did. Our cadets also knew that we cared about them and would help them any way we could. They did not experience that anywhere else on campus; and they let that fact be known to others in the university community. By the time I left Cornell in 1976, Vietnam was a distant memory and having the military on the campus was only a problem with a few die-hards."¹⁹²

Not all of our classmates encountered hostility while serving in ROTC detachments. Bob Anderson emphasized the "personal caring and support" he received from professors at the University of Dayton in 1967-1969.¹⁹³ Gordy Larson described his service with the ROTC detachment at Seattle University from 1972 to 1976 as one of his "favorite assignments." He wrote, "I found that the faculty were relatively friendly compared to other universities at the time."¹⁹⁴

Like those who served in ROTC detachment, those of us who attended graduate school in the late sixties or early seventies had widely varying experiences. Russ Campbell, who went to graduate school at the University of New Hampshire, observed, "These were tough times to be on a college campus as students were rallying against the Vietnam war and taking it out on the troops and the military, rather than the politicians. We were advised not to wear our uniforms on campus to avoid provoking any anti-war sentiment. Still, I was subjected to some harassment. For example, before the introductory mixer of the class we had received brief bios on each student. When I met various new classmates, greetings were cordial and typical for such gatherings; then one guy, when introduced to me, said, 'Oh, you're the f****g Vietnam war baby killer that we have in the class.' He and I didn't hit it off. Weeks later he apologized for those remarks. Then, while at church, the priest in his sermon screamed at the congregation to rise up against the war and support the peace movement. They really got wound up, and I had to leave the church. I was there to pray and not there to be harangued by a minister in a church. He and they had no idea how much the troops wanted peace or the sacrifice that was required to accomplish it." Russ, nonetheless, was obviously respected at the university, something demonstrated by his being elected co-president of his graduate school class for two years.¹⁹⁵

The reception our classmates received on campus sometimes depended on what they were studying. Cam McConnell attended graduate school at Berkeley from 1965 to 1967. Cam explained that the College of Engineering was on the north side of the campus, and most of the demonstrations and students/faculty who supported them were on the south side of the campus. Cam wrote, "Over in the College of Engineering, one would not even have sensed any feelings about the war or about the military." He added, "Many of the professors in Civil Engineering either had military experience themselves or had worked for the Corps of Engineers before

teaching.” He concluded, “Were we welcome? Yes--beyond any doubt. Did I see any changes in student attitudes? No--those with whom I interacted were uniformly unconcerned with my military status.”¹⁹⁶ Steve Ellenbogen also noted that the response to our classmates depended on what they were studying. Steve, after leaving the Army in the summer of 1970, studied for an MBA degree at Harvard. He wrote, “The business school was somewhat of an oasis, being across the Charles River from the main campus (Harvard Yard), and while the Vietnam unrest was still in evidence, it really had very little impact at the business school.”¹⁹⁷

On some occasions, frank discussions opened lines of communication and re-established respectful relations. Bob Berdan told a story about his moving into student housing at Rutgers near Newark. Since he was leaving Fort Monmouth and arriving at Rutgers, he had two enlisted soldiers helping him unload the moving van. The two soldiers in uniform attracted some attention, and a handful of college students gathered and began jeering and chanting anti-war slogans. After a while, the protesters began to include Bob’s family in the jeering. When the soldiers stepped forward, Bob waved them back. He approached the protestors and told them he had served in Vietnam and might even agree with them about the war, but he warned them that they should not harm his family. The protestors departed and the unpacking continued, but a short time later the protestors returned, this time with reinforcements. Bob feared a fight, but he was pleased when the protestors pitched in and helped with the move.¹⁹⁸ Communication and respect had replaced confrontation.

CONCLUSION

The final phase of the war in Vietnam proved difficult for us to watch. The last U.S. combat soldiers left Vietnam in March 1973, and Saigon fell on April 30, 1975. The photos of a North Vietnamese tank crashing through the front gate of Independence Palace in Saigon and of a helicopter evacuating panicked South Vietnamese from the rooftop of a building became indelible images in our minds. As President Gerald Ford said, the photos marked the end of “a sad and tragic period in America’s history.”

Looking back on the Vietnam years still stirs emotions deep within most of us. While acknowledging that it was a “sad and tragic period,” we are proud of our service, of our having performed our duty. Frank Hennessee, who served thirty-three years in the Army said his most “memorable and fulfilling experience would have to be as an infantry company commander in combat in Vietnam.” He noted, “There is nothing like the satisfaction that comes from commanding U.S. soldiers in combat!”¹⁹⁹ We also share happy memories of Vietnam, such as our meeting classmates in unexpected circumstances, and our welcoming our wives at R&R. Jerry Lipsit recalled attending the annual Bob Hope tour on two occasions in Vietnam and having tears in his eyes as the entertainers sang “God Bless America.”²⁰⁰ We also remember cheering when an airplane lifted off the ground for our return trip to the United States. Steve Darrah said his most memorable experience was “coming home from my first tour and seeing my 10-month old son for the first time at midnight in the Providence, Rhode Island, airport.”²⁰¹

We also share less favorable memories. Russ Campbell wrote: “To this day, the smells (example burning waste, Vietnam hooch cooking fires, and the jungle) are readily recalled, as are the sounds of guns, bombs, B52 arc lights, incoming mortars, rockets, bullets, and especially the sounds of the helicopters--CH47s and UH1Ds---whoop, whoop, whoop... We were always sweating, hungry, tired, wet, scared, and miserable as we moved on foot burdened down with 65 to 70 pound packs, searching and listening for VC/NVA activity. Our bodies smelled, jungle rot sores invaded our skin, leeches latched on to us, and safe drinking water was in short supply. Taking a piss or a crap was always an involved process from having a

look-out for protection to concealing or covering the waste so the enemy could not count our numbers or the smell give away our location. There were periods of long boredom and apprehension punctuated by moments of sheer terror and fright.”²⁰²

As Dick Smoak wrote: “Obviously, none of us came out of the experience thinking it was a wonderful success.”²⁰³ In later years we heard General Westmoreland argue that the war had served a noble purpose because it helped weaken Communism, end the Cold War, and dismantle the Soviet Union. While his assessment paints our experience in a positive color, we know that we did not accomplish our nation’s goals and that our nation and our Class sacrificed much for those goals. On the eve of our celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of our graduating from West Point, we still have different opinions among our classmates about those goals, about the meaning of the war, and about the morality of some of the actions that took place during the war. We agree, however, that the United States paid a high price for the war, and we grieve for our classmates, as well as our soldiers, who were killed or wounded terribly during the war.

A memorial service has been and always will be the most emotional event in our reunions. In that service we remember all our fallen classmates, not just the ones from the Vietnam War, and we honor their service and sacrifice. Yet, the loss of our classmates in Vietnam remains foremost in our minds. Whether individually or in a group, we visit the memorial in Cullum Hall that lists all those who died in the Vietnam, we visit the Forum at the end of Thayer Walk that emphasizes “some gave all,” and we visit the Southeast Asia memorial near Lusk Reservoir. We also visit the West Point cemetery where fifteen²⁰⁴ of our classmates who fell in Vietnam are buried. Frank Hennessee spoke for all of us when he wrote in the October 1967 edition of Assembly: “But even though they have departed from this life, we of ‘65 want their wives, families, and loved ones to know that their memories will never die. They live on with us in treasured memories as friends and classmates who paid freedom’s highest price.”²⁰⁵

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