

A MEMOIR OF A TEN DAY WALKING PATROL

By Dale Ellingson Det 2 3rd RRU Bien Hoa, Vietnam November 1965

With Sgt. O Del Williams – SP/4 Jerry Cecil – SP/4 Dale Ellingson



The following are highlights and events that I can recall about special days of that patrol. Gary Mathews was taking photos of us just before leaving Det 2. Odell, Jerry and myself left in a Jeep along with three to four companies from the Big Red One. We joined a convoy and traveled from Bien Hoa to the edge of the Iron Triangle where there was a camp.

The next day we loaded in Huey choppers, sitting on the edge with one arm around a post and the other in lock with the guy next to you. Our feet were on the landing skid bar. It was a scary ride. We went out about 20 miles to start our walk back. Good for us the L/Z was cold. The three of us walked in a column into the jungle. We were placed just behind an Inf. Company commander and his radio man. The Inf. CO was in radio contact with the Colonel in a chopper over head during the day. Sgt. Williams was a good soldier and a great man. He took his rotation carrying the radio or batteries each day of the patrol. He wouldn't have had to do that for that was Jerry's and my duty. Jerry was a Vietnamese linguist. He was always scanning frequency's trying to intercept a VC transmission as we walked throughout day.

One day walking through the jungle we found a rice storage area. After a C-4 blast, rice rained down for some time. The column later came under rifle fire. A1E Sky Raiders were called in and dropped

three or four bombs. The A1E Sky Raiders came almost straight down and went up just above the jungle top about 100 yards in front of us. After that we walked on to a clearing in the jungle with an island woods in the middle where rifle fire started coming in from. The Inf. surrounded it and closed in but no VC were found. I am not sure the tunnel system was figured out yet late in 65.

Small streams were everywhere in the jungle. We walked across one about every two hours. This day most were three to five feet deep and five to 15 foot across. We stayed soaked all day. Leeches were a big problem. We checked ourselves over and pulled them off during each rest period.

The day of the rain, it rained all day. The poncho drained all your body water into your boots. We came across three bomb craters so big you could have built a house on top and had a full basement under. About 7 pm we came to a clearing in the jungle and heard this is where we are spending the night. I was standing in water up to my ankles. I made a damn around a sleep area, cupped the water out with my canteen, put the poncho down and that was my bed. One side of my body was white with wrinkles the next morning.

This day was uneventful except for a network news correspondent and his cameraman were with us. They filmed a bunker being blown up in the background while he was reporting. He then asked for a soldier for New York to do an interview. We bivouacked in a grassy area that had six to seven foot grass all around. We called it Elephant Grass. That night, support artillery started at dusk. All of a sudden it started walking in on us. The CO got on the radio and said, "Cease firing, it's coming in on us. I WILL SOONER TAKE MY CHANCES WITH "CHARLIE" THAN YOUR "XOXOXO" SUPPORT." Not another shell dropped that night.

One day, there was a soldier walking across a stream in front of us. He was carrying the butt plate for a mortar, it had to weight 50 lbs. He was an Italian kid about 5 foot 4. I had never seen him until that day. When he crossed the stream he went completely under the water for about 5 or 6 steps and then came back up. It was very funny to me at the time.

That night, rifle fire greeted the choppers as they came in to drop off rations for the next day. The chopper hovered about four feet off the ground. Five other soldiers and myself rushed in and pulled off the supplies. He was off in minutes. We always dropped 3 meals so you ate two and carried one for the next day lunch. Our company was to cross a big 50 yard wide river. Because we were last to cross it would be after dark in the moon light. Our CO said NO WAY would he cross. The Colonel in the chopper overhead finally agreed with the CO but said the Core of Engineers were taking down the temporary bridge. We would have to cross on a rope pulling ourselves across. Our gear would be pulled across on a raft.

I just fell asleep about 10pm when all hell broke loose up at the river crossing. The company crossing the river was ambushed along with the trucks loading in the rubber plantation after their crossing. The firing went on about 15 minutes and the next day we heard eight were killed with two dozen wounded. I only knew our patrol Inf. CO for a few days but I would trust his judgment to the end. He called off the artillery a couple of days before that. That night a claymore mine had been placed on a tree facing the perimeter. That morning a LT. walked to the edge and it exploded. He took a shrapnel wound to the leg but no bones were broken. He was air lifted out.

Two VC were seen running from the area into the jungle. An eight man patrol was formed and the Italian soldier that carried the mortar the day before was put on point. A half mile into the jungle they were ambushed. He and the second soldier took rounds in the chest and were killed. The jungle was

so thick they had to send in help to carry the two out to our camp to be air lifted out. Because of that we did not get to the river crossing until early afternoon. The Colonel was right, no bridge. Just a rope lying on the water to pull ourselves across. The ambush sight was cleaned up except for a 2 ½ ton truck out of order and a lot of blood clots on the ground.

One night before going off to sleep, Odell asked if we had a girlfriend story to tell. After hearing Odell's and Jerry's experiences, Odell said don't you have one? I said I didn't have a girlfriend at the time. He said, "How about high School?" Odell was a gentle and kind man.

Another evening camp was an old French Fort from the 50's. It had a seven foot wall on all four sides with a building in the middle. The walls were about 40 yards from the building. The thing that struck me was the building had a bullet hole every two to six inches on all four outside walls. I was sure glad I wasn't there when that happened.

The last day walking on line in an open area we received rifle fire from the jungle edge. It stopped as quickly as it started. The Inf. found a series of tunnels but no VC.

We got back to our starting point 10 days into the march. We loaded up and convoyed back to Bien Hoa and Det 2. On the way back were stopped for a while because of rifle fire. We then took off at double time and the song "Hang On Snoopy" came on the radio. Jerry wasn't listening for VC transmissions anymore.

I remember telling myself, while walking in the jungle, these 10 days should be a snap for I had three uncles in the Pacific for three years in WWII.

I was in Vietnam only 6 month's: July, 65 thru. Dec.65 but the events that happened created a lasting memory.