

April 19, 2011

Written by Oliver Jones, US56956772

2nd Platoon, Charlie Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry

Spec/5-Medic, C Troop

My rank was Medical Specialist, and at the time, I was attached to Charlie Troop, Second Platoon, Third Squadron, Fourth Cavalry, Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division. I was assigned to Headquarter Troop, Third Squadron, Fourth Cavalry, Twenty-Fifth Infantry.

I arrived in Vietnam on 14 December 1967. My medical training was done at General Leonard Wood Army Hospital in Missouri. I am Port Gamble S'Klallam Indian from the state of Washington. My friends either called me "Doc" or "Chief". I was and still am proud and honored to have served my country with my military service and am proud of what was required of me to render first aid to our wounded. I took many enemy soldiers' lives but I also saved the lives of many of my comrades with my medical training.

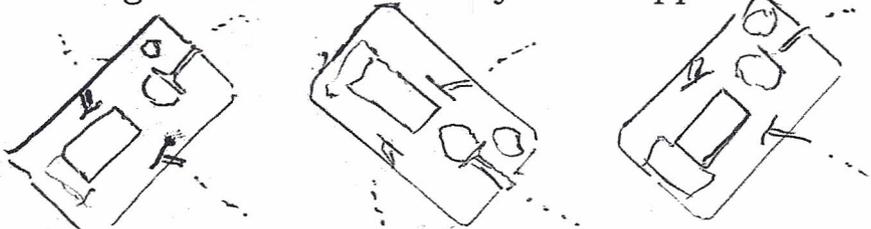
31 January 1968

At about 4:00 a.m., the red alert sirens at Cu Chi started and we were receiving a lot of incoming mortars and rockets. We were ordered to grab our gear, mount up and then told we were going to Tan Son Nuht Air Force Base because they were getting hit pretty hard by enemy troops. We went out the main gate and cross-country and came out on Route One east of Cu Chi. If Captain Varrant hadn't made that decision we may have been ambushed at the rubber trees outside the main gate before the town of Cu Chi, or ambushed in the town of Cu Chi. On the way to Tan Son Nuht we were given artificial lights by flares from a chopper.

Our first platoon was guarding Hoc Mon Bridge, the night the attack started. Just before we got to the Air Force base, Captain Varrant was in his track right behind our second platoon command track, which I was on, with platoon leader Lt. Jim Pinto, driver Frank Cuff, and track commander, St. Augustine. Capt. Varrant asked Pinto to pull over so he could be closer to the front of the column. Platoon Sgt. Patrick Strayer was leading the way, followed by our scout track, then our infantry track and then our track 2-0.

He proceeded to pass us and ended up right behind our lead tank. If Capt. Varrant hadn't done that, everyone on our track may have been killed that day.

After Capt. Varrant passed us near the factory all hell broke loose. Usually when we would get ambushed we would go into what is called a herring bone or a fish bone formation, meaning the lead vehicle turns at about a forty-five degree angle with the road and the next rig will do the same only to the opposite side:



This makes the column look like a herring bone made of armored vehicles. On this occasion at Tan Son Nuht Air Force base we were receiving fire from the south side of the road, which was to our right, so all of our tanks and armored personnel carriers turned to the right. We immediately started to lay down fire. There were so many enemy soldiers we didn't have a problem picking out targets. As it turned out, the base was being attacked by more than 2000 North Viet Nam regulars. When we pulled up there were already 121 N.V.A. soldiers inside the base. We drove right up between the forces inside the base and the rest that were intending to get into the base. If it hadn't been for Capt. Varrant's military training and his intuition we wouldn't have made it that far.

Capt. Varrant passed us, so that put us one more vehicle back in the column. His 0-6 track put him right behind our lead tank 2-5. We were down to only two (I think) tanks that day and that's why Sgt. Strayer was leading the way. His tank was followed by: Capt. Varrant's track, our scout track, our infantry track, followed by us in 2-0 track, which was the second platoon command track. Frank Cuff was our driver, St. Augustine was our track commander, Lt. Jim Pinto manned our M-60 machine gun on the left side and I, Oliver Jones, manned the M-60 machine gun on the right. We all did a turn to the right, which gave St. Augustine and myself a clear field of fire. Lt. Pinto dismounted his 60 and was behind and to my right firing his weapon. Like I said before, there were so many N.V.A. we didn't have a problem picking out targets. This was the first time I actually had a visual of enemy soldiers. They usually

used the "hit and run" tactic because an armored cav. unit can bring a lot of firepower to bear in a firefight.

It seems as if time stands still but everything was happening at a hundred miles an hour. I shot at least three boxes of 60 ammo through my weapon. Sgt. Strayer jumped on the left side of our track, as ours was the only one not hit by rocket-propelled grenades. Everyone in the rigs in front of us, by this time, was either killed or wounded. He was yelling at us to fire towards the front of the column because the tank and tracks were being overrun by enemy soldiers, and they were shooting everyone. Lt. Pinto moved his weapon to the left side of our track and opened fire on the enemy. When Sgt. Strayer was yelling at us to fire towards the front, he was hit again and fell from the side of our track 2-0, to the ground. That was when I grabbed both of my aid bags and jumped from our rig. I was checking Sgt. Strayer's wounds when three N.V.A. ran up on the road and started firing at Strayer and me. I covered Strayer with my body but he was hit again. By this time, he had been wounded three separate times and I somehow, miraculously, had not been hit. Sanchez and Randazzo took out the three N.V.A., enabling me to get back to Strayer, but he was gone. I drug his body to the ditch on the north side of the road, between the road and the Air Force base.

Our T.C., St. Augustine, was hit in the side of the neck by a large caliber weapon. It blew a big part of the side of his neck away. I bandaged him and gave him a unit of blood serum, and put him in the ditch as well. He was seriously wounded but he survived, and I believe he was sent home. That was the last time I saw him.

Martinez was firing a L.A.W. near the front corner of one of the tracks and was wounded in the groin. He was in a lot of pain so I gave him a shot of morphine and direct pressure on the wounded area, put him on a litter and moved him to the ditch near where Dwight Birdwell was firing from tank 3-5. Frank Cuff and another sergeant went forward with me, checking all of the rigs for survivors. At this point we'd been receiving enemy fire for about an hour. We got out the wounded, took care of their wounds, and checked vitals on the rest of our guys. My priority was taking care of the wounded. I thought we could take care of our killed in action later. I was assuming we would have a "later".

We were very close to losing that battle. We had burned up our weapons and were out of ammo. There were a few attempts by the enemy to run across the road and get the rest of us, but we had just enough firepower to repel their attempts. They were also rolling Chi Comm grenades across the road at us, wounding several of our already wounded guys. When we went forward with Cuff and the other sergeant we had to cross what appeared to be a little road that lead straight into the constantina wire and fence of the Air Force base. We had to cross this road twice. Cuff and I made it across okay, but the sergeant was wounded when we crossed the second time. We were trying to get our wounded into a smaller area which we could more easily defend. We were moving everybody back to an area behind our track and kind of in between where Birdwell was manning tank 3-5.

I can recall several events of the day but I don't know if it will be in chronological order. A big, dark-haired guy named Ward had an M-16 shot from his hands. The weapon took the force of the blast and probably saved his life. Our mortar sergeant, a young black guy, was wounded across the back. It cut him right across the back like a knife wound. I will never forget what he said: "Mother-fucker Doc, they're using real bullets." It made me chuckle amongst all this terror and horror.

A guy named Red, shot this N.V.A. soldier with three magazines of 16 rounds before it put him down for good. This N.V.A. would take a full magazine in the torso, fall down, then get up, go back across the road and then would come across at us again. Our 16's, the new ones, were such a high velocity and small projectile that they didn't have much stopping power. A lot of the enemy were high on drugs. We found a lot of drugs when they were doing the mop-up of the combat area after the battle.

Capt. Varrant was shot in the head and survived. There also was another guy who was shot in the front of the head and a lot of his brains were in his steel pot. I assumed he was dead but much later in the battle he regained consciousness and said, "Fuck, have I got a headache." My reply was, "No shit." During the battle, towards the end, we tried to drive a track through the wire because we were in deep trouble. After two attempts they made it through. There were multiple rows of wire with many anti-personnel mines as well as claymors, so it wasn't as simple as just going through the wire.

When we first got there, there were 121 N.V.A. inside the base, so at first we were fighting front and to our back-sides. There was also a guard tower about 75-100 yards up the runway on the east side, manned by Air Force personnel. This guy, that was manning the tower, put up a great fight the entire day!

I've always thought if it wasn't for Capt. Varrant's decisions and leadership, Col. Otis' leadership and courage under fire, and Dwight Birdwell's ferocious battle action exposing himself all day while returning fire; we would have lost that battle. If anyone of their actions were taken away we would have all probably died that day. I was very disappointed and surprised when the three of them didn't all receive the "Medal of Honor". What we all did that day was very courageous but what they did was "way above and beyond what the rest of us did". I'm not trying to belittle what we all did that day because we were all courageous under fire and operated quite well under very stressful conditions.

I remember an Air Force chopper (gun ship) making a run on the enemy for us. They received fire and didn't come back. We were all wishing "D Troop" would show up. There was also a WWII dive-bomber that showed up and dropped several bombs on the enemy position. The most significant air support we got was from Col. Otis. He had a couple of choppers shot from under him. He would appropriate another, and get right back into the battle. Smith, from third platoon, Cuff, Sanchez and the wounded sergeant were helping me take care of the wounded most of the day, as well as firing on the enemy.

At the end of the battle we were out of ammo and working weapons. I was out of morphine, blood serum, dextrose, saline, I.V.'s and bandages. I was covered with everyone's blood from the daylong battle and the amount of casualties we suffered that day. What we took with us that first day of TET was all we had for three or four weeks. This was the greatest battle in 3rd Squadron, 4th Cav. history. We all lived a part of history that day. If anything would have changed, history would have changed, history would have turned out different and **all** our names would now be on the Viet Nam Memorial Wall in Washington D.C.

I will also never forget what Sanchez told me right after Sgt. Strayer was killed. He said, "Doc, you take care of them and I will take care of you." Wherever I was or whatever I was doing, Sanchez wasn't far

Written by Oliver R. Jones, US56956772

2nd Platoon, Charlie Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, 25th Infantry

Spec/5-Medic, C Troop

Hoc Mon

2 March 1968

I don't know if the guy was a captured P.O.W., or if he was a Chu Hoy, regardless he gave us information about a weapons cache south of Hoc Mon. Our Commanding Officer was Capt. Shaffer, our Platoon Leader was still Lt. Pinto and our Platoon Sgt. was Frank Williams. Our T.C. was a guy named Busto. Our driver was still Frank Cuff. We had a guy from our motor pool who was manning the 60 on the right side. Pinto was manning the 60 on the left.

After our search of the area didn't yield any weapons or any kind of ordinance, our leaders decided that more effort would be useless. We were leaving the area on a small overgrown road, heading north toward the town of Hoc Mon. Every third day we took turns with C.P. day. Third Platoon was leading and we, of the Second Platoon, were falling in behind them. Our 2-0 track was just entering the overgrown part of the road when we began hearing what sounded like explosions forward.

I was sitting on the hatch right behind Cuff. If the occasion ever arose to button up, we would close all the hatches and doors and the hatch would cover the driver. Anyway, I was sitting on the hatch facing the rear of our track. We heard explosions forward and at the same time I heard what sounded like a low flying duck, right behind my head. I turned quickly to see what it was, and another flew over my lap, right in front of me. What I thought was low flying ducks were actually Rocket Propelled Grenades being shot at our 2-0 track. One of their tactics was to hit the lead vehicle, disabling it, and then hit another vehicle at the rear. This trapped all of the vehicles in the middle of the two disabled vehicles, creating a kill zone. Lucky for us on track 2-0 and Second Platoon, they missed us near the rear. We all did our fish bone formation and returned fire.

Right after the second R.P.G. flew over us, I jumped off our track and ran around to the back. I ran right into an enemy soldier with an automatic weapon, firing at me. I lifted my M-16 and pulled the trigger but nothing happened. I quickly ejected the chambered round and pulled the trigger again, still nothing. The entire time I was doing this, I could hear the double pop of his automatic weapon, because he was firing right at me. We were looking into each other's eyes. I jumped to my right, rolling at the same time, came up to my knees and ejected another round. I pulled the trigger, but still nothing. By this time Lt. Pinto saw what was happening and shot the guy. I immediately jumped into the back door of

our track and breathed a heavy sigh of relief. Lt. Pinto said, "Doc, what you trying to do, get a Purple Heart?" My reply was, "My god damn 16 won't fire!" I looked down at my weapon and my safety was still on. From that point on, I always kept my thumb on the safety switch and my finger on the trigger.

We were returning fire and slowly withdrawing from the ambush. We were ordered to withdraw and do an end sweep, and come at the enemy from Rte. 1. During the ambush we were returning fire toward the north, right into the town of Hoc Mon. That's why we were told to withdraw and come in from the north. In doing so, we had to leave our lead tank because it was disabled by R.P.G.'s. All of the tank crew were still alive. We went south and west.

We were now about a hundred yards away from the ambush site. As we were leaving, the track behind us had his fifty-caliber machine gun pointed down and forward. As we were moving, that put his 50 aimed at our back door. His weapon was still hot from all the ammo fired through it. He had a round chambered in his 50. Because his weapon was still hot and it had a chambered round, it unexpectedly fired the round through the back door of our track. His 50 round hit our T.C., Busto, in the thigh, breaking his thigh bone in several places with a large amount of blood loss. We evac'ed him right on the spot, which delayed our move up to Rte. 1.

3 March 1968

We got to Rte. 1 between Hoc Mon and the ambush site and got on line to make a sweep through the area. There were so many enemy soldiers, we couldn't make any head way to get to our tank which had wounded men aboard. We knew they were still alive because they were popping flares out of their tank to let us know. A couple of us crawled along the edge of the narrow road to get to the tank. The driver was killed, the T.C. was left in the tank - the enemy probably thought he was dead, as he was wounded several times, and the other two were taken prisoner. I then evac'ed the wounded T.C. back to base camp.

We were still on line, laying down fire. We called in air strikes and the jets came in from east to west, dropping 500-pound bombs several times. When we called in air strikes or gun ships, we marked our location by popping a smoke grenade and they, our air support, would identify so as not to hit us with friendly fire. When we called in the air strikes we withdrew to a safe distance for safety reasons. After the air strikes we started to advance on the enemy again, firing as we advanced.

We were just getting into an area covered with brush, bamboo and small hootches when I noticed some violet smoke coming from my left. I

initially thought they were calling in another air strike or gun ship, but I had never seen that color of smoke before. I started hearing someone call "Doc", saying they were wounded. At the time, I was walking behind our track 2-0 firing my 16 at possible locations of enemy soldiers' hiding spots. At the time I didn't know they had dug tunnels and built bunkers, that they were pretty well entrenched in that location. Anyway, when I heard their call for help I immediately started running toward where I heard the call for help come from. About halfway there, I felt a hard thump and a burning sensation coming from the middle of my chest, at my sternum. Having never been shot or wounded before, I thought I had just taken a major hit. I stopped and dropped to my knees. I got out a bandage and opened my fatigue shirt to bandage myself, because if it was a major hit I wanted to apply a bandage before I passed out; that's how serious I thought it was. When I looked down toward where I thought I was wounded I saw a hot piece of shrapnel stuck into the center of my sternum. I pulled it out and took off running toward my wounded friends. When I got to their track I immediately assessed the situation.

An R.P.G. had hit the front shield of the 50-caliber machine gun manned by T.C. Eddie Pleasant. It burned through both the shield and Eddie. After it passed through him, it exploded, taking the head off of, and killing, Dan Charles. When it hit the shield it created shrapnel, wounding driver Mason on the right side of the head. He went into shock immediately. When the R.P.G. exploded, it hit Sanchez in his front side, covering him with a lot of shrapnel wounds. I jumped up on the hatch behind Mason the driver, pulled him out of the driver's seat and laid him across the hatch. I dropped into the driver's seat and backed the track out of harm's way. I drove it back about 30-40 yards and bandaged Mason and started an I.V. on him. Then I called in a dustoff to take out the two wounded and the two killed in action. After dusting my guys off, I went back to the front where the battle was still going on.

When I got back to the front I could see the bunker where the R.P.G. came from, the one that killed and wounded my friends. The bunker was covered with wood and a piece of corrugated tin roofing material, trying to hide the bunker, but I could see the muzzle flash, could see the distinct tracer color, and, their weapons sounded way different from our weapons. This meant that we could hear them fire, and quickly identify whether hostile or friendly fire. When I saw the muzzle flash, I immediately realized no one had taken the bunker out. As soon as I realized that, I put in a fresh magazine of ammo into my M-16 and charged the bunker, firing my weapon the whole way, so they would keep their heads down. When I got to the bunker, I shot two new magazines into two of the openings of the bunker. After the two magazines, I then dropped two grenades into the bunker, just to make sure they weren't a

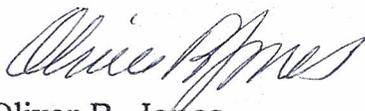
threat to any more of my guys. After I blew up the bunker I walked back to my track 2-0.

The N.V.A. were dug in so well and there were so many of them, we couldn't make much headway. We circled up right next to Rte. 1 and in the morning we started back into the battle area. We met no resistance at all the next day, so we made a complete sweep of the area. That morning I found one of our guys that had been taken prisoner, in a small hootch. All of his fingers had been cut off, but before that, it looked like they (N.V.A.) had pulled out all of his fingernails first. It was very clear to us that they had tortured him before they killed him. After that I had zero respect for our enemy. Actually, I had a big burning hatred for these guys.

The night before we made our sweep through the area, we had Puff circling over our position, firing flares; so we were watching them, watch us watching them. About halfway through the night one of our leaders at a higher level, decided to turn out the lights to see what the N.V.A. would do. The nights in Viet Nam are totally dark, so you can bet your bottom dollar that no one got any sleep that night - everyone was waiting to see if we would be attacked. As it turned out, they headed toward the Cambodian border in the middle of the night. We found them the next day, about half way to the border. We hooked up with 25th Armor and caught them (N.V.A.) before they could dig in. They didn't have much of a chance against an armor and an armored Cavalry unit; like I said earlier, we could bring a lot of fire power to bear in a fire fight.

This is my best recollection of the events happening on these two days at Hoc Mon.

Respectfully,



Oliver R. Jones