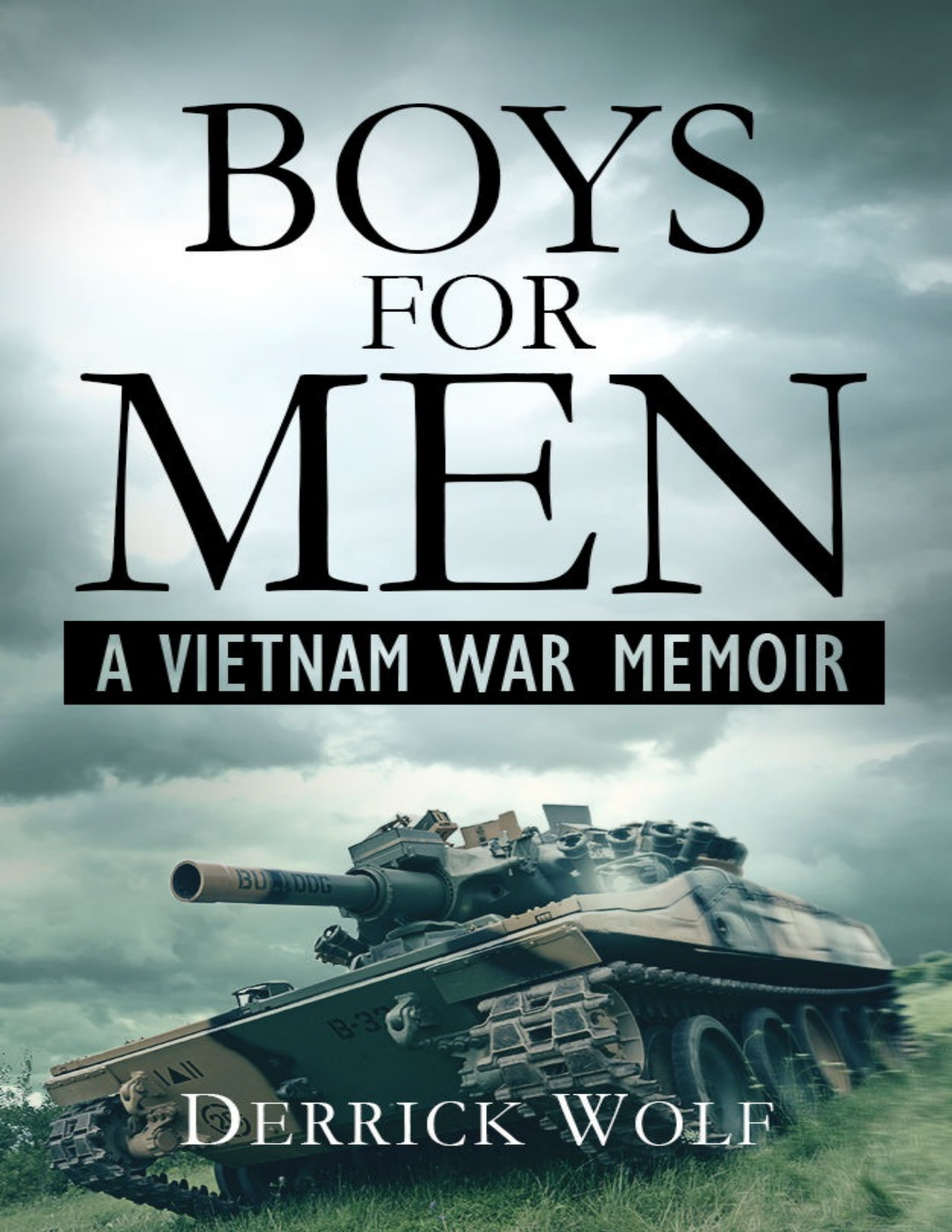
# BOYS FOR MEN

## A VIETNAM WAR MEMOIR



DERRICK WOLF

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# BOYS FOR MEN

*Derrick Wolf*

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# *Preface & Acknowledgements*

I was drafted into the army in June of 1969. After completing basic training, I received further training as an armor crewman. I was then sent to Vietnam in January of 1970 and discharged from the army in March 1971.

In 1999, my good friend Jerry Hosier let me read a copy of his great great-uncle Sylvester Waltz's journal from his time in the army during the Indian Wars of 1876. The journal was filled with the mundane everyday routines and of the hardships of being in the infantry during a time of war. I couldn't get his stories out of my head, and I was struck by the many similarities, especially the trials we both endured during our time in the military, even though our period of service was separated by almost 100 years. It wasn't until 2007, while attempting to write down my army stories (in part inspired by reading Waltz's journal), that I realized that I could and should combine them somehow. It took me a few weeks of contemplation before I decided on my format.

From notes and a list of memory triggers I wrote an after-the-fact daily journal of my time spent in Vietnam. The events I detail in my journal are all true but some of the events depicted might not have happened on the day entered in my journal. My memory of that time was surprisingly good but not *that* good. I did remember the exact day of some events, and I used those to try to put the rest of the stories at least close to their correct order. The daily entry in my journal is preceded with an entry from the Waltz journal and by juxtaposing them this way the similarities are very evident. This maybe one of those instances where the sum of the parts is greater than the whole. At least I hope so.

Many of my friends and family helped and assisted in this project and I would like to acknowledge that now.

My first thank you is to Jean Hosier (Jerry's mother and at times, a mother to me) for obtaining the first copy of the Sylvester Waltz Diary and Journal from the Monroe County Historical Commission. Jean, along with her niece, Patricia Cole, typed a transcript from the copy of the actual handwritten journal. The copy of the handwritten version they had to work with was very light and difficult to read in places but they did an exceptional job of deciphering Sylvester's handwriting, which for the most part is quite good.

Next I want to thank Jerry Hosier for letting me read his copy of the Waltz diary and journal.

I also want to thank Foster (Tony) Waltz, who is a grandson of Sylvester Waltz, and his wonderful and charming wife Marcia for sharing photos of Sylvester Waltz and his wife and children with me. They were also the source of information on Sylvester Waltz that is included in the Afterword.

Thanks to all my friends and family who helped with the typing and that would include: Nels Nelson and Claudia Berg, as well as my daughter, Alexis, and my wife, Tasha Lebow.

I want to thank all my loyal readers: my wife, Tasha, and both my children, Evan and Alexis, as well as friends Martha Adler, Nels Nelson and Nick Guyol, and my brother Ken Wolf.

Martha Adler was in the Peace Corps and stationed in the Philippines during the Vietnam War and had some contact with American GI's on R&R there. She mentioned to me that she once saw some GIs on the beach playing with firecrackers, seeing who could hold the firecrackers the longest before they went off. Martha, who was 20 years old at the time, said, "They were just boys." I asked her if she wanted to know the working title of the book I was working on about the Vietnam War. When I told her the title was Boys for Men, Martha said, "Oh man, you just gave me a chill!" To which I replied, "You just gave me a title for my book. Boys for Men isn't the working title anymore. It *is* the title." After reading some of my initial rough drafts Martha encouraged me to continue.

Special thanks to Sally Muse, my good friend, Main reader, and self-proclaimed #1 Fan who was the first of my readers to finish the rough draft of Boys for Men. She was a constant source of inspiration.

Thanks to Sylvester Waltz for taking the time almost every night to write in his journal. There were times it must have been a supreme effort, writing by campfire light during the winter in Montana after a long hard days march.

Lastly I want to thank my wife, Tasha, and our children again, as they all taught me how to use a computer, how to surf the Internet, and how to do all things necessary to write and publish a book.

Without their assistance and the help from everyone mentioned above this work would have never been completed.

# *Introduction*

Sylvester Waltz's diary and journal starts on St. Patrick's Day, 1876 when the cavalry and infantry he is with leave Ft. Shaw in Montana and continues as the Yellowstone Expedition makes its way to the Little Bighorn Valley and back to Ft. Shaw. The Yellowstone Expedition had three main forces that were to converge at the Little Big Horn Valley. General Terry lead a force from the north which included Gen. Custer and the 7th Cavalry. A force lead by Gen Crooks was coming from the south and a force lead by Gen. Gibbon was coming from the west, with Sylvester Waltz among the latter. He describes the incredible hardships and danger they endured on their journey. His journal has many more entries than mine, so I was able to "cherry pick" what I felt were the best and most pertinent entries. My hope is that the entries I have used will create enough interest in the Waltz journal that it will eventually be published in its entirety.

My stories, although written in the present tense, were actually written during February 2008 to February 2009 from rough drafts and notes written from 2000-2007. Virtually everything was written from memory.

Because of all the military slang and jargon used, I have included a glossary at the end of the book.

I want to acknowledge inspiration as a writer from Leo Tolstoy, Mark Twain, Jules Verne and Joseph Heller among others. I hope it is not considered plagiarism if I admit ahead of time to using some of their pet phrases. I happened to read Heller's Catch 22 while in the army, and it was a real eye opener for me and one of the reasons I promised myself that one day I would tell my stories. So promise kept, some forty years later, but here they are.

*January 1970*

*March 17, 1876*
*Friday, St. Patrick's Day*
*Ft. Shaw, Montana*

*A few days ago we received orders for each company of this fort, Fort Shaw, Montana Territory, to be ready to march at any time. We are, it is understood, going to the Yellowstone River, on a trip I do not know how long it will last.*

*Boys are all feeling good on the prospect of getting out of the post. This morning turned out as usual at Reveille and found the ground covered with now four inches of snow. Of course (as it is St. Patrick's Day) the musicians played St. Patrick's Day in the morning around the parade ground. We all have our knapsacks packed and ready to be slung. We were fell in, away we went.*

*Camped about three o'clock at Eagle Rock. Its name I believe was derived from the fact of so many eagles alighting on a high point of rocks here. We have had very bad walking. The snow melting, we all have wet feet. We have to clean away the snow first to pitch our tents and it is beginning to snow and expect to play Freeze Out all night. Three of us bunk together. We all have had our supper by sitting around the fire and shivering. We made twelve miles today. Wood and hay were hauled from Shaw.*

*Camp Eagle Rock – 12 miles from Ft. Shaw*

January 6, 1970
Tuesday, Epiphany
Oakland, California

I just noticed that it's Epiphany, the Day of Revelation. Lots of thinking time flying across the US from Dearborn, Michigan to the Oakland Army base in California. I am one of the last arrivals of the day. All the barracks are full. Even in all the Day rooms - the recreation rooms - all the chairs and couches have been claimed by earlier arrivals. There are two places left: the

floor or the pool table. Today I have had my first revelation about war. My comfort is of no concern to anyone but me.

The curriculum at Armor School was much more challenging than the Army's Basic training. Tank Weaponry and Mechanical Systems Operation and Maintenance were some of the courses. We also had training for a tank fired missile and its guidance system.

To get us to apply ourselves diligently, the Drill Sergeants told us The Big Lie. Right up until graduation we were repeatedly assured that we would be posted to Germany. Of course, we naively thought, the army wouldn't want to waste all the costly training we had by sending us into harm's way. Naive because it is almost the sole purpose of the military to send its members into harm's way.

To bolster The Big Lie, we were given brochures for a payroll deduction plan where a certain amount of our monthly pay (probably most of it) went to pay for a brand new Porsche. When finished with our tour of duty in Germany we would fly to New York City and pick up our new Porsche at dockside and drive it home.

So it is very disappointing, to say the least, that we all got orders for deployment to Vietnam.

I settle into my bed of green felt and slate. At first I wondered: How bad can it be?

I haven't even left the U.S. and yet I already feel I can answer that: Probably far worse than I could ever imagine.

That's my second revelation today.

*March 18, 1876*
*Saturday*
*Camp Deerborn Valley*

*Played Freeze Out all night last night, and three of us laying under one width of blanket so that the outside ones were cold on one side all the time, and the middle one crowded so he could not turn. Snowed considerable last night.*

*Country high. Buttes and hills on every side. Camped for the night in Deerborn Valley. Crossed a high divide. This valley would be pleasant if there was no snow. A small creek or river running through, holding the same name as the valley. Cottonwood on river bottom and a few scattered pines on*

*the hills.*

*I am sitting in front of my tent where we have a large fire built. Am going to try and sleep alone.*

*Sergeant Rogan and one man came out from Shaw to put up telegraph line where it is down and brought along the mail. Received letter from T.C.H. and was very glad to hear all was well. 16 miles today.*

*Camp Deerborn Valley – 28 miles from Ft. Shaw*

January 7, 1970
Wednesday
Oakland, California

I spend the next day in Oakland finally being issued a bunk, all my jungle fatigues, and boots. This place is wall to wall GIs on their way to Nam. Thousands of guys just milling around waiting. I'm here for two days and only meet one person I know.

The day before I leave I meet up with Tom H., an acquaintance from high school. He is an E-5, Buck Sgt. and is just back from the Nam. I am surprised he will even talk to me because I'm not even a FNG (Fucking New Guy) yet. There are lots of guys here just returning from the Nam. Apparently it is possible to make it back alive. At least that's what the army wants us to think.

On our side of the partition wall we can hear them laughing and celebrating on the other side of the wall they put up to try to keep us separated so we can't talk to each other. There is no celebrating and very little laughter on our side of the partition.

*March 19, 1876*
*Sunday*
*Camp Crugers Ranch*

*Again I froze and last night went outside tent, made up the fire, wrapped my buffalo robe around me and spent the night sleeping until the fire went down, then awaking and building it up again. Struck tents 8 o'clock a.m. and passed over high divide. A fierce cold wind blowing all day. Thought I would freeze to death before we got into camp.*

*Camped on a small creek forty four miles from Shaw having went 16 miles today. A ranch close by where it seems they have plenty of the warming up*

*stuff, mainly whiskey and several of our good Templers are getting boozy, besides a great many that aren't Templers. Weber and Knlealey were reprimanded by the Captain for not staying in camp when told to.*

*We have a place where there is no snow to pitch our tents and have hay to sleep on so think I will at least have a good sleep tonight as I have a bunky and so have more blankets. Country high and very rough. Too cold for me to write any more.*

*44 miles from Ft. Shaw*

January 8, 1970
Thursday
In the Air

We fly from Oakland, to Alaska in January, in our jungle fatigues, no coats. "You won't need coats where you're going," they say. We are in Alaska for a few hours. We actually have to walk outside for about 200 yards to get to the terminal, and we do freeze. From there we fly to a US military base in Japan. As we taxi down the runway we can see, just outside the fence of the base, Japanese war protesters. After a quick re-fuel (they don't let us off the jet in Japan) it is off to Vietnam. We are flying on a commercial jet with female flight attendants so at times it is hard to believe we are going to a war zone.

There is no First Class section on this plane, just one big open interior filled with a sea of olive drab (O.D.) green clad GIs from side to side and front to rear. It is a long punishing flight. There is some joking around at the start of the flight but by the end we are all tired and apprehensive about what is in store for us. For a while I thought I could imagine the worst of what to expect as I head off to war. I have already had my thinking corrected about that, and I haven't even made it to the Nam yet.

*March 20, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Mouth Little Prickly Pear Canyon*

*We slept pretty well on account of having a little hay to sleep on last night. Broke camp 9 o'clock, 13 miles today.*

*Passed through Prickly Pear Canyon today and a more magnificent work*

*of nature I ever saw. It is 13 miles in length and in most places not more than wide enough for a wagon to pass through. 200 Ft high. High, rough walls of rock rise perpendicular, high over our heads with pine trees growing where one would not think anything could grow. A pretty stream, running through bearing the same name as the canyon.*

*At the mouth of the canyon a ranch is built where Lager beer is advertised for sale. Further up the canyon is scattered with logs ready to be hauled to the mill. The stream we crossed 11 times. Bridges built on all the crossings except one. The scene, though grand, is awful in its sublimity. Snow melting rapidly. Melting which makes it very muddy passing though the canyon.*

*We camped at the mouth of Little Prickly Pear Canyon on Prickly Pear Creek and 1/2 mile from a ranch where butter, eggs and etc. can be bought by anyone who has money. Owing to the thaw, our camp is very muddy and wet. Detailed for guard tonight. Lt. Bradly and mounted detachment are in pursuit of two men of K. Co. who deserted the night before we started out.*

*We marched 12 miles today and all feel pretty tired. 60 miles from Shaw*

January 9, 1970
Friday
Cam Rahn Bay, Viet Nam

We arrive at Cam Rahn Bay military base during the afternoon. It is a barren and hilly complex next to the ocean with burned brown hillsides. It is dusty and smoky. What is that awful and acrid smell? I will soon know that smell all too well. Burning shit. All the base camps smell of burning shit and piss. Although there are piss tubes, so numerous you will trip over them if you aren't looking, most guys just piss on the ground where they are standing.

I have brought an old box camera with me. My thinking had been the tropical environment would probably be tough on a good camera. Box cameras, being very simple, would be a good choice. Mine is a Kodak Target Six.

Once I arrive at Cam Rahn Bay and have a look around I quickly realize there is not going to be anything I want to remember in photographs here. I throw the box camera in the first trash can I see and never regret it.

It has been a long trip, and we are all extremely tired and just want to be issued our bunk so we can get some sleep.

*March 21, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp Billy John's Ranch*

*Broke camp this morning early. Passed through Little Canyon which is also grand but not as large a scale as the other. Camped at Billy John's ranch where the boys are all availing themselves of the opportunity of buying everything (edible). Had to put a sentry on to keep them from going too strong.*

*11 miles today and have a nice camp. Two men from K Company caught, out of luck decidedly. Sweeney of A Company deserted last night. A couple of mounted men went in pursuit of him. Simons of H Company deserted also. Both of them took everything they could carry.*

*Pretty cold with high wind. 68 miles from Ft Shaw.*

January 10, 1970
Saturday
Base camp at Da Nang

Everywhere I've been on my way to Vietnam is just jam packed and overcrowded with FNGs and a lingering perception that no one knows what's going on.

After an overnight stay in Cam Rahn Bay, I get my first chopper ride in the Nam. From the air, most of the Nam is breathtakingly beautiful. Every shade of green you can imagine. Terraced rice paddies and all sorts of fields of crops with very clearly defined boundaries. We don't fly too high so we can see farmers in the fields and water buffaloes are a common sight.

The barracks are just as crammed at the base camp in Da Nang. I'm here for a week of In-Country-Training. When deemed fit for the field we start falling out for formation three times a day where they call out the names of the guys being sent to their final unit.

Until they call my name, I spend my time walking through every barracks here looking for anyone I know. I find no one I know so I go to the USO. Wow, what a joke that place is. A couple hundred dog-eared paperback books, and that is it. I check out the PX which is well stocked with stereo systems, not too appropriate for guys heading for combat. I have no money with me anyway. Back in Oakland they said we couldn't have any U.S.

currency with us and besides there's nothing to buy. I never find anyone I know before being sent to Da Nang for In-Country-Training.

*March 22, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Camp Widow Durgins*

*Broke camp and pulled at 7:00 o'clock. Marched until 9:00 o'clock. Camped at Widow Durgin's farm 4 miles from Helena City and 85 miles from Shaw. Passed Silver City on the left. A small mining town of a hundred or more inhabitants. Country level and quite pretty and settled pretty thick. Farmers who have built some very nice residences and seem to live very comfortably.*

*The two men that were caught in Helena City were brought out to camp this evening looked ashamed of themselves when their Capt. John Sanns and General Gibbon went up to them and reprimanded them severely. Calling them a couple of cowardly scoundrels. Told them he would give them one more chance if they want it and that was if they should go along with him to Yellowstone River and fight Indians and behave themselves like men, he would release them. They both promised faithfully, so their handcuffs were taken off and they were released. The luckiest thing that ever happened to them.*

*Two men deserted last night. Sturgean of H. Co. who enlisted same time as I did. Corporal Abbot of mounted detachments caught Sweeney of A. Co. back at old camp in Little Canyon, he tried to fool them by walking backwards in the snow but he didn't fool worth a cent.*

*Snow nearly all gone except on the mountains, where there is plenty. Day very pleasant. Several of the boys got thoroughly wet in crossing Silver Creek. Lt. Colonel Gibbon just came this evening and goes on ahead of us to the Ellis's Fort where he waits for us.*

*News was brought here that John McLellen's (musician of A. Co.) sister is dead. Feel very bad about it. Water very high and very, very muddy.*

*85 miles from Ft. Shaw.*

January 11, 1970
Sunday
Da Nang, In-Country-Training

After leaving the cattle yard at Cam Rahn Bay, I fly by chopper to an In-Country-Training center in Da Nang. It is the middle of monsoon season, so it rains just about every day. They house us during this training in several small compact buildings which we learn to be the standard and are lovingly referred to as hootches. Light frames with screen and plywood walls (about 16'x25') sometimes packed with twenty GIs but usually only eight to ten. Some Rear Echelon Mother F***ers (REMFs) with connections can have one or two guys to a hootch. They have about twenty of us packed into the hootches during the In-Country-Training.

The days are spent on things the army feels important that you learn before going out into the countryside shooting things up and killing people. Things like a typical Vietnamese grave is circular, about two feet high and six feet in diameter, and we should not desecrate them in anyway.

We are informed of Vietnam's previous French Colonial experience and some common slang phrases and words that can be used to communicate with the locals, many of which are French words with some interesting pronunciations. For example they say, "boo coo" here instead of "bo coo" which is how the French word *beaucoup* is properly pronounced, and it means “very much”. “Tee tee” means “a little bit”, and is likely a corrupted use of the French phrase *ti petite*. *Didi mau* is slang Vietnamese for “leave quickly”.

Also, *number one* means the best and *number ten* means the worst. Almost everything, it seems, is either number one or number ten, so you can usually get your meaning across to the Vietnamese.

*March 23, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Spokan House*

*Broke camp this morning 7:10 – marched all day through mud and water all day and consequently all of us were very tired. A great many of the boy's were to the city and look as if they had been in a fearful spree. Passed half way house where some of the boys had a fire at last after much jumping of creeks and muddy places.*

*We camped at Spokane House. Corporal Daniels strained his ankle so badly that he could not walk at all. My feet were as wet as could be when got*

*in. Boys getting on a drunk, a great many of them again good Templers too.*

*A man by name Minter deserted from K Co. Sweeney of A was brought in last night but was not released same as others. 18 miles from Helena, 20 from where we camped last night. 103 miles from Shaw.*

*Have a very good camp. Creek running alongside of camp. Country rolling, really settled pretty thickly. Everybody seems to be going to Black Hills. Wagons loaded down with patients, sure feel the disease. Not tired at all but sleepy and think will go to bed.*

January 12, 1970
Monday
Da Nang

We can see when arriving that Da Nang is a pretty good sized city with a lot of hustle and bustle. Lots of motorcycles, bikes, scooters and some cars and trucks on the streets. They do not let us leave the base camp to check out Da Nang, so we have the second day of In-Country-Training classes that last most of the day.

When in Oakland, CA just before being sent to Vietnam, we are issued our sets of jungle fatigues and jungle boots. The jungle boots have removable mesh in-soles we are told are very important for proper drying of the boot and your feet when they get wet as they assuredly will.

At In-Country-Training they tell us if we still have the mesh in-sole in our jungle boots we should take them out and throw them away. It has been ascertained that, although the mesh in-sole might help things dry out, it's also the ideal breeding ground for some of the worst jungle rot foot fungus known to man. Apparently no one feels it necessary to inform the jungle boot issuers in Oakland.

We are also instructed to take our malaria pills. We are warned that once you get malaria you always have it, and you can have relapses. Once we are out in the field, everyone says to just slather yourself with bug juice. Forget the malaria pills, unless you want to feel sick all of the time, which is how most guys feel who take them.

*March 24, 1876*
*Friday*
*Camp on Missouri River*

*Pulled out at 7:17 a.m. Country level as yesterday although mountains on each side of us. Camped on Missouri River Valley within one-hundred yards of the river. Our big fat cook, Pady Parthing, came very near falling into the river. He stepped onto a piece of ice which broke off and came near precipitating body into the river, but however managed to save himself by throwing himself backward upon the bank, but the camp kettles, which he had, went down the river.*

*River here is about 60 yards wide and runs very swift, we are about 2500 miles (this is the largest river in the United States) from the mouth. The valley is very pleasant and settled pretty thickly and seems to have some very thrifty farmers by the looks of their buildings and farms.*

*We are now one hundred and twenty miles from Shaw. We are all getting hardened to it and think will get through all right. Boys had some fun by the dogs running a jack rabbit through Camp. 3 hounds on his back but he got safely away. Have a horrible toothache.*

*Day very pleasant.*

January 13, 1970
Tuesday
Da Nang

They have a program called "Chieu Hoi" which means "Open Arms" and is intended to lure the NVA and VC to drop their arms and surrender for “re-education”. We are not to kill these people, we are told. In the field, the short-timers warn that every guy captured immediately shouts out, "Chieu Hoi." The problem is that not all of them mean it.

One of the cultural oddities here is many Vietnamese chew beetle nuts which at first turn their teeth a reddish-brown, but long term beetle nut chewing turns their teeth black. Their teeth, we are told, are in good condition, but at first it appears as if they are all rotted or even gone. There are additional side effects as well. The whole face of a beetle nut chewer becomes numb, and they experience a high similar to smoking pot or something even stronger I'm told.

They tell us that after a while you don't even notice whether someone's teeth are white or black. That's usually when you realize that you have been in the Nam too long.

*March 25, 1876*
*Saturday*
*Camp Stage Ranch Hogen*

*Broke camp this morning, early. Slept well last night. Today passed over Crow Creek Divide which is six miles to top then six miles to the bottom. Ranch at the place where we were camped last night, and an old ferry. Wind almost bitter cold. Coffee in large quantity. Our shoes are all green with vitriol that's arising from them.*

*When we reached the valley we found it quite warm. The valley contains a distillery. Quite a lot of settlers. Readerburg, situated on the creek, is a mining town of a couple hundred inhabitants. Valley level with Cottonwood plenty in the creek.*

*We have had a very hard march today and I feel so tired I could have laid down almost anywhere and slept. Our camp for this evening is a very good one. Bought wood for the outfit at the Stage Ranch, twenty two miles we marched today.*

*Wind blowing a perfect gale. Expect to make Gallatin City tomorrow. Boys all tired.*

*142 miles from Ft. Shaw*

January 14, 1970
Wednesday
Da Nang

They tell us during our In-Country-Training there will be no dentists in the field. So we should take good care of our teeth. At least the ones we want to keep. In my case, that would be all of them. Flossing, we are told, is the most important thing (more important than brushing). I already floss, and I should have started sooner. I have never have had a tooth cavity since I started flossing. However, I already have a lot of fillings in my teeth so there's not many places left for new cavities.

It's monsoon season which means rain and lots of it, and that's what it has been doing most of the time. We huddle in the damp hootches trying to stay dry.

They still won't let us go off base and into Da Nang. Since there's nothing

to do here they keep us occupied by having us fill sandbags.

One more day of training before we leave for our final base camps. I can hardly wait.

*March 26, 1876*
*Sunday*
*Camp Gallatin city*

*Broke camp this morning at daylight struck the Missouri River at its head where there is a ferry and where the three rivers that form it come in together. The Gallatin, Jefferson and Madison. One year ago I did not dream of being at the head of this mighty river, 5000 miles from its mouth.*

*We were ferried over the river and camped close to Gallatin City. Here wood had to be bought again. We are out of provisions. The citizen train that was sent ahead of us from Shaw is camped ahead of us a few miles.*

*Sergeant Schriver the commissary sergeant took a wagon and went to them and got rations to last us till we get to Ft. Ellis. Have a nice dry camp.*

*Came pretty near having a fight. Hasting of B. Co. was struck on the mouth with a piece of sod which made him perfectly wild but could not find anyone to fight with him so all was quiet.*

*Jefferson River comes in on the left, Madison in the center and Gallatin on the right. They are all very beautiful streams. Gallatin City amounts to but a few dwelling houses, a hotel, one store and post office combined. Butcher shop, etc. and a large mill is about all the city amounts to.*

*17 miles today and camped early. Valley is very thickly settled more so than the Missouri.*

*Am sitting in front of tent where I have a good fire built and feel quite comfortable.*

*A report came in this evening that General Crook has had a fight with the Indians and had several men killed and killed a great many Indians. I do not know how true it is but suppose it is not all rumor. It is understood here that we take 4 months rations from Fort Ellis and expect to have a skirmish with the redskins ourselves when we get to where they keep themselves.*

*I do not think I would like to farm it here. Day very pleasant and warm. 159 miles from Ft. Shaw*

January 15, 1970

Thursday
Da Nang

They tell us there used to be a lot of tigers in Vietnam but due to the war there are none left. Well, practically none left. And the few that have survived seem to have acquired a taste for human flesh due to all the dead bodies lying around at times. Here they refer to the dead VC as 90 pound tiger snacks. So if you come across a tiger in the bush it will not be a good thing as you will be viewed as a tiger snack as well.

This cheerful note concludes our orientation for the Nam, and I for one feel so very enlightened about the culture here. As it has stopped raining for a little while and to make sure we don't get bored, we spend the afternoon filling sand bags again. Filling sand bags, it turns out, is a common pastime for the REMFs. No wonder they all have a bad attitude.

*March 27, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Cottonwoods*

*Broke Camp this morning and followed the Gallatin River to West Gallatin bridge which we crossed and camped in cottonwoods, a most beautiful camp.*

*Passed West Gallatin Ladies Seminary which does not look like our seminaries of the East and middle states. This merely being a log house or building of good size and appeared to have a goodly number of scholars.*

*Some of the boys were talking about going to the house to buy fresh bread when all the young ladies came out to see the soldiers and so the boys concluded they did not want any bread- some promising young ladies. The building stood in the woods we might say and was rather a lonely place, at least so it seemed to us.*

*Passed a small town by name Hamilton of a few houses. In fact small towns spring up everywhere in this valley. Sixteen miles from here to Fort Ellis. Will make it tomorrow.*

*Two men deserted, Floy and Lewis from Company A took everything along they had guns and ammunition. Mounted men after them but could get no trace of them. Passed Blackfoot and Flathead pass today. To the right the former is wide enough (so I am told) for a team to pass through. The latter only for a single horseman.*

*180 miles from Ft. Shaw*

January 16, 1970
Friday
Quang Tri Province

When I finally get my orders to be shipped to a base camp in Quang Tri Province I meet up with one of my first friends from Advanced Individual Training (AIT). His name is Faustino, who got drafted after graduating from college. Like me, he was sent to tank school after basic training.

Faustino and I get on a deuce and a half with our gear and head out for our base camp in Quang Tri Province.

At a dirt crossroad out in the middle of nowhere, the truck driver tells us this is where we get off. We have no weapons, and we are alone walking down this road to our base camp, we hope. A jeep appears up ahead of us, coming our way. A good sign we think, must be something down this road at least. Maybe they realized we have arrived and sent a jeep to get us. Wrong. The jeep just blows by us in a swirl of dust. Just before it passes us, I realize the jeep driver is a friend of mine from high school and basic training, Cal McNutt. He drives right past us without so much as a nod acknowledging our presence. He obviously has been here awhile judging by his faded fatigues. We, being FNGs with our very new looking fatigues, will not be noticed by anyone.

Guys who have been in the country for a while hate it when their jungle fatigues wear out and have to be replaced. It is okay in the field where people know you aren't an FNG. But back at base camp you can easily be mistaken for a FNG, a fate worse than being mistaken for a REMF for some guys.

My first night in Quang Tri Province at the Dong ha base camp I am put on night perimeter guard duty. I haven't even been issued a weapon yet, and I'm on guard duty.

I've been in the Nam now for about two weeks. First, I'm dropped off in the middle of the countryside at a dirt crossroad with nothing in sight. Now I'm on night guard duty with two short-timers who take turns standing actual look out guard while the other guy watches a little 10" black and white TV. They both have only two weeks left and both are on High Alert. Every other sentence out of their mouth is, "Two weeks and a wake up!" They plan on staying on High Alert until they actually leave having known too many short-

timers who let their guard down near the end and got whacked. They tell me they took turns carrying the TV in the bush for the last couple of months.

These two guys are not going to let a FNG (me) use one of their M-16s to be on actual lookout, so I get to sleep all night. Problem is, the guard post is a small concrete bunker with a small opening for look out. It is grimy and smells of stale urine. Just about all the confined areas of Vietnam military bases smell of urine, fresh and stale. Even though there are piss tubes all over the place, most guys feel comfortable just whipping their wanger out and taking a piss on the spot, no matter where they are. At base camp during night, if someone sleeping in a hootch has to take a piss they just get up and open the door and piss outside. That's probably why all the hootches smell like piss. This is especially common for guys who have been in the field for any period of time. In the field, when you need to go - you just go. There are no porta-potties.

So I just hunker down in the corner of the guard bunker and try to get some sleep while listening to my guard mates' TV programs. Mostly sitcoms from the late 50s and early 60's, and as each guy takes his turn watching, he is glued to the screen. They apparently have missed watching TV, a lot, I think. I have a lot to learn yet about being in the Nam. While here, your only thought besides surviving is getting back to the Real World. These TV programs are these guys' only window to the Real World.

I should say something about the state of High Alert. In dangerous situations, most people with thoughts of surviving are mentally on High Alert. They are focused on the elements of the situation at hand. When it gets really scary, things happen seemingly in slow motion. Problem is, while seemingly in slow motion (you can almost see the bullets whizzing by) things are really happening at full speed. But just like in some bad dreams you can't, for some reason, get out of the way of things coming at you. I hate that!

The High Alert mental status is very tiring and draining of a person's energy. While not pumping adrenalin in a big gush, it's a steady flow that keeps you right there on the edge, ready to jump in whichever direction necessary to survive.

This is one of the reasons marijuana is the drug of choice in the field. When you're mentally on High Alert it's often not easy to relax when it's time to relax. Pot is great for this situation and in the Nam pot is typically a non-issue. Even if you don't smoke it yourself, it is an acceptable practice. I haven't seen it for sale at the PX but it wouldn't surprise me if it were. In the

little time I have walked around here at base camp, I am quite sure on several occasions I smelled pot being smoked. I'm only not completely sure because of the other incredibly strong odors here that dominate your sense of smell.

*March 30, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Snow Glen*

*Broke camp this morning and left Fort Ellis. Crossed a creek, Paddle Fallen, fell in and got thoroughly wet. Crossed the divide and camped in a beautiful place in the mountains. Teams did not get in until quite late. Our company, Company B on guard tonight, first time we mounted guard by company.*

*Made 12 miles today. Am camped in a kind of basin, high mountains and every side covered with pines and deep snow on north side.*

*Citizens on the road to Black Hills. Roads very bad to this place. Snowing very fast now while I am writing. Scenery splendid and night in mountains is colorful. Coyotes howling like sin. Fresh beef for supper. Hard life, a soldiers. Disagreeable day.*

January 17, 1970
Saturday
Quang Tri Province

After a night in a guard bunker on perimeter guard duty, I am put on shit burning detail. As a FNG, I can expect to get all the worst work details. Just another reason why some guys prefer to be in the field. Though the field is more dangerous than base camp, at least you don't have to do nasty details.

The outhouses here look like those familiar to us but without the half moon on the door. Inside, the holes are covered by a hinged lid. Underneath each hole is a cut-in-half 55 gallon oil drum which catches and holds every one's business. At the rear, the lower half of the outhouse siding is one long hinged door which can be propped open to allow the half drums to be pulled out with a hook. A gallon or two of diesel fuel is poured over the contents of the drums. The more crap, the more diesel fuel.

Now, if all you have to do is light it up and let it burn, it wouldn't be so bad. But that is not the way it works. Fresh shit and piss do not readily burn

away, no matter how much diesel fuel used. So you have to stand there and stir the burning mess until it is almost gone. Emanating an odor which so assaults your sense of smell it is difficult to clearly describe. Diesel exhaust with strong shit and piss notes. When you arrive at your first base camp, there's always the question: what is that god-awful smell in the air? That smell is burning shit. A smell so foul and awful it will not, and cannot, be forgotten. Definitely a disagreeable day.

*March 31, 1876*
*Friday*
*Camp Snow Glen*

*Snowed all last night. Orders from Gen Gibbons at Ellis for us to lay over here today. Cold and at times snowed all day. Rice soup for supper.*
*Lieut. Bradly shooting at mark with a gun, an Evens rifle, 36 shooter.*
*Went up the mountain after pine boughs to put on the bottom of tent to lie on. Snow very deep. Teams for Black Hills.*
*Mail from Ellis. Don't get any. Day unpleasant.*

January 18, 1970
Sunday
Quang Tri Province

This is my third day at Dong ha base camp here in Quang Tri Province. The First Sgt. says I'm going out to the field on resupply today, so I need to go over to the Armorer and have him issue me my weapon.

At the Armory there's one guy at the counter in front of me, a short-timer tank driver. He throws his Colt .45 on the counter, gets his receipt for it and leaves. The Armorer doesn't look at the .45 or even touch it.

When I give him my paper work the Armorer takes one look at it and then pushes the .45 that has been on the counter over to me and says, "Here's your .45."

"Don't you have any M-16s?" I ask.

"Nope," the Armorer replies. "And even if I did, you're a tank driver. Tank drivers are issued .45s, not M-16s."

I pick up my .45 and as I lift it, it makes a disturbing click. I move my hand back and forth and each time there is a click from somewhere inside the

.45.

"Hey! Come on, man. This thing is worn out. Listen to that click," I say.

The Armorer just laughs.

I look at what I think is the manufacturing date, and say "1911, jeez, this thing is a veteran of four wars, WWI, WW11, Korea and now Vietnam."

The Armorer laughs again and says, "1911 is the model number, not the year it was made." He continues to laugh off my concerns that this .45 is worn out. He does concede the .45 is probably from WWII. It's older than me. Of course I'm only twenty.

Finally the Armorer says, "Where yer goin' ya can't see anything more than ten feet away. That'll do the job for ya."

Such a comforting thought.

So that afternoon Faustino and I ride out of base camp on a deuce and a half that's going out to resupply our platoon.

My first trip into the field, and I'm finally armed but with a piece of crap. It takes us about 45 minutes to get to the resupply point.

There are several short-timers in the Second platoon who are near the end of their tour of duty here in the Nam. But the Lifers won't let the short-timers go to the rear yet. So there are actually extra guys in the platoon and some crews have five guys. A situation that never lasts long as we are usually short of crew members.

Tank crews in the field often only have three guys instead of a full four man crew. Because I am a tank driver without a tank, I am assigned to personnel carrier (P.C.) 2-4. The tank commander (TC) is Sgt. Green, one of only three Soul Brothers in my new platoon. One of the side gunner's name is Tom Wack. Everyone just calls him Wack, and he's my first friend in the field. Since I'm technically an extra crewman on 2-4, my official designation is 2-4 Excess. Pretty uplifting don't you think?

So Faustino, Wack and I have the dinner that was brought out with us on resupply. It is the worst excuse for food I have ever seen or tasted. Although there are over fifty guys here only about ten of them show up for the hot chow. I think that might be a strong hint about what the guys here think about the hot chow.

The kitchen patrol (KPs) dishing out the hot chow are understandably nervous about being outside of base camp when it will soon be dark. At least they will be back at base camp when it is dark tonight. I won't.

Resupply is finally over and the convoy of deuce and a halfs start on their

way back to base camp at Dong ha. The crews of the Second platoon prepare to leave the resupply site as well. We take in the concertina wire and tie it to the sides of the vehicles. Then we sky to our overnight defensive position (RON) for my first night in the field.

It takes quite a while to get set up for the night. First, all the tanks and P.C.s drive around in circles at our intended RON so as to flatten all the grass and brush to make it easier to move around, set up our equipment, and most importantly, to see.

The ground is closely examined for any hidden tunnel entrances. If any are found, someone will check them out and clear them.

We set up in a circle with the front of the tanks and P.C.s facing outward. The RON's diameter is about 100 yards, more or less, depending on field conditions and terrain. In front of every track vehicle a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) screen is set up. The RPG screens are made from some cyclone fencing and a couple of engineer stakes. Directly in front of the RPG screen we set up the razor wire that we call "concertina wire". In front of the concertina wire we set up claymore mines and trip flares.

Between each tank and P.C. is a foxhole that the side gunners on the P.C.s dig each night before dark or after dark if we set up late. I help Wack dig his foxhole for the night. The P.C. side gunners dismount their M-60 machine guns and set them on a bi-pod at the foxhole if it isn't raining.

Wack has a tent that he shares with me my first night. Sgt. Green sleeps in his P.C. even though it's against regulations.

I'm on guard duty my first night in the field sitting behind the .50 caliber machine gun for two hours with my hated .45. Day unpleasant.

*April 1, 1876*
*Saturday*
*Camp Shields River*

*Broke camp at 7:30 a.m., passed through a small canyon and struck the Yellowstone River about eight miles from our old camp. Here we find the snow all gone and the roads are perfectly dry.*

*The peak of Yellowstone Mountain appeared, high above us, there being a thick fog at the base of the mountain. Here 2nd Lieut. McLellen of 2nd Cavalry told Engineer Sergeant to take his observation from the peak which he proceeds to.*

*Crazy Mountains we see on the left of us and Shields mountains is directly in front of us. The Crazys are covered with snow. Not a spot of anything else is visible, though have mountains and the low foothills which has no snow on them. It presents quite a scene.*

*Camped at mouth of Shields River on Yellowstone. Splendid camp. Trout are being caught. Duck and geese in abundance. Mountains covered with pine and river bottom with Cottonwood.*

*Feel first rate, soup for supper. Eighteen miles today. The citizen train, loaded with provisions for us, is camped with us tonight and will continue to do so all the way down the river.*

January 19, 1970
Monday
Quang Tri Province

First night of guard duty in the field goes well. I don't fall asleep or have to shoot someone with my hated .45, or worse, the .50 Cal. that I sit behind for my two hours of guard duty.

Since it's monsoon, it rains most of the time so we live in our ponchos. It keeps you fairly dry but the hood cuts your field of vision, and it just always gets in the way.

The platoon starts getting up at 6 a.m. and then most guys have some c-rats for breakfast. For my first breakfast in the field I have a pecan roll from the c-rats we have and a canteen cup of instant c-rat coffee.

When we get orders to break camp, first we bring in the concertina wire, then the claymores and the trip flares. The last thing we do is take down the RPG screen. We roll the engineer stakes up in the cyclone fence and tie it all to the side of the tanks or on the front of the P.C.s.

The mortar crew packs up the mortar and the side gunners on the P.C.s take the M-60s off the bipod at the foxhole and re-mount them on the side of the P.C.

Then we sky. Where to? We don't know. Usually we follow the LT's P.C. single file to our destination for the day. They never tell any of us where we are going or exactly where we are.

I think it interesting that the Lieutenant has a P.C. while the platoon Sgt. has a tank. It's understood that the tank is a superior assault vehicle compared with the P.C. We Tankers refer to the P.C.s as Rolling Coffins. The P.C.'s

interior is definitely spacious compared with the turret compartment of the tank and is useful for the LT to use as an office and bedroom. But the lack of substantial armor on the P.C. isn't the only down side of being a LT in the field in the Nam. For many reasons, LTs have a notoriously short shelf life here in the Nam.

We drive around for a couple hours and then we stop for a couple of hours so most of us heat up some c-rats for lunch before we have to move out. The LT and the platoon Sgt. are trying to decide where we should meet the resupply convoy. Finally a decision is made and we sky to resupply. We set up our resupply site with all the vehicles in a circle and we put out the concertina wire and wait for the convoy.

It's raining when the resupply convoy gets here so we have to re-fuel in the rain. Then to make it even worse we have to eat the hot chow they bring out on re-supply in the rain. All our hands smell like diesel fuel after re-fueling all the tanks and P.C.s. Of course it's not a big deal because diesel fuel actually smells tee tee better than the bug juice we slather on ourselves to repel the bugs here.

The hot chow sort of looks like beef but the KPs joke about it being water buffalo. We often refer to it as Mystery Meat. Water buffalo it definitely is not, because we can get into trouble for injuring or killing a water buffalo. It's probably dog meat for all we know.

After loading up all the ammo and supplies the convoy brought out, we put all of our trash and the packing materials in some of the foxholes the M-60 gunners have dug and pour diesel fuel on it and set it on fire. It's a smoking, hellish sight as we take our leave.

We start out from our resupply site to set up our RON. The LT on 2-5 is in the lead with the rest of the Second platoon following behind. We don't drive very long before we pull off the redball (hardtop road) and start driving down a dirt trail. The LT has one of his side gunners dismount and mine sweep the trail as we proceed at a walking pace to an open area where we set up our RON.

I have guard duty tonight as everyone has guard duty at night when you're in the field. The crew on 2-4 is happy to have me as an extra crew member, because it's another person to share the work and most importantly, guard duty.

We have to dig two foxholes for 2-4. One on each side of the P.C. at night. The ground is pretty hard and all we have to dig with is something called an

entrenching tool. It is sort of a fold-up shovel. The *sort of* part is the shovel (which it sort of is). It works okay for filling sand bags. But for digging in hard ground, it is hard going. The only thing it does well is fold-up. Even when you don't want it too. Disagreeable day.

*April 2, 1876*
*Sunday*
*Camp Yellowstone River*

*Crossed the Shield first thing this morning. Cold as ice. Boys were not slow getting their shoes and stockings on I tell you.*

*Also crossed a low range of mountains. Followed the river and then crossed a still lower range of hills and camped on the Yellowstone 17 miles from the Shield River.*

*Crossed the stream that runs from hot springs which is quite warm. One of the fellows dipped down with his cup and drank a mouthful and swore it came direct from H-ll.*

*Have a very good camp. Boys all fishing but do not know of any that were caught.*

*Two young ladies came into the camp accompanied by a gentleman from the hot springs. Corporal Smith putting on airs (or the boys sayings) in charge of cooking outfit and eats more than the whole company put together. He reminds me of character in Hoosier Schoolmaster from Ind. Day pleasant.*

*Orders issued tonight for no one to leave camp further than 200 yards and not to fire off a gun unless with the permission of commanding officer.*

January 20, 1970
Tuesday
Quang Tri Province

We drive in all kinds of terrain and ground cover. One of which is Elephant grass, which is about 10 to 12 feet high. When we drive through such an area it's Elephant grass on all sides with the trail pretty much just beat down by the track vehicles in front. The tank drivers can't see anything on either side and not much straight ahead.

Sometimes it is rolling hills with green scrub brush about 2 feet high. It looks fairly lush in the distance but when we move to those areas it is the

same green scrub brush a couple feet high with a lot of bare brown earth. Often we drive in the dry or partially dry river beds which are extremely rocky and an easy place for a tank or P.C. to throw a track. An easy place to throw a track but a difficult place to get the track back on.

Sometimes when the terrain is especially difficult we have a bulldozer with us. In the movies tanks just push down and drive over huge trees and other impediments but in the Real World a bulldozer does a much better job. Tanks can run over a pretty good size tree but when you get into really thick vegetation and big trees it takes a bulldozer to clear a path. One guy drives the dozer while someone rides shotgun actually armed with a shotgun. Guys fight over whose turn it is to drive the dozer. Very surprising, since the dozer totally lacks armor of any kind, so the driver and guy riding shotgun are completely exposed when the blade is down.

Today the dozer is with us as we are driving around in what I would call the highland areas. High, rolling hills with green scrubby vegetation, with some areas of dense forest that we have been ordered to penetrate for some reason unknown to us.

We blow up a few trees with C-4 and push stuff around with the dozer. It is very slow going and after spending all afternoon we have only made it about 75 feet into the bush. We have to meet up with resupply soon so we pack up and sky to the resupply point. So much for our mission to penetrate the bush, where if we had met up with the VC or NVA, it would have been a number one for them and a number ten situation for us.

Resupply is a lot of fast paced work but we look forward to it because we usually get some hot chow and mail call. Since I have just arrived I don't expect to receive any mail soon. I wrote home to my friends with my current address, but it will take weeks for my letters to get home and weeks for their letters to reach me. It's no surprise that I get no mail today.

The hot chow is awful and only looks like something you can eat. The KPs are unapologetic about the food and are only interested in dishing it out as fast as they can so they can get out of the field and back to the relative safety of base camp at Dong ha.

At resupply the M-60 gunners only have to dig one foxhole for each P.C. instead of two. We put out concertina wire around our perimeter if only to keep the locals from entering the perimeter of the resupply site.

We refuel all the tanks and P.C.s and top up their base load of ammo. The main gun ammo for the tanks comes individually packed in wood crates that

have to be pried open, unpacked and unwrapped, and the rounds stowed away in the tank. All the crates and packing material are thrown into the foxhole/burn hole, doused with diesel fuel and set on fire with the rest of our refuse from the hot chow and resupply. We pull up the concertina wire, and the resupply trucks didi mau back to base camp while we sky for our RON.

It's raining when we set up just before dark which always adds to the fun. Because I'm still excess on P.C. 2-4 my duties are limited, especially since I'm an FNG and not to be trusted with anything important. I help dig the foxholes and set out the concertina wire. I'm not yet trusted to set out the claymore mines and the trip flares. While Wack helps the driver on 2-4 with that, I set up his tent for us to share.

We're wet from the near constant rain by the time we are done, and so we go to bed wet. When you go to bed wet, you get up wet. Since I've been out in the field I've been wet most of the time. Many of the guys have persistent rashes and infections that just won't heal because we're wet or damp all the time.

I have guard duty every night now but haven't had to fire the .50 Cal. at anything yet. If we hear anything while on guard, we're always given permission to fire off a couple of grenades with Thumper, our grenade launcher. Day unpleasant.

*April 3, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Big Boulder River*

*Marched along the R. bottom all day. Crossed river six miles from last night's camp. Began to snow about the middle of the afternoon and done so with a vengeance. Crossed Big Boulder River which is very low but report says it is very swift when high.*

*Have pretty nice camp, not very cold. Ford where we crossed the river was very good and all got across safely. I pulled my shoes off and waded Boulder River. Although it was pretty cold had no other way as I did not want to get my feet wet. The river deserved the name it bears for more rocks and boulders I never saw in any stream. Fifteen and one half miles today. Country on either side of river high and broken.*

*Camp is near B.B.R. Cottonwood plenty. Pickets out in groups of three each and have to lie down and relieve each other at regular intervals.*

*Plenty of emigrants going to Black Hills. One of our boys called out to passing team, "Black Hills or bust." They replied, "I expect we will bust though." Ha-Ha. Only sensible fellow I saw on the trip this far.*

*Have a very nice job of drying my gun. I must (as the boys say) my best friend. Oiled it and it is ready for either Indians or other game. Day very stormy.*

January 21, 1970
Wednesday
Quang Tri Province

Just after dark last night I experienced my first Mad Minute or sometimes called a mike-mike. Everyone gets behind their machine gun (or in my case, behind my hated .45) and lets loose for about a minute. It is an awesome show of power and an expensive one, but from the waste I witness, cost is not much of a concern here. The first and only plus I encounter regarding my hated .45 is that I can disassemble, clean and reassemble it in less than five minutes. Because of the Mad Minute everyone is busy cleaning their weapons this morning after our c-rat breakfast.

I am still leery of the disturbing click my hated .45 makes if it is moved from side to side when held in the firing position. It can't be good. I have just two magazine clips for it, so I keep them both fully loaded. But because I am suspect of my hated .45 I never put a clip in unless I intend to fire it. Even if I did keep a clip in it, which I never do, I would never chamber a round and put it on safe and walk around with it in my holster. Not my hated .45. I help clean one of the M-60s on 2-4 and watch Sgt. Green take apart the .50 Cal., clean it and put it back together .

So far it hasn't rained so the gun cleaning goes pretty well. We finally start to break camp and bring in all the claymores, trip flares and concertina wire. Lastly, down come the RPG screens, and we sky for the redball.

Today we are on some sort of a road patrol. We are driving single file down the redball spaced at about 50-75 feet between track vehicles. It's mostly stop and go but occasionally we get going about 15-20 mph and as it still hasn't rained today, we are able to dry out a tee tee bit. Having no official position on 2-4, I sit on the rear deck of the P.C. where I can catch the most breeze to help in getting dry. Even though I'm extremely exposed I'm not so dumb as to wear my helmet. LTs are the notorious goal of snipers, and

because I'm riding on the rear deck of a P.C. and wearing a .45 I could easily be mistaken for an LT. Often the LT is an obvious person in a platoon. He will be the only person to be always wearing his helmet, flak jacket, long sleeve jungle fatigue shirt and his Colt .45 on 90 degree days or in the pouring rain.

The country side is high rolling hills with the road in most places having been cut into the side of the hills so that on one side the terrain goes abruptly up and on the other side it goes down steeply. It's fairly dense brush and lots of full size trees on both sides of the road. It's dense enough vegetation that we can only see into it for a few feet.

During one of the actual road march periods when we are driving 15-20 mph down the redball, a full grown tiger bounds into the middle of the road from the upper side of the hill. He pretty much lands right between two moving track vehicles. He stops briefly to look right at us, as we are the next vehicle coming. He seems unconcerned about us as he lingers a second or two before jumping off the road and down the hillside and is quickly out of sight. He should have been concerned because everyone on 2-4 was trying to get a round off at him, including me.

The tiger came and went so fast and is only seen by a few of us, so that soon afterward we have to keep asking each other about what we had seen. Seeing tigers in a circus or at the zoo is one thing, but when you see one in the wild (and it's the wild you have to walk around in occasionally), you only have one thought: Shoot it. Shoot it fast before it's gone. And then it's gone and you didn't shoot it and you will be walking around in the bush knowing he is there besides the VC and NVA.

I can't believe how big he was. He was huge, about 10 feet long if you count his tail, and probably four and a half feet high at his head and three and a half feet high at his back. If I were to encounter him in the bush with my hated .45, the tiger would probably consider my hated .45 a minor irritation as he bit my head off for being stupid enough to try shoot him with such a piece of crap. That being our big excitement for the day, we eventually turn around and head back from where we came to meet the resupply convoy.

We used boo coo fuel today driving up all the hills. Tanks don't measure their fuel mileage in miles per gallon. It's gallons per mile. Right, and it's about 6-7 gallons per mile on the straight and level and 10-12 gallons per mile going uphill with a full base load of ammo and gear.

It's getting late, so after resupply we sky to our RON. It has been a rare

day during the monsoon in that it didn't rain. We set up the RON without any rain for once. Because the night setup goes well I catch up with Faustino, who is excess on one of the other P.C.s, and we watch the mortar crew dig the mortar pit which is 15 feet or more in diameter and 3 feet deep to set up the mortar in. The mortar is a very valuable addition to the platoon. During a firefight they can drop explosive rounds on the attackers and can also launch illumination rounds that we call lume. The lume is burning phosphorus with tee tee parachutes to light the area up at night. Unfortunately it lights up the area for everyone, us and Charlie. We also use the mortar pit as the safest place to put the wounded until daylight when the dust-off choppers can come in after a firefight.

It gets dark early here so Faustino and I head back to our respective P.C.s. Wack and Sgt. Green tell stories until it's time to start guard duty. We have Wack's tent set up behind the P.C. and it keeps the rain off but the mosquitoes are insufferable. We slather ourselves with bug juice, and it is somewhat effective. But there are so many insects it's a constant buzz inches from your face with occasional landings and take offs, so that you're constantly being awakened. Most guys can never fall deep asleep anyway. I know I don't.

*April 4, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp Little Briar Creek*

*Woke up this morning to find several inches of snow on the ground and tents all frozen stiff and besides have a horrible toothache. Broke camp, marched along the river 8 miles and camped at Little Briar Creek where we found some trappers camped.*

*Snow pretty deep and wind blowing it ugly. Feet soaking wet and very cold. Toothache to beat everything.*

*Don't know what I shall do tonight as I am on guard mount as Corporal and don't think I will get but little sleep. Country except in bottom, high and rough. Cannot tell whether beautiful or not, everything looks desolate (from) snow.*

*Black Hillers keep close to us now as we are getting more into the Indian country. Team of oxen belonging to trappers ran away so they have to wait until storm is over to go and find them. We are now 28 miles from Crow Indian agency.*

*Mail came in, didn't get any. Cavalry 35 miles from us on Shield River*

January 22, 1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province

I have the last guard duty shift from 4 a.m. till 6 a.m. Most of the guys who don't have the last guard duty shift try to sleep till about 6:30 a.m. when it's near full light out. However, guys like me, who have been awake for two hours already, are making some breakfast. So far my morning breakfast routine has been to fill my canteen cup with three cups of water, boil it and add three packs of c-rat instant coffee and three packs of non-dairy creamer, stir and drink. The pound cake is usually the most favorite item in a case of c-rats and therefore can't be counted on regularly for breakfast. I like the pecan roll which is not as popular as the pound cake, and so I can usually have one for my breakfast.

It's raining a light drizzle on and off adding to the enjoyment of bringing in the claymores and the trip flares. Finally when we are all ready to sky we bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen, tie them to the track vehicles, and we didi. To where? We don't know. To do what? We don't know either. No one tells us anything. We just follow orders.

The LT leads the way on 2-5 and we follow single file spaced about 50-75 feet apart until we get to the redball. We drive back the same way we did yesterday but after driving for about an hour, we are given orders to stop and space out about 100 feet between vehicles or less in order keep both the vehicles in front and behind in sight. Because the road twists and winds some track vehicles are closer than 100 feet between them. Finally word comes down we are to guard the road for the next 3-4 hours. We take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal on 2-4 while some explore the area on both sides of the road.

We're in one of the places where the road was cut into a steep hillside covered in dense brush and lots of trees of all sizes. We are sitting ducks spread out the way we are with the hillside above us as a perfect spot to ambush us. We always wonder who makes these decisions. Being told we are staying put for 3-4 hours is rare, so guys take advantage by heating up some c-rats for lunch. The track drivers have a chance to inspect all their track blocks for dead ones that they mark. We can't count on really being here 3-4

hours, so we can't repair anything now. Instead the drivers mark the dead track blocks for future repair.

We are all soon bored but at least the rain has stopped, though it's still overcast and gray. When it is my turn to sit in the TC's position behind the .50 Cal. on 2-4 for my stint on road guard, one of our small observation helicopters flies by at tree top level. The official designation being Huey-L.O.H. (Light Observation Helicopter). We just call them Huey loachs. It's a small unarmed glass bubble two-seater, and it probably can fly 150 mph or faster. It flew by fast but because it went by us we know it will be back. The chopper pilots follow the road like religion since there is no other place to make an emergency landing in the bush.

Anyway, because we are bored, and we know the chopper has to return, we wait. We actually see it before we hear it. But as it is at treetop level and going fast none of us can actually draw a bead on it with the .50 Cal. I should make it clear that we would never shoot at any of our choppers. But because we are so close to the Z we always expect North Vietnamese aircraft, and we always wonder if we could shoot them down if need be. We realize now that it would be doubtful. The Huey loach, at tree top level, going at least 150 mph, is here and gone in an eye blink. That's number one for the chopper pilot and his passenger, should Charlie be in the area.

After four hours of road guard duty we start our road march back to meet resupply. We're glad to leave because we hate being sitting ducks, especially for no good reason. We meet resupply at our turn off from the redball. Since we sat in one place for most of the day the track vehicles only need the fuel tanks topped off which doesn't take as long.

They send out hot chow from base camp, and it is almost always the same. Re-hydrated dehydrated potatoes, some beefy looking meat and some over cooked canned vegetable. No bread and no milk. It's not unusual for most of the guys to forgo the hot chow for c-rats.

After resupply is over we pull in the concertina wire and sky for our RON. We camp somewhere that hasn't been used by anyone so we have to drive around in circles to flatten all the vegetation before we set up. After everything is flattened, we park our vehicles in a circle, wagon train style, except the front of the tracks point out from the circle.

We then dismount our vehicles and carefully inspect our RON for tunnels and booby traps or any unexploded ordinance. Tunnels are found often, but not tonight. I can't believe how many guys are willing to voluntarily go down

into the tunnels. Not me. Not even at gun point would I go down into one of those tunnels.

No tunnels being found, we set up for the night. I have last shift guard duty again, from 4 a.m. to 6 a.m., since I am the crew's FNG. For some reason no one wants the last guard duty shift. Probably because after your shift you don't get to go back to sleep. Sleep is a premium here. We never get enough so guys fall asleep on guard duty quite often. Falling asleep on guard duty is a serious offense, especially for guys who continually screw up. If you have your shit together you might get off with a warning. Maybe.

Another wasted day here in the Nam but as we say here in regards to our pay, "Another day, another penny."

*April 5, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Trout Camp*

*Very cold, wind blowing this morning until about nine o'clock, when we got where there was no snow and pretty warm. Grass green and buds coming out in the trees and everything betokens the approach of spring. Camped at a beautiful place. Will call it Trout Camp on account of first trout being caught here and here had a bath all over.*

*Turned out to be a splendid night last night after all. Became acquainted with the citizen herder and had a good supper while on post with him.*

*Passed a large encampment of Black Hillers. Here we will see the last of them as there is another road that leads off from here. Co. B. (company I belong to) marched in rear of train.*

*Some boys catching trout aplenty. Country high and mountainous, on each side of us. The valley muddy but very beautiful.*

*Thirteen miles today. We have 25 wagons in the train, as many more in the cavalry train coming. 200 head of mules and horses with us now. Day pleasant except former part.*

January 23, 1970
Friday
Quang Tri Province

Guard duty ends at 6 a.m. and my breakfast routine so far has been three

cups of instant c-rat coffee in my canteen cup and the pecan roll if I can score it out of the case of c-rats we have opened. The canned peaches are considered by most to be the best fruit available in the case, and it's my favorite, although the fruit cocktail is top notch as well.

It's another gray monsoon day, and we pull in the claymores and the trip flares at about 8:30 a.m. Around 9 a.m. we bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen and we sky single file following the LT on 2-5, as usual. Today we drive up to a river and then proceed to slowly drive along its very rocky but fairly level banks. We take turns walking in front of the tanks and P.C.s using a metal detector to search for mines. It's slow going and because we're single file in fairly open terrain we are once again sitting ducks.

Who decides these missions, we always wonder? Around noon we space out single file, about 100 feet apart, and face the vehicles toward the river. The order is given to expect to be here for the next 3 hours. We take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. while the guys who aren't afraid of being down range of the .50 Cal. explore the river's edge. The water level of the river is low but you can see by the low flat banks that it's very wide when the river is high. It's only about one to two feet deep but surprisingly cold.

Since we're wet and damp most of the time, playing in the river has little appeal. Especially so when down range of the .50 Cal. with some of them being manned by FNGs, and that would include me. A decidedly dangerous situation.

We guard the river all afternoon and at about 3 p.m. we re-group and carefully follow our trail back from where we came. We go a bit faster this time, as we forgo mine sweeping. But not too much faster as the river bank, while fairly flat, is very rocky and therefore an easy place to throw a track. Track drivers who constantly throw tracks become very unpopular with their crew members. Because the drivers on both the tanks and P.C.s are very exposed in the upright driving position, which is how we operate 99% of the time, not many guys want to be drivers in the first place. Fortunately, today no one throws a track, and we meet up with resupply. We set up in a circle, and tank 2-6 is next to us on 2-4. After we set out the concertina wire, Wack and I start digging a foxhole between 2-6 and 2-4. The tank crews don't dismount any weapons (unlike the P.C. crews), and so they don't usually dig a foxhole.

Wack is friends with the driver and loader on 2-6 and they saunter over to

heckle us as we dig. Wack introduces us to each other. Zack is the tank driver and Big Al is the loader, and they are expert at encouraging us in our task but neither offers any actual help. We make a good show of our efforts to dig the foxhole but the ground is hard, and we only have an entrenching tool to do the job. We don't expect to spend the night here so we're not too concerned about the shallowness of our hole. As expected, after we finish resupply we pull in the concertina wire and we sky.

We don't go too far off the redball before we set up our RON. We camp at an old campsite which is considered number ten by most of us. Our RON is usually about 100 yards across, bigger than a football field, so finding open ground of that size where we are is difficult. We drive all over our intended RON site, and then we dismount and go over the area square inch by square inch for tunnels and booby traps. We find nothing so we set up for the night.

We set up next to 2-6 again so Zack and Big Al come over to encourage Wack and me as we dig another foxhole for Wack's M-60. Thanks to their constant comments about how the job should be properly done, we get our hole dug in a very expert fashion. Once again, both are careful not to offer any actual labor. But they were always ready with some handy advice.

I have the last shift on guard tonight, but I made two new friends today. We hang out until dark, which comes early here in the tropics compared to the northern latitudes. It starts to get dark at 6:00 p.m. and is completely dark by 6:30 p.m. every night. It starts to get light again at 6:00 a.m. We have Wack's tent set up behind 2-4, but the mosquitoes really get fierce when the sun goes down. We doze off at night to the gentle buzzing of insects inches from our face. Day unpleasant.

*April 6, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Videttes*

*Warm and pleasant. Marched eleven miles along the river. Forded six miles from our last night camp. Got to camp with wet feet. Camped on river bank. Covered with pine.*

*One of the boys brought in a kill or brought in part of it to camp so will have fresh meat for breakfast. Trout caught by the bushel I might say.*

*Videttes and pickets posted. We stay here until cavalry comes up and General Gibbons will be two or three days yet.*

*Saw a band of 50 or 60 (Indians). Another tongue on ambulance broken.*

*Managed to get a quart of flour and made some slapjacks which went pretty good, considering we had hardtack ever since left Ft. Shaw. Day pleasant.*

January 24, 1970
Saturday
Quang Tri Province

We are having our typical c-rat breakfast on 2-4 when I get to meet another member of my platoon, which is the Second platoon of A Troop. Smitty is our current platoon screw up. He is purported to have been wounded three times in three separate firefights by grenades he had himself thrown. He has no Purple Hearts. Getting wounded by your own grenade is not hard to do, but it's considered a self-inflicted wound so no Purple Heart is awarded. Now if there was a medal for being stupid, he would have at least three.

Smitty is taking orders for bottles of Tiger beer, the local beer available from the Black Market. It has been against Regs to have beer or liquor in the field for a while now, but enforcement used to be so lax that if you had the money, you could order beer or liquor on resupply. But now the army has stepped up enforcement of the Regs, so the juicers have to get their beer and whiskey on the Black Market. I have no money, so I pass on the Tiger beer. Smitty ambles off to the other tracks, taking orders for Tiger beer.

Technically you have to be at least a Private First Class (PFC) or E-3 in rank to be in the field. Smitty has been reduced in rank to E-2 for his many infractions. Mostly he gets caught sleeping on guard. That's considered a boo coo serious offense. We all wonder how Smitty manages to stay in the field. It's certainly more dangerous here in the field but for some guys just the thought of being a REMF is worse than the possibility of getting wounded. Smitty keeps getting caught asleep on guard duty at night because he will drink all the Tiger beer he can get.

We pull in our concertina wire and off we go, following the LT on 2-5, single file for our day's adventure. Now that I'm getting to know some of the other guys in the platoon, I'm included in the near constant horn chatter we keep up as we drive around. It's mostly just small talk and guys teasing each other but it's also how we know if we're all still in horn contact with each

other in case something happens out of our sight.

Although my current platoon ID is 2-4 Excess my radio call sign is 2-4 Echo which has a tee tee bit nicer ring to it. I chat with both Big Al and Zack on 2-6 for a while. Smitty and some of the other juicers are ranting over the horn about the no alcohol Reg actually being enforced. Apparently, before I got here if you had the money you could get not only beer, but ice at resupply on most days. Now at resupply there isn't even any ice. If you have money you can buy soda pop and Coke sometimes, but it's always warm.

We drive around in what appears to me to be aimless circles for most of the day in Elephant grass which is 10-12 feet tall. From where I sit on the rear deck of the P.C. I can barely see over the top of the grass and every turn seems the same. It's good I'm not leading the way as I feel completely lost. The LT somehow manages to find our way out of the Elephant grass and finally we sky to resupply. First we get back to the redball and then drive a few kliks to meet the resupply convoy.

After we re-fuel all the tanks and P.C.s and load up the c-rats and ammo we get some hot chow. But we only eat it because we are hungry, not because it is good. After the hot chow Smitty stops by 2-4 to show off his Black Market score of Tiger beer. I have never seen it before. Tiger beer comes in a big brown bottle, not quite a quart, but close. He has six bottles left but he's not trying to sell any, he just wants to show them off. Those beers will taste boo coo better now that it's against Regs to have beer in the field. They'll have to since Smitty is going to have to drink them warm. For a juicer, better to have warm beer than no beer. But for me, if beer isn't cold I won't drink it.

We leave our resupply site and sky to set up our RON for tonight. It rains as expected. It's monsoon. How long does monsoon last, I wonder? The rain makes the actual digging of Wack's foxhole a tee tee bit easier, but then it keeps filling with water. We bail it out with our helmets, but because we are in a low spot, water keeps running into the foxhole. Since it's raining, Wack's not going to take the M-60 off 2-4.

2-6 is set up next to us but it's a big RON and they're probably 50 feet away. Zack and Big Al are taking shelter under a tarp they have tied to the side of 2-6. They allow the monsoon rain to rob them of a chance to offer their insight into the proper way to dig a foxhole. The day ends disagreeably but not as bad had Big Al and Zack been allowed to correct our thinking as we dug our foxhole. As the FNG on 2-4 I get last shift of guard duty tonight, 4 a.m. to 6 a.m.

*April 21, 1876*
*Friday*
*Ft. Pease*

*We layed in camp this fore-noon then struck tents at One o'clock and went as far as Ft. Pease. Here we camped I might say around the Fort. Company B (the Co. I belong to) is camped the furthest down the river.*

*Four graves mark the place where the unfortunate citizens lie.*

*The Fort is a square stockade with bastions on the far site corners with quarters inside of stockade for the men that stayed here. The ground was undermined so that persons could go to river underground. This fort was built by T.D. Pease.*

*Three miles today. Mail came in today. Letter from P. Wade. We expect to lay here quite awhile. Day pleasant.*

January 25, 1970
Sunday
Quang Tri Province

Day dawns a gray monsoon day. It's foggy and misty as we break camp this morning. Even though it's wet and damp, it's not actually raining so at least we don't have to wear our ponchos. We sky single file behind the LT on 2-5 as he leads the way. Our sight is hindered by the mist and fog so the tracks keep pretty close together (about 25-30 feet apart) as we drive.

We drive down a small dirt lane past what appears to be an abandoned plantation that still has straight rows of palm trees and several buildings in various states of damage and disrepair. A little further down the lane we enter a small Vietnamese cemetery. The Vietnamese typically bury their dead in raised circular mound graves about 6 feet in diameter and two feet high. Although we are encouraged to show respect for the grave sites I notice from my vantage point on the rear deck of 2-4 that every grave has been run over by tanks and P.C.s. As we proceed through the cemetery, single file, several of the tracks drive over some of the graves. Since I am along for the ride and not driving, I don't let myself feel guilty about the disrespect to the dead.

We can't see much, our visibility being affected by the fog, so there is boo coo horn chatter as we keep each other appraised of our current situation. The

going gets slow as we leave the cemetery, and we start to sweep for mines. Again we don't know where we are going or what we will do once we get there. We can tell the area we are in had been in agricultural use but because of the war, the fields are lying fallow. It's lush and green with lots of small palm trees and boo coo dense undergrowth and some areas that look like lawns that haven't been cut in a while.

We see no one all day. No VC or NVA which is number one. No locals either, which is typical, I'm told. While the area we patrol is not the actual Z, locals are strongly encouraged to stay out of the area. There are several reasons: land mines, booby traps, and unexploded bombs to mention just a few. We're supposed to stop and apprehend anyone we find when we're on patrol. Usually it's some villager trying to collect some firewood. I don't know who we turn them over to, but it can't be good for them no matter what they are doing since they're not supposed to be here.

Finding no one today, we start back to meet up with the resupply convoy. The resupply site is next to the redball in a big open area that we use often because several platoons can set up in a circle at the same time. During resupply we are parked next to 2-3 which is the platoon Sgt.'s tank. I meet Fanelli, who is the gunner, and Pruitt, who is the tank driver for the platoon Sgt. Pruitt only has a couple of weeks left for his tour of the Nam. Pruitt, being a short-timer, doesn't have anything to say to us FNGs. He has a bad attitude (as we say here). Even though his replacement is already in the platoon out in the field they won't let him go to the rear yet. I would have a bad attitude about that myself.

After resupply we sky to set up our RON for the night. This time 2-4 is set up next to 2-3 so while I am helping Wack dig his foxhole, Fanelli comes over to chat. He tells us why the platoon Sgt. won't let Pruitt go to the rear. The platoon Sgt. is pissed off that he only has two FNGs, myself and Faustino, to choose from for Pruitt's replacement. I didn't know this, and I'm not excited about the possibility of being the platoon Sgt.'s driver. Word comes around as we dig our foxhole that after sundown we are having a Mad Minute. What that also means for the Second platoon is that tomorrow morning all the guns will have to be cleaned.

2-6, Zack and Big Al's tank is set up on the opposite side of the RON tonight so they aren't able to enlighten us further in the subtleties of foxhole digging.

During the start of the Mad Minute, the TC on 2-6, who I've only met once

briefly, forgot to wait for Zack to take down the RPG screen before he shot off the .50 Cal. The result was he got some metal fragments in his eye. A number ten thing, plus because it is dark out now, he will have to stay in the field overnight and wait for the dust-off chopper in the morning. Day unpleasant, especially for the TC on 2-6.

*July 6, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Valley of the Little Horn River*

*A sergeant of the 7th Cavalry shot himself accidentally this morning. Day pleasant. River rapidly rising.*

January 26, 1970
Monday
Quang Tri Province

It's not a hot LZ so the dust off chopper comes at first light to get the TC from 2-6 and take him to the base hospital. I have only met him once before, but I see him leave. He has one eye patched and his pals are congratulating him on his Million Dollar wound. Even though his wound is self-inflicted, it is an excusable accident. When someone has been in a firefight and then sits behind the .50 Cal. when the Mad Minute starts, it gets your adrenalin pumping and you just automatically pull the trigger and start shooting. It's not like he shot himself in the foot.

So now it starts and the first guy I know to get hurt is by his own hand. I better watch myself from hurting myself. After the chopper leaves I get called on the horn by the LT to come over to his track as he wants to meet me. I think, yeah right, you probably want to meet me before I kill or wound myself.

So I leave Wack and Sgt. Green who are cleaning the guns after last night's Mad Minute. I get to the LT's P.C. as he finishes putting his .45 back together after cleaning it. I notice that he put in a loaded magazine, chambered a round and put it on safe. He then tossed it on to his bedroll in the P.C.

Because of the TC on 2-6's self inflicted wound, the LT will be explaining the incident to Higher so he isn't exactly happy, but he is cordial to me.

He says, "No decision has been made as to your vehicle assignment, so I want you to hang loose on 2-4 until further notice."

I reply, "Roger on that, Sir." Before I leave I take out my hated .45, make sure it is unloaded, and I rock it back and forth. It makes its disturbing click. The LT hears the click and picks up his .45 and rocks it back and forth. It too clicks.

"Whaddaya think?" I ask. Before he answers I say, "I think they're worn out. It might be number ten to keep a round chambered."

He ignores my suggestion. The LT is a First lieutenant and not just a butter bar. That in itself says something. He's been in the field over six months, which is a long time for an LT in the bush. He doesn't need any suggestions regarding survival from a FNG.

I sky back to 2-4 and hang loose as ordered. None of us wear underwear under our jungle fatigues so as to keep the jungle rot to a minimum. We all hang loose all the time. I've been in the field a couple of weeks now and have my own personal rash going on my side. My hands look like I've been washing dishes for a couple of weeks straight.

We get a late start this morning and finally we didi about 10 a.m. following behind the LT's P.C. It turns out to be another gray overcast day but the rain holds off most of the time. When it's like this, it's useless to wear our ponchos. We're already damp, and it’s not really raining so nothing dries, poncho on or poncho off. We hate wearing the ponchos anyway.

We're in an area of rolling hills with short scrub, about 2 feet high. We make our own trail or break brush as we call it, so we don't have to mine sweep the area before we drive over it. When we come to ridge crossings sometimes we have to get back on an existing trail. Then we have some guys dismount and mine sweep the trail as the tanks and P.C.s climb over the hills. Because the terrain is high rolling hills, our field of sight is limited. But when we get to the tops of some of the ridges we can see boo coo far into the distance, several kliks at least.

We break for lunch on top of a ridge line with the tanks and P.C.s strung in an undulating line that follows the trail at the top of the ridge. Wack and I are sitting on the rear deck of the P.C. eating some c-rats for lunch. Sgt. Green is behind the .50 Cal., on guard, while we eat. We can see several miles, or kliks as we say here.

At risk of being berated for being a know-nothing FNG I ask Wack, "So where are we? Do you know?"

Wack laughs and says that he does know where we are. He gestures north and asks, "Can you see that second ridge line about five kliks from here?"

I say, "Roger."

"That," he says, "is North Vietnam."

I am in total disbelief. I know that I am in the I Corp or what is called the Northern I Corp which is the northern most corp of the four military divisions of South Vietnam. But I had no idea North Vietnam is so close. I am now sorry I asked where we are because I was happier not knowing.

We took a couple hours to get here so after lunch we start back so we can meet resupply later in the afternoon. At some of the gully crossing points we have to get back on the trial and mine sweep. The trail usually follows the best place to cross a certain gully. But just because it is the best crossing doesn't mean it is a good crossing. Two of the P.C.s get stuck in a deep ravine and one of the tanks has to pull them out one at a time. This slows our progress but fortunately no one throws a track. Resupply takes a long time because all the track vehicles need boo coo fuel from our excursion today. We get hot chow and I'm being kind by saying it is unremarkable. We finally finish with our resupply duties and eat our dinner and now we wait for our orders.

It's getting late and we need to get going so we sky to our RON. It has been a long day, and while we set out the claymores, trip flares and the concertina wire, word goes around the RON that there will be no Mad Minute tonight. Last night's mike-mike caused the LT boo coo grief and so tonight there will be no show of power.

Wack and I finish digging the foxhole for his M-60 and it's not dark yet so we go watch the mortar crew finish digging their hole, which is much larger. The mortar crew have real picks and real shovels so that even though they dig a much bigger hole they make short work of it. They look practiced at the art of digging. The fact that three tank crews do not have to dig a foxhole at night is not lost on me. If I don't get assigned to a tank crew soon, Wack and I need to score a pick and real shovel.

I meet the leader of the medic crew. Everyone calls him Doc. He seems pretty young to be called Doc but then we're all young. Most of us are in our early twenties but some guys are still in their teens. Truth be told a lot of us are really just boys for the most part. Boys, but sent to do a man's job.

It starts getting dark so we head back to 2-4. My ears are still ringing from last night's Mad Minute but my hearing seems to be slowly coming back. I'm

glad there is no mike-mike tonight. Day unpleasant.

*May 10, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Camp Specimen*

*Broke camp this morning and left Fort Pease at 8 o'clock a.m. did not stop until 2 o'clock p.m. We left the river bottom and went on high table land. A strong wind arose and soon began to rain and continued so until we made camp on the river again. We were all thoroughly wet and all felt disagreeable but we soon had rousing fires going but had to wait until after dark for the wagons. E Co. soon after we came, arrived.*

*We have a good camp, plenty of wood and water, had our supper and so felt quite comfortable.*

*Cavalry captured two Indian's ponies.*

*Nothing but sage brush and prickly pears could we see all day. Except now and then a jack rabbit would hop out of a clump of bushes and scamper off with all the dogs that were with us after them.*

*One of Co. cut his leg badly but doesn't not amount to much as he is a dog robber anyhow so called among us.*

*Sixteen miles today, mail came in. Don't got any, out of luck decidedly.*

January 27, 1970
Tuesday
Quang Tri Province

It's against Regs to have dogs in the field. Some Regs aren't strictly enforced, and four guys on different tracks have dogs. You can buy or trade for a puppy from locals at resupply sometimes. They all are very well fed, and I've never seen one of them turn down c-rats, except of course Ham and Eggs. On 2-2, or Double Deuce as we call it, the TC's real name is Charles Brown so everyone calls him Charlie Brown after the comic strip character. Charlie Brown has a dog, and his name is Snoopy. What else could he name it? When we drive around, the dogs happily ride on top of the P.C.s or tanks with their faces to the wind and their tongues hanging out.

They are helpful at night when sometimes our first warning of attack is the dogs barking. Normally these dogs don't bark unless something is about to

happen. At first appearance, the dogs look like typical mutts from back in the Real World. But after seeing boo coo of them that all look alike I realize these dogs are the type the people of Asia raise for their meat. The Regs against dogs are rarely enforced except when someone tries to take their dog home with them. It's almost impossible, so most guys pay some local to take the dog if they can't get someone to adopt it. It's a good deal for the locals all the way around. They sell you a puppy and you fatten it up and raise the dog, only to have to pay them to take it back when you leave, should you be so lucky. They then eat the dog or sell it to someone else to eat. For the dog, not so lucky. Xin loi, dogs.

Because there was no Mad Minute last night we don't have to clean all the guns this morning before we break camp. As we're finishing our c-rat breakfast, one of the platoon's dogs comes over to our track to beg for scraps. Double Deuce is parked on one side of 2-4 so I guess it's probably Snoopy, but all the platoon’s dogs look alike to me. Wack offers what's left of breakfast, and Snoopy snarfs it down.

Orders come to prepare to break camp, so we start to bring in the claymores and the trip flares and the concertina wire. The concertina wire's real name is razor wire, and that's a more apt name because instead of barbs like on barbed wire, razor wire has half inch long razors with sharpened ends every half inch. Even when wearing gloves and being careful you can easily get cut on razor wire. Cuts are bad news here because they almost always get infected or won't heal. No cuts today so things start out well.

We are somewhere west of the village of Cam-lo, so after breaking camp we sky to the redball after slowly mine sweeping the last couple of kliks, because we have to drive on an existing trail. We forgo mine sweeping once we are on the redball and we head east, single file with the LT's P.C. in the lead. After about an hour of driving 15-20 mph, the village of Cam-lo comes into sight. We can actually smell it before we get to it. Cam-lo is only about two city blocks long, and this is my first trip through with the Second platoon. There's a small pond on the edge of the village and because they cook on wood fires, the whole place is enveloped in a dense cloud of smoke, limiting our visibility. We drive straight through without stopping.

We continue down the redball, east of Cam-lo for about another hour before pulling off the redball onto a dirt lane. It's too overgrown with brush to make a new trail so we have to mine sweep again. Wack has been here a while so he is one of the regular mine sweepers. He is called on the horn to

come up to the front of our convoy and mine sweep. Since Wack is one of the two side gunners on 2-4 I take his place behind the M-60. We're sitting ducks again, as we are single file and strung out boo coo far in some dense brush. What we're up to, we have no idea. We just follow orders no matter how dumb they seem.

After an afternoon of being sitting ducks, our thoughts turn to resupply and we head towards the redball. At the redball we head back west for a few kliks, where we meet up with the resupply convoy. It takes a long time to re-fuel as we drove around boo coo today. They have mail call but I haven't been here long enough, and I get no mail. The hot chow is horrible as usual, but we eat it anyway. It makes the c-rats more appealing but not much. After resupply we get back on the redball and sky west towards Cam-lo, but we pull off the redball before we can see or smell the village. We don't drive too far off the redball to set up the RON, because we have to sweep for mines and it's getting late. As we set up the RON, word goes around that because we are so close to Cam-lo there will not be a Mad Minute tonight.

I get last shift for guard duty. After I help Wack dig his foxhole, Faustino comes over to 2-4. He's excess on Double Deuce, and we joke about being driver for the platoon Sgt. No one wants to drive for him but we know one of us will have to. The platoon Sgt. is a white racist Lifer from the south. He calls everybody *boy*, even LT. The platoon Sgt.'s current driver, Pruitt, is from the south also, and it's the only reason the platoon Sgt. tolerates him. Tolerates. But he still won't let Pruitt go to the rear, so Pruitt has a bad attitude.

Wack and I are still sharing his tent that we set up behind 2-4. Even if it doesn't rain which isn't that often, it keeps the dew off us. So far, it's a 50-50 chance that I have to drive for the platoon Sgt. Considering my situation I'm not feeling lucky.

*April 12, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Camp Supply*

*Morning dawned clear and bright and a little cool. Stayed in tent all day. Bacon, soup, biscuits and beef for dinner.*

*Gen. Gibbon, Capt. Barnet came from agency with train.*

*Two mules from citizen train drowned fording river.*

*Leaving Company A at this place. We start away tomorrow for Pompey pillar about fifty miles (so they say) from here.*

*Steamer Josephine came up river last summer to within 36 miles of this place. That being as far as she could go on account of the many sandbars in the river.*

*Officers are at snowballing again. Reminds me of school boys days. Their fun will not last long as the snow is melting rapidly. We leave about 10 thousand lbs. of freight here for Co. A to guard. Train nearly loaded with as much as is left here. Coffee for supper, feel tiptop.*

*The Indians hired as scouts by Lieut. Bradly came in today. Fine looking lot of men as one wishes to see. Issued rations to them. None of them can talk English. Will give their names later as do not know them yet. Had a medicine dance as soon as they had their supper. Something! A great many of us never saw anything of the kind and was new to us. There is also a white man with them called Bravo who deserted a few years ago from the army but was pardoned and is still living with the Crow Indians.*

January 28, 1970
Wednesday
Quang Tri Province

After an uneventful night we have a c-rat breakfast. I'm quickly realizing it won't be long before I start to hate c-rats like most of the guys. Typical mess hall coffee can be two or three days old, and they will still serve it. It's some sort of a badge of honor to have the world's worst coffee and bragging rights to the Lifers who drink it. By comparison the c-rat instant coffee almost tastes good but it's mostly just a hot drink with some needed caffeine.

We bring in the claymores and trip flares and concertina wire and the RPG screens and we sky single file behind the LT's P.C. We break brush on our way to the redball, so we don't mine sweep. When we get to the redball we head east and drive about half an hour until we stop and space out about 50 feet apart. The LT says we will probably be here all day, so we take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. on the P.C.s and tanks.

Some of the guys not on guard walk around to some of the other tracks to visit. We usually don't get time to socialize with the other guys in the platoon when we are in the field, because we always have a lot of tasks, and the tracks are almost always spread far apart.

There is one Armed Forces radio station, and it's number one. They play mostly current Rock and Roll, some Blues and Motown. Most of the crews have at least one small transistor radio. If we stop somewhere long enough, the transistor radios come out if it's not raining. It's probably a combination of our damaged hearing and the radio's small speaker, but when a favorite song of the guys comes on the radio everyone turns up the volume. Sometimes the radios just vibrate and move around on whatever they are sitting on because the volume is set so high.

My hearing seems to be back to normal after the last Mad Minute. No rain so far today and we spend the day guarding the redball. When we didi, the redball is still here so we did our job.

It doesn't take long to get to resupply because we are already on the redball. At resupply I run into Faustino in the hot chow line. He said the LT assigned him to the platoon Sgt.'s tank as the driver. I tell him how sorry I am, but secretly I'm as happy as I can be given my current situation. I hate digging foxholes like sin but I would rather dig than drive for the platoon Sgt.

It doesn't take long to re-fuel and load up the supplies, and we sky for our RON for tonight.

After driving around in circles as usual and setting up in a circle, 2-4 is set up next to 2-3, which is the platoon Sgt.'s tank, and sure enough Faustino is sitting on the turret. As Wack and I are digging the foxhole, Fanelli comes over to chat. Fanelli says Pruitt gets to go to the rear after he shows Faustino how to put out the claymores and set the trip flares, which is the job of the driver on all the tracks. Pruitt has a much better attitude now according to Fanelli, but Faustino isn't happy. Xin loi, Faustino.

It gets dark and so we make our guard plans. I get last shift again, which I am getting used to. No Mad Minute tonight, we don't know why. Some guys get nervous when we haven't had a Mad Minute and hear things in the night while on guard. So all night long the guys on guard shoot Thumper at the real and imagined sounds in the night. We never get real deep sleep here so the grenades going off all night reminds us the guards are awake and protecting us while we doze on and off. It's kind of like getting all your sleep by taking short naps. It doesn't work very well and is probably why there are so many screw ups here in the Nam.

*March 28, 1876*
*Tuesday*

*Ft. Ellis*

*Pulled out this morning passed several neat looking farm houses. Road very muddy. Passed through Bozeman City. People all out looking at the soldiers. This city is the second one in size in Montana.*

*Finally got to Fort Ellis. Mud knee deep. Straw was handed out and then every man for himself and he had to hustle pretty lively so as to get some for his tent, but in all the scrambling I managed to get enough for myself.*

*Ellis is both a cavalry and infantry post. There being four Companies of cavalry and one of Inf. Here, the fort you might say, built against the mountain and is quite a pleasant looking fort.*

*Boys all looking fat and robust here. E Company stationed at Camp Baker. We expected to meet here but they have gone on to Crow Agency. We expect to lay here until the first of the month.*

*Day pleasant. On guard.*

January 29, 1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province

It starts raining during the night and continues into the morning. We drove down a dirt lane about 3 kliks from the redball to our RON last night. The tank that was sent back down the trail to check its condition for travel comes back to report they had a hard crossing the uphill part of a small gully. The rain turns the ground to slippery mud and the tank crew is doubtful the P.C.s can all make it up the hill. The LT reports our situation to Higher and they concur that the rain has turned everything into a sea of mud. We are ordered to stay in place and there will be no resupply today.

That is number ten news, and not because no hot chow for dinner. It means no mail call. I haven't gotten any mail yet but I am hopeful for some soon. Just watching the other platoon members getting mail reassures us that the Real World is still there.

Some of the track crews start to inspect the tracks and are planning to replace some of their dead track blocks since we're here for the day. It rains off and on, but mostly on, so working on the tracks should prove interesting.

Some of the crews are still working on their c-rat breakfast. Johnson, one of the three Brothers in Second platoon stops by 2-4 and asks, "Hey, you

guys got any extra Ham an' Eggs?"

Do we have any extra Ham and Egg c-rats? We all have a good laugh. Ham and Eggs is the scorn of the meal selections available in a case of c-rats. Even the dogs won't eat it so we always have a couple of cans of Ham and Eggs handy. Mostly to get the attention of recalcitrant water buffalo to move out of our way. We give Johnson two cans of Ham and Eggs and actually witness him consume one right on the spot. He eats it with such enthusiasm, it seems as if he really likes it.

He is just back from R&R in Bangkok but instead of regaling us with tales of debauchery with the whores there he says, "I was totally unable to do it. Couldn't get a hard-on even! When I got back to base camp I went on sick call. The doc said my condition is temporary and from a bad diet. He said I should eat Ham and Eggs every day."

"Did the doc say you should eat it for every meal?" asks Fanelli.

"Nope," Johnson answers. "But I figure if once a day is good, three times a day is boo coo better."

What a cruel hoax, I think. If his condition is from a bad diet you can't get much worse than a

c-rat Ham and Eggs diet. But no one tells Johnson. So every morning we all get a laugh as he goes around the RON, from track to track, asking for their extra Ham and Eggs. He doesn't even heat them up. He just opens the can with his P-38 and snarfs it down.

We leave all the claymores and trip flares and concertina wire in place, and between the bursts of heavy rain, when it stops or just sprinkles, the track crews work on their vehicles. Wack's foxhole keeps filling with water and several times during the day we bail it out with our helmets.

Johnson, it turns out, is really thinking ahead. We usually throw the Ham and Eggs away as we can't even use it to trade for other things with the locals or other crews. We count on resupply every day but can go a day or two before we're really out of food and water. If the weather stays bad and we don't get resupply tomorrow we will be fighting over the Ham and Eggs we revile so much.

For water, one of the P.C.s tows around a water tank on wheels we call the water buffalo. It's a steel tank that is lined with an anti-corrosion coating that imparts a bouquet of plastic and vinyl to the taste and smell of the water. It is difficult to accurately describe with words. We drink water only when there is nothing else to drink. We carry iodine with us so we can treat river water to

drink if we are near the river. Bomb crater water can be the most beautiful shades of aqua marine that I have ever seen and looks inviting when you are thirsty. I imagine there is some nasty explosive residue contained in it, so we just look.

Today we have c-rats for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Living on canned food is far better than starvation but we all miss bread and milk. There are crackers in the c-rats as well as peanut butter and jelly so we make PB and J's with crackers, but it's just not the same.

The crews make sure to finish repairs before it gets dark. No foxhole to dig but we do have to keep it bailed out. I get last shift on guard duty. Because our night defenses are all still in place from last night, our evening routine goes fast. Wack and I still have his tent set up so I crash about 10 p.m. which is the earliest I've been able to go to sleep since I've been in the field.

*March 29, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Ft. Ellis*

*Did not move today came off guard at 2 o'clock PM. Boys nearly all drunk. Sergeant and Corporals and even some of the officers. Drew rations today. Fresh hardbread (or as the boys call them, four cornered cakes) made in Lockes steam cracker manufactory at Helena City. This tastes considerably better than the old ones.*

*We leave here tomorrow. Wrote a letter to TBT. Received one from friend Cliff. Day pleasant. Devil of a place for mud around here. Several of the boys went to Bozeman to have a general tear-up before they got altogether out of civilization.*

January 30, 1970
Friday
Quang Tri Province

I feel like a new man. I slept six straight hours last night before being awakened at 4 a.m. for guard duty. It's only misty out now and the platoon gets ready to break camp around 8 a.m.

There is some horn chatter about the real reason we have to make resupply today is because Johnson only has two cans of Ham and Eggs left.

As we circle around and line up behind the LT's P.C. I can see Pruitt is sitting on top of 2-3's turret. The platoon Sgt. has Faustino driving already. Apparently there is some sort of a prestige thing going on between the platoon Sgt. and the LT. Pruitt is a Spec. 5 which is an E-5, and he outranks the LT's driver who is a Spec. 4 or E-4. Faustino is only a PFC or E-3 (and a FNG to boot), so the platoon Sgt.'s prestige is being besmirched. The platoon Sgt. is in a foul mood. The main reason for his unhappiness though is that beer and liquor are no longer allowed in the field. The word is he's a major juicer. And now the LT's driver outranks his driver. He feels insulted, and so he sulks. Xin loi, Sarge.

We drive around most of the morning and afternoon but because of the recent heavy rains several P.C.s get stuck in the course of our patrol, and we spend most of the day getting them unstuck. After a frustrating day, we finally make resupply and 2-4 and 2-3 are parked next to each other. I walk over to the hot chow line with Faustino, and he is miserable. The platoon Sgt. has been yelling and cursing at him all day. The mud made his first day as the platoon Sgt.'s driver hell. When they came to an intersection on the trail the platoon Sgt. berated Faustino for not knowing which way to turn. I express as much sympathy as I can, while I continue to be secretly happy that Faustino, and not me, is the platoon Sgt.'s driver.

Because we didn't have resupply yesterday, we somehow think the hot chow could be worthwhile today. It isn't, but the chow line KPs tell us that the company clerk didis in two days and his replacement fell through. The most plum job in the rear is up for grabs, but it's a REMF job. Just after we part on our way back to the tracks, I can hear the platoon Sgt. already grieving Faustino about taking too long at chow.

We finish packing up our supplies and sky for our RON. We don't go far because of the poor trail conditions. Probably only one klik off of the redball from where we had resupply. We circle around in a sea of mud, and then start setting up our night defenses.

So far this is the easiest foxhole I help Wack dig. We, however, are nearly covered with mud from our patrol today and now from digging the hole. No showers here. We just go to sleep wet and muddy and get up in the morning the same. Day unpleasant.

*April 9, 1876*
*Sunday*

*Camp Supply*

*Broke camp this morning. Marched along the river bottom. Crossed the river, that is the train did. We went along the rim of hill so did not cross. Fifteen miles and camped which is a very good one. Will stay here for two or three days. Teams going to agency for freight. 75,000 lbs.*

*Trout bite with a vengeance. String after string continually coming in river about ten rods from my tent.*

*Cook growling, everyone out of humor. Decidedly disagreeable. Toothache again, feel miserable, could swear. Bunkey on guard.*

*Saw a large bear track in the sand close to camp. Duck and geese until further orders.*

*Dreamed last night I had a square meal. Hardtack and bacon for supper.*

*Country very rough and covered with pines. The train unloaded and ready to start to agency. Day pleasan*t.

January 31, 1970
Saturday
Quang Tri Province

Today is, we hope, payday. When I left base camp for the field, the company clerk told me I didn't need any money in the field as there is nothing to buy. He was, sadly for me, misinformed. There is not much to buy at resupply. But sometimes when we're near Cam-lo some of the local villagers come to our resupply site with food to sell or barter. Because I brought no money with me to the field, I have been trading c-rats and cigarettes when I can. They actually give us several cartons of cigarettes every week, whether we smoke or not. I don't smoke, but they are handy for bartering.

It's c-rats for breakfast, then we bring in the claymores, trip flares, concertina wire and the RPG screens, and we sky single file behind the LT. We drive to the river, and even with all the rain lately it is very low, about 1 to 2 feet deep and 15 to 20 feet wide. The dry, rocky river bank, which is fairly flat, extends at least 100 feet from the water’s edge. When the river is high, it is 200-300 feet wide. We space the tracks out about 20 feet from water’s edge, and about 50 feet apart. Orders are given that we are guarding the river section we're at for the day. One man is to be posted behind the .50 Cal. at all times.

We take advantage of the situation to change into any clean fatigues we have and wash our muddy fatigues in the river. That is, of course, if you don't mind being downrange of the .50 Cal. Some of the guys have seen the locals washing clothes in the river and pounding the wet clothes with a rock on a bigger rock. We have a good laugh at the guys who try it. Mostly they just smash all the buttons off their fatigues and don't end up much cleaner. We get to take a bath in the river, and so we are all feeling invigorated.

We do spend all day guarding the river. It's pretty open, and we can see a lot of sky. Being so close to North Vietnam we see lots of activity in the skies. All kinds of choppers flying all day long. Large planes and jets fly over all the time. We don't see the bombers, as they fly boo coo high, but we feel the ground shake from the bombing of North Vietnam, which is boo coo close by. Usually the bombing is at night, so as we lay on the ground trying to sleep we can feel the ground tremble when the bombs explode in North Vietnam. We can still feel the ground move when there is daytime bombing. It's just not as strong when you aren't laying on the ground.

We finish our day guarding the river and line up single file behind the LT on 2-5. We head for resupply. The rocky river bank is an easy place to throw a track if a bunch of rocks get between the track and the road wheels, so we go slow. Everyone just got cleaned up for the first time in weeks and if we have to get a thrown track back on, some guys are going to get muddy again. We get lucky and meet the resupply convoy without incident.

The paymaster is here, so I get paid the first time since I've been in the Nam. I only get $25.00 of my pay because when I left the rear for the field, I had most of my pay go into a savings account. I thought I wouldn't need any money here. I correct that mistake with the paymaster. But I will have to wait until next payday, a month away, to get my "allowance" increased.

The hot chow is miserable as always, and even though it's payday, no one hardly cares because there isn't anywhere to spend it where we are today. Smitty is going around taking orders for Tiger beer. Word is, tomorrow we resupply near Cam-lo, so there will be Black Market stuff to buy.

We finish loading up, bring in the concertina wire and sky for our RON. After we circle around a while and finally get into position, the driver on 2-4 sets out the claymores and the trip flares and the concertina wire. Wack and I put up the RPG screen, set up his tent, and then we start our evening ritual of digging his foxhole. We get no encouragement in our task from Big Al and Zack as they are on the opposite side of the RON. Tonight we will have to go

it alone, but I'm confident the bugs will take up their slack and torment us all night long.

*February 1970*

*April 11, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp Supply*

*Snowed considerable last night, very disagreeable outside of tents and cold inside. Have a fire in front of tent but smoke blows or comes in tent so bad. Have no comfort from it. Mended some of my old clothes for do not know how long they will have to do me. Boys are beginning to liven up and are having a brisk game of snowball and by the way they crack against the tents woe to the fellow that puts his head out of tent for he is sure to draw it back much quicker than he put it out. Some of the officers are having the same kind of fun.*

*Got tired of doing nothing so went and borrowed a Jew's harp and tried to amuse myself in that way but gave it up as a bad job, then went to writing and done better.*

*Wolves howling plenty last night and sound dismal.*

*One of the scouts came in today for whom it is reported Sitting Bull offers a reward of one thousand ponies. Half breed with same name as his Indian majesty name, Mitch Roger.*

*No fish caught today.*

*Getting heartily tired of army life but I think it will learn me a lesson I never will forget. But many a man before me has committed an error in life that he is liable to be sorry forever afterward and think I have made one enlisting in army but as the saying is, will stick it out or bust.*

February 1, 1970
Sunday
Quang Tri Province

The first day of February makes me wonder when monsoon ends. The near constant rain puts everyone in a foul mood. But yesterday was payday. We are supposed to resupply by Cam lo and Smitty and the other juicers are in

high hopes of scoring some Tiger beer. As always we have c-rats for breakfast and then start bringing in the claymores, trip flares and concertina wire. Lastly, the RPG screens come down and are tied on the tracks.

Over on 2-3, Faustino is driving and because he is backing up he can't see anything. The platoon Sgt. is on top of the turret talking to Faustino over the intercom, directing him. The track scoops up a couple of big rocks, along with the dirt it would usually scoop up when turning a tank slowly on soft ground, and the result is the track tread just rolls off the drive sprocket.

It's about 9 a.m. and the platoon Sgt. is already drunk, so he doesn't realize they have thrown the track until it is all the way off. If he had noticed before it was all the way off the drive sprocket, they might have been able to finesse it back on. But now it's all the way off. The only choice now is to break open the track and lay it out straight on the ground. Then we drive the tank back on the track while as many guys as can be gathered help pull the track back on and over the drive sprocket. Each track block weighs 90 lbs and there are over 100 of them, so it is an unpleasant task that also requires a lot of strength.

The platoon Sgt. just about blows a gasket swearing at Faustino when he realized the track had been thrown off. It takes over two hours to get it back on, and the platoon Sgt. has Pruitt drive the tank back on the track because he doesn't trust Faustino to do it correctly.

The Second platoon has been hanging loose for the past two hours waiting for 2-3. So now all the tanks and P.C.s uncircle and head out of the RON single file with the LT on 2-5 in the lead. We only drive for about an hour before we stop and break for lunch.

"C-rats all around, bartender," jokes Wack as we open a fresh case. We get two cases a day per track crew so with four crewmen dividing 24 meals, each guy gets six c-rat meals per day. Since I'm extra on 2-4, we have five crewmen, but we still only get two cases per day. So we have to eat some of the c-rats we would normally trade or throw away.

After lunch we drive down a trail that leads to the redball. We have to sweep for mines so it goes slowly as we make our way to the redball, and we don't reach it till about 2 p.m. in the afternoon.

We sky on the redball to meet the resupply convoy somewhere just east of Cam-lo. The local villagers know that we just got paid, so many of them are already waiting at the resupply site. Because so many people are milling around, it's hard to circle the tracks around to park.

Once we park, we have to set the concertina wire out to keep the local villagers out of the resupply site. When the crews start to trade and buy things from the locals, we have to do it over the concertina wire, which is a tee tee bit inconvenient.

We're always getting cut and scratched when reaching through the wire. Resupply looks like a flea market today. Smitty scores a whole case of Tiger beer, and he is boo coo happy.

The hot chow is almost an afterthought, and I catch up with Faustino in line. He is in a boo coo good mood. The platoon Sgt. told him to get on one of the deuce and a halfs when resupply is over, and go back to base camp with Pruitt. Faustino is to be the new company clerk. I am happy for him but the ramifications of the situation don't become clear until I get back to 2-4, and Sgt. Green tells me to report to the platoon Sgt.'s tank. I am the platoon Sgt.'s new driver.

How did this happen to me? I get my gear off 2-4 and head over to 2-3. Faustino and Pruitt have their gear and are heading over to the resupply deuce and a halfs for their ride back to base camp. I have never seen two guys in the field in a better mood, especially Pruitt.

With a big grin from ear to ear Pruitt is saying to anyone willing to listen, "Two weeks and a wake up!" Short-timers can be so insufferable.

Faustino lost his boonie hat when it blew off his head and the platoon Sgt. wouldn't let him stop to get it, so I give him mine. We almost never wear our hats in the field, but in the rear they're required .

Faustino got three days of on the job training (O.J.T.) with Pruitt as to the tank driver's duties. I get zero.

The platoon Sgt. just comes over to me and says, "Wolf, get in the driver's compartment and let's go." That is my O.J.T.

After we get to our RON and park 2-3 the platoon Sgt. tells Fanelli, the gunner, to give me a hand putting out the claymores and trip flares. As an FNG I didn't expect to be given such an important task on my own. As we set the claymores out I remember something.

"Hey Fanelli, we don't have to dig a foxhole do we?" I ask.

"Fuck no! That's for the ground pounders. Just so they can set up their M-60." That is good news. Now if I just get some mail from the Real World...

The platoon Sgt. has ensconced himself up at the TC's seat on top of the tank turret. He keeps a bottle of whiskey at the ready, next to the .50 Cal. He wedges it in place with a .50 Cal. ammo box as he does not want any of it to

spill. Being an FNG, and the newest crew member, I once again get last shift on guard duty. I'm getting use to it, like a sharp stick in my eye, as they say.

*April 17, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Pompey's Pillar*

*Left the river this morning and marched across a large bottom which took us all day. Nothing but Prickly Pear and Sage brush. All through it Prairie dogs villages aplenty. Day was very warm and water was very scarce. Camped for the night at Pompey's Pillar on the river.*

*General Gibbon told the Indians that he would give them all the ponies we would capture if they would tell him where there is a Sioux camp. Some of them started out tonight on a scout to last three or four days.*

*Have a beautiful camp, a circle of Cottonwood trees running all around the camp. Looks as if men had been here long time ago and planted trees.*

*We marched 19 miles today. Indians brought a Buffalo calf into camp and have plenty of fresh meat.*

February 2, 1970
Monday, Ground Hog Day
Quang Tri Province

Because there is no winter here in the Nam, Ground Hog Day goes largely unobserved. If there were ground hogs here and seeing their shadow meant six more weeks of monsoon, it would be number ten for a ground hog to show themselves. They would be blown away the minute their tee tee head peeked out of the burrow. Fortunately for the ground hogs, there are none here.

Faustino turns out to be one lucky guy, and in one day goes from having the worst job in the company, the Second platoon Sgt.'s tank driver, to the most plum job, that of company clerk. In an unfortunate chain of events, I now find myself with the worst job in the company as I finish my stint on guard duty. I decide to heat up a canteen cup of water and make some instant coffee in hopes of breaking out of the bad mood I am in.

Being on a tank is quite different from the P.C.s and as I am new, I don't know where anything is yet. I find an unopened case of c-rats, and I rummage

around for the c-rat meals from the open case I assume is around here somewhere. I open one of the thermo chests on the bustle rack, which is on the back of the tank turret. When I open the case (if it weren't for the fact that we are probably less than 3 kliks south of the Z) I almost think I died and am in heaven. In the thermo chest is no less than six cans of c-rat pound cake and six cans of c-rat pecan rolls among the several unopened c-rat meal boxes. I help myself to one pound cake and one pecan roll for as satisfying a breakfast as I have had since being in the field. It is number one, as we say.

When Fanelli gets up with the rest of the platoon at 6:30 a.m. I ask about all the cans of pound cake and pecan rolls. He says the platoon Sgt. has a liquid breakfast and lunch and usually survives by eating the hot chow they bring out on resupply. Fanelli says he has never seen the platoon Sgt. eat c-rats, so we always have a lot of c-rat meals to trade. If the pound cake is the "Boardwalk" of a case of c-rats, the pecan roll is the "Park Place", and my personal favorite. When bartering or trading you can get just about anything for one or two pound cakes.

After a c-rat breakfast, we start to break camp. As the tank driver, my job is to bring in the claymores, trip flares and concertina wire. Fanelli and the loader take down the RPG screen, roll it up and tie it to the side of the tank. Because of the snafu yesterday when the platoon Sgt. allowed the tank tread to be thrown as 2-3 backed up, today he is on the ground beside the tank. He's in my line of sight so he can give me hand signals as I back up. All goes well, and we uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5 and we sky.

We drive to an area of trails through 10-12 ft. tall elephant grass. They don't call it elephant grass because it's tall, they call it that because elephants like to hang out in it when there doesn't happen to be a war going on. We have been told there are no elephants left in the Nam, but we are dubious because we have been told there are no tigers left here, and we have seen one already.

The tank driver's compartment is only four feet off the ground so all I see is grass after we get to our area of operation. The tanks and P.C.s usually take turns leading the way to share the risk. This is my first full day driving, and I have no idea where we are or where we are going, even if I could see over the grass.

Having been forewarned by Faustino about the platoon Sgt.'s tantrums if you don't know which way to turn at an intersection, I just guess at which way to turn and have only gone the wrong way once. So I have only had to

suffer the platoon Sgt.'s curses once so far today. That's probably a record.

We space out about 50 feet apart and break for lunch. C-rats again. Since coming into the field I have been using heat tabs to heat water for coffee and to warm up the c-rats to make them more palatable. The fumes from the heat tabs are horrid and can ruin any little bit of an appetite you might have. The flame from the heat tabs is similar to canned heat, but the smell is extremely acrid and burns your nose and eyes should you get downwind of it. As I prepare to heat up some c-rat spaghetti, Fanelli notices I plan to use some heat tabs.

"Hey FNG, we're Tankers!" he growls at me. "We heat our chow with explosives!" He opens a compartment on the tank in which there are a couple of cases of C-4 plastic explosives. He pulls out a partially used stick of C-4 and tears off a small chunk. It looks just like white putty. He rolls the piece into a small ball and pinches and rolls a tee tee bit between his fingers to make what looks like a ball with a short stem. He lights the stem, and the ball bursts into a small but intense flame.

"Just remember to let it burn itself out. Don't ever step on it when it's lit, or that'll be your last step," cautions Fanelli.

I hold my opened can of spaghetti over the C-4 flame. Almost immediately the entire contents erupt from the can, right onto my jungle boots.

Fanelli and the loader, who are closely watching me, both start laughing so hard I can barely understand Fanelli when says, "You gotta stir it up a tee tee bit first, FNG!"

I guess this is my initiation as a crewman on 2-3, and I laugh it off with them. I'm confident it won't be the last time this trick is pulled. But it will be the last time it's pulled on me.

Lunch being over, we mount back on the tracks and start working our way back through the elephant grass. I don't have to lead the platoon for a while, and when I'm finally ordered to the front, I think I can tell where I am. Mostly I follow our fresh made tracks from this morning.

Today when Fanelli was calling in our resupply order on the horn, I had him order a case of Coca-Cola. I'm hopeful it will come on resupply. We meet up with the resupply convoy, circle up and set out the concertina wire. We haven't had any Mad Minutes or seen any action, so there is no ammo to load up. I get my case of Coke. It's five bucks but worth it. I break it open immediately and toss Fanelli and the loader each a can of Coke. We chug the warm pop, and then we all burp loudly. Though warm, it's one of the best

cans of pop I've ever had.

We head over to the hot chow line expecting to be disappointed in the chow, and we are. Smitty is there in line, and it's obvious he has scored his Tiger beer. Fanelli works the KPs, on my behalf, for some ice to cool our Cokes. They sometimes have ice at resupply, but we have no luck today. We head back to 2-3 and Fanelli and the loader and myself wash down our dinner with another warm Coke. Tastes number one.

Resupply ends, and we pull in the concertina wire and sky for our RON. We drive east a short way on the redball, less than a klik, before we turn off at a two track lane and drive into the bush. When we get to our RON, it's covered with 2-3 feet high green scrub vegetation that is the main ground cover here. We drive around in circles to flatten it. We then dismount and scour our site for tunnels or booby traps. Tonight none are found, so we start our night defense set up.

Fanelli again assists me in setting out the claymores and trip flares, this time without any suggestion from the platoon Sgt., who has his own task at hand. That of emptying the whiskey bottle he keeps up in the TC position behind the .50 Cal.

We have a large tarp that we tie to one side of the tank and stake out the other end. The result is a sort of a lean-to we all sleep under. Depending which way the rain is coming, the guys at the ends can get wet, but we're usually wet to some degree at all times, so no big deal. Both ends are open, so it's well ventilated, which is important. We don't bathe regularly, so we all stink to high heaven. Also, the c-rat diet makes us fart all the time. So fresh air in unlimited quantities is appreciated, especially in confined spaces. When we are under way, the driver's position is best for plenty of fresh air. The air coming in blows my farts into the tank turret where they can be appreciated by the rest of the crew. I always deny it's me who farted, so Fanelli is forever punching the loader, blaming him.

I am on last shift for guard, but I console myself with the fact that all the pound cakes and pecan rolls in our c-rat allowance are mine. I smile.

*April 13, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Videttes*

*Followed the river bottom today. High rocky bluffs on each side of us. A*

*few scattered pines were on the hills. Wagons move along very slow, so that I have many rests. Was on fatigue this morning loading wagons. Co. A left behind, two beeves left with them for fresh meat for them.*

*23 Indian scouts came from agency. Chief Red Fox, the other named Cut, Little face, Grandmothers knife, Tash,Two whistle, White mans runner, John, Buffalo calf, Brown, Half yellow face, White swan or Little waist, Curly, Little waist, Second, Little wolf, Showy face, the others I do not know their names. All were fine looking fellows.*

*Some pretty places along the route. Rocks all shapes. Large holes in some of them. Wooded glens and deep ravines. Marching along and seeing these scenes I forgot the hardships looking at them. Here again I wish for a sketch book so that I could carry sketches of scenes I may never see again, away with me.*

*At last we camp. Videttes are posted. Tents placed so as to form a square the wagons being corralled inside where the stock are kept at night.*

*Undress parade last night and inspection of arms and orders read out by Lieut. Zasdruff, acting Adjutant, concerning the dangerous country we were passing through and that we were to be very careful and always ready, in case anything should happen.*

*My tent mate just brought in an armful of dry grass so I think we will have a soft bed tonight. Weather pleasant, signs of game in plenty.*

*Camped within 25 miles of Baker's Battleground where Colonel Baker had a fight in 1872 with the Sioux Indians. 11 1/2 miles today.*

February 3, 1970
Tuesday
Quang Tri Province

After an uneventful guard duty, it’s finally 6 a.m., so I heat up some water in my canteen cup for some instant coffee. The C-4 heats the water up boo coo fast, and I notice that not only do the fumes from the burning C-4 not burn my eyes, but I think I'm copping a minor buzz from it. As I sip my morning coffee, I pick bits of spaghetti and tomato sauce off my boot laces and out of the lace eyelets. I take care not to clean them up too good. Don't want to look like an FNG with clean, shiny boots.

At 6:30 a.m. most of the platoon is up and getting their c-rat breakfast. When we set up our RON, the three tanks in the platoon are spaced as evenly

as possible, so that each tank's main gun can cover about 120 degrees of the field of fire. Because of the spacing of the tanks, Zack and Big Al's tank, 2-6, is over on the far side of the RON. I've finished my breakfast so I saunter over to 2-6. Zack and Big Al are still without a TC since he wounded himself. As the crew on 2-6 is down to three, that means only three guys to share guard duty at night, and three guys to pull maintenance on the tank and to set-up and break camp. They already seem like they are getting behind the rest of the crews breaking camp, so I leave them and sky back to 2-3.

When I get back, the platoon Sgt. is up and in his position on the turret behind the .50 Cal and next to his bottle. His eyes are already bloodshot. But since I didn't see him get up, his eyes could have already been that way from last night. I attend to bringing in the claymores and trip flares and stow them in one of the side compartments of 2-3. When the platoon is about ready to leave, we bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen and tie everything to the side of 2-3. We uncircle, line up behind the LT on 2-5 and we sky.

We are in an area of low rolling hills covered with green scrub a few feet high. It's a gray overcast day and when the mist clears, we can see 1 or 2 kliks off into the distance. As noon approaches, all the mist just disappears. We have to sweep for mines in the places where we have to drive on the existing trail. We break brush where we can, but even that is not a guarantee we won't hit a mine. We just can’t really mine sweep when breaking brush most of the time. No one wants to drive the P.C.s or tanks but letting someone without any apparent skill drive a tank or a P.C. is almost a certainty that a track will be thrown. We hate that. We drive and sit around pretty much as sitting ducks a lot of the time already, so dealing with getting a track back on a tank or P.C. just increases our vulnerability. So now that I am a driver I at least don't have to mine sweep anymore.

As is typical, there is a lot of chopper activity in our area since we are about 2 kliks south of the Z. Two Cobra gunships work out an area to our north. Their flight path is a big circle tipped at a 45 degree angle relative to the ground. As one Cobra dives down low sweeping the ground with mini-gun fire, the other Cobra is at the top of the circle preparing to dive down and shoot the place up as soon as the first Cobra climbs out.

When the Cobras leave to refuel and load up more ammo, two fixed-wing aircraft, called Snoopy and Puff the Magic Dragon, take over shooting up the area with their cannons as they circle around at a couple thousand feet of

altitude so as to stay out of range of small arms fire.

After the Cobras, Puff the Magic Dragon, and Snoopy are done strafing the area, we are sent in. It takes us until about noon to get there. The NVA have retreated, and although we find blood trails, we find no dead or wounded. Since we are tankers and not grunts, we are reluctant to beat around in the bush looking for wounded NVA.

Being in a recently Hot area with blood all over the place does nothing for our appetite. We break for lunch anyway. If we do have some sort of an appetite, the c-rats will take care of that. I am getting the hang of cooking with C-4 and haven't dumped anything on my boots since my initiation. We take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. as the other crew members have some lunch.

When I was assigned to drive 2-3, I brought all my gear over in a water proof bag that I just threw into the driver's compartment. There really isn't any room for it there, and it keeps getting in my way. There is much less storage space on the tanks than on the P.C.s, so I ask Fanelli where we're supposed to put our personal stuff. He shows me the insulated thermo chests that are bolted to the bustle rack on the turret. Each crewman has one for personal stuff but Pruitt took his when he left for the rear. I need to get my own, and Fanelli says I can score one on resupply today if I do it right.

"Just remember," he says, "the KPs are lazy as sin and only want to get done as quickly as possible so they can get back to the rear before it gets dark." Fanelli continues, "Just offer to help them load up the thermo chests at the end of resupply, and then help yourself to one." That sounds like a plan to me.

It took us a while to make our way over to where the Cobras were working out, so we start back in hopes we can still make resupply today. After several hours of slow going we finally make it back to the redball and sky for resupply. It's not far and is just off the redball, so we circle around and put out the concertina wire. I watch some of the side gunners on the P.C.s start to dig their resupply foxholes. I smile knowing I don't have to dig.

In my head, I go over several possible scenarios for scoring a thermo chest from the KPs. Fanelli and I saunter over to the hot chow line. I size up the KPs during my walk through the chow line and head back to 2-3 with my dinner. We are disappointed with our food, and I round out dinner with one of the pound cakes in our stash. Fanelli thinks it would be a good time to score a thermo case so I get ready to go back to the hot chow line. I've

decided to pack some heat, so I get my holster and my hated .45 out of the driver's compartment and strap it on. I decide to act a tee tee bit gruff and bully a thermo chest from the KPs if I have to. I sky over to the chow line.

All the KPs are on the back of one of the resupply's deuce and a halfs taking a smoke break. Lucky for them and me. I grab two of the thermo chests. They both have a little left over food in them, but this food is so horrid I feel no guilt at all about wasting it as I dump the thermo chest's contents into the first foxhole I pass. I walk over to the water buffalo in the center of the resupply site and rinse out both thermo chests.

When I get back to 2-3 Fanelli is impressed that I have two. "Why'd ya get two?" he asks.

"I thought we could use one for storing our soda pop in, especially if we can get some ice," I say.

"Not a bad idea," says Fanelli. "Just don't count on any ice."

Bolting the thermo chests will have to wait for later as the resupply convoy heads back to base camp.

We uncircle the tanks and P.C.s, line up behind the LT on 2-5, and sky to our RON. The site for tonight is one we have used before so the ground is still fairly clear of standing brush. We forgo driving in circles before parking the tracks, but we still carefully inspect the area for tunnels, booby traps, or anything unusual. We find nothing so we set out our night defenses.

The platoon Sgt., but more importantly Fanelli, has decided to let me put out the claymores and trip flares solo. The reality is that it's a difficult job, and now I have to do it by myself. Word goes around the RON to expect a Mad Minute tonight. We haven't had one recently, and I guess some of the guys are getting itchy trigger fingers. After everything is set up, we tie our tarp onto the side of 2-3 and our shelter for the night is ready. We only have three sleeping bags for four crewmen since one person is always awake at night. When guard duty is over, we just wake up the next guy, and when he gets out of the sleeping bag, we crawl in. Fully clothed. Sometimes I take my boots off, sometimes I don't.

This is my first Mad Minute as a tank driver, so I'm not sure what to do. Fanelli tells me to knock down the RPG screen, and then quickly get in the driver's compartment and start the engine. I know enough to close the driver's hatch when the main gun and the .50 Cal are being fired. No reason for me to fire off my hated .45. Then I won't have to clean it tomorrow morning. When word comes over the horn to prepare for the mike-mike, I push down the

RPG screen and get in the driver's compartment and close the hatch. I have been in the driver's seat when the main gun is fired during my tank school training, so I know what to expect. I grab onto the steering tiller and hold on. When the main gun fires, the whole front of the tank lifts off the ground about a foot, like when race cars pop a wheelie at the drag strip. From the driver's seat, it's quite a ride, and I hold on tightly to the steering tiller each time the main gun is fired.

With the drivers hatch is closed, the .50 Cal is not as loud as when you're outside the tank. After the Mad Minute, I realize my ears are not ringing, and I can still hear which is a definite plus 2 kliks south of the Z. Fanelli, the loader and I chat awhile before turning in for the night under our tarp shelter. The platoon Sgt. is once again ensconced up in the TC position which he never left when the Mad Minute was over. He likes to have a little night cap before turning in, and he keeps his bottle out of harms way behind the .50 Cal. If someone tried to get that bottle he'd probably shoot them with the .50 Cal.

*April 14, 1876*
*Friday*
*Camp Beaverland*

*After crossing a broad stretch of prairie camped on a river bottom. Large flocks of wild geese we saw today. Wind blowing a perfect hurricane.*

*Some of the Indian scouts first came in bringing several quarters of deer. Presented two of them to Lieut. Bradly who is in with them often.*

*No Sioux seen yet. I don't think we will see any until we cross the river again.*

*Plenty of beaver signs here. Cottonwood trees in great many numbers cut down by those industrious little animals.*

*The monotony of the march came very near to being broken by some boys starting a fight, but however all cooled down and no damage done.*

*Mail came in this evening. Received three letters from P. Mills, C.P. Fracken, & Geo. Decker. Two meals a day now and consequently am desperately hungry as none of us allowed to go hunting so we could not get meat of any kind. Except bacon which we have in plenty.*

*14 1/2 miles today. Not tired. Strong appearance of a storm about three o'clock pm but very pleasant now.*

*Country pretty much the same as has been. Rough and rocky. Am on guard tonight. Hate it like sin. Day very pleasant.*

February 4, 1970
Wednesday
Quang Tri Province

The Mad Minute deterred any action against us for the night. After I finish guard duty this morning and before the rest of the crew on 2-3 get up, I decide to get some practice using the P-38. The P-38 is a small folding can opener that comes in the sundry packs, and while they are laying around all over the place, everyone carries their own. There is a certain knack that needs to be acquired to smoothly open a can with a P-38. The sure mark of an FNG is not being able to open a can while continuing to look around at your guard post. We often eat c-rats while on guard behind the .50 Cal. We usually open the can lid most of the way and then bend the top back *a la hobo* to use the top as a handle. The C-4 gets the can and its contents hot boo coo fast so the top helps to prevent any burned finger tips. I open a couple of cans of Ham and Eggs for practice. They smell so bad I immediately throw them into one of the trash pits.

After they have breakfast, Fanelli and the loader have to clean the main gun and the .50 Cal. I start work on bolting my thermo chests to the bustle rack. The turret interior and drivers compartment are small, with no personal storage space. We look like a gypsy caravan instead of soldiers at war with all the gear we have strapped, tied, and bolted to the exterior of the tanks. We keep all our clothes and what little personal gear we have in the thermo chests to keep everything as dry as possible. Stuff gets moldy or rusty before your very eyes here in the Nam.

I also get an empty .50 Cal. ammo box to keep some paper and envelopes, pens, pencils and a small blank journal. Why I would want to remember this place I don't know. I think I'll have a boo coo harder time forgetting about the Nam than remembering it. I keep the ammo box in the drivers compartment in one of the only places not already occupied by ammo.

While most of the platoon is busy cleaning all the weapons that were fired off last night, some of the slackers amble around the RON. Zack and Big Al, being still without a TC, are slacking with a vengeance, and they stop by 2-3 to chat. They must like to live dangerously because almost none of the

platoon members come to the platoon Sgt.'s tank unless ordered to. Fortunately for Zack and Big Al, it is a good time to stop by as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is having his morning bracer up at the TC position on the turret, and he doesn't even notice their intrusion.

Zack, who is the driver on 2-6, shows me a slingshot he carries in his back pocket and says, "You need to get yourself one of these."

"What for?" I ask.

"Water buffalo," he replies. "All the track drivers have one handy to encourage water buffalo to move out of our way."

He points out that although we often throw cans of c-rats at obstinate water buffalo, we're not supposed to hurt or kill them. It's pretty obvious when we throw a can at them. But when you shoot them with the slingshot from inside the driver's compartment, no one can see anything except the water buffalo moving away. At times it seems insane that there are rules for war. Zack says they pull the slug out of M-16 ammo to use for slingshot ammo.

"It's pretty effective at getting their attention," Zack says. "You can get a slingshot from one of the kids that come out to resupply the next time we're by Cam-lo." Zack and Big Al didi before the platoon Sgt. notices them and head back to 2-6.

We break camp sometime after 10 a.m. as cleaning the guns takes extra time, and we are careful not to take a part all the guns at the same time for cleaning. That would be too dumb even for the army.

We uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5, and we sky. Where to? As always we have no idea. We drive single file for a while on an existing trail while sweeping for mines. We proceed at the walking pace of the guys with the metal detectors.

Eventually we arrive at the place in the highlands where we spent the afternoon blowing up trees and pushing stuff around with the dozer two weeks ago. We had only made it in about 75 feet then, and it's probably 250 to 300 feet into the bush now. Some of the other platoons probably got to share in the insanity that rules this place and made more headway into this forested area. After all the tracks space themselves about 50 feet apart orders come for one person to be behind the .50 Cal. at all times. Fanelli and I are ordered to come up to the front of the conga line of tracks. The LT is at the front of the line, and he wants us to blow up some of the big trees that are in the way of the new trail.

We're supposed to pick-up the dozer at resupply later today, the LT

informs us. When we come back here tomorrow, they want it ready for the dozer to clear the trail.

Fanelli and I go back to 2-3 to get a case of C-4 and a detonator and some detonator cord. Then we head back down the trail to the first tree we decide to try to blow over. The bush here is not boo coo thick, so although we can see more than a couple feet into the bush we can't see everything. The way the tracks are strung out with vegetation close to the sides, all the guys in the Second platoon are sitting ducks.

Fanelli and I are not excited about our orders, but we follow them. We are using the same hand held detonators we use for the claymore mines. They are about 5 inches long, 3 inches high and about 1 inch thick. It's a small DC dynamo with a protruding handle that, when squeezed, electrically detonates the blasting caps that we insert into the C-4. Fanelli, having done this before, is prepared. He brought along an entrenching tool with the case of C-4 so we can dig around the tree roots and get the explosives somewhat under the tree.

The first tree we encounter is boo coo big, about a 4 to 5 foot diameter trunk, but the other trees blocking our way are even bigger. We dig a small hole under the roots and place a half a stick of C-4 under the roots. Fanelli puts a blasting cap in the end and we string the detonator wire to its end. Then we retreat behind another massive tree. I am doubtful the C-4 will blow this tree over, but I am wrong. The tree goes over with a loud crash almost equal to the blast of the C-4, exposing a large root ball of dirt and rocks.

If no one knew we were here before, they know now. Fanelli and I busy ourselves making our way to the next few trees and blowing them over before we take a break for lunch.

The LT is happy with our progress and OK's our lunch plans. He is counting down the days until his R&R in Hawaii.

"Just five more weeks and I'll be back in the Real World," he says. Counting down days is a risky practice here in the Nam.

After a tasty c-rat lunch back at 2-3 and some noodles and broth for Fanelli, we head back to clear more trees.

For some reason, we luck out today as it hasn't rained yet, although it is still monsoon. The bugs constantly flying in our faces are annoying, but not having to wear our ponchos and not having to deal with the rain makes our task a little easier. Altogether we blow over about twenty trees and feel it a job well done as we head back to 2-3.

It's always nice to get away from Our Dear Platoon Sgt. for a while. When

we return, we can tell he has been busy working on his bottle. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is not what you would call a happy drunk. I think sloppy drunk would be more correct. The loader is relieved Fanelli and I are back so Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has someone else to curse at besides him.

The trail isn't wide enough for the tanks and P.C.s to pass each other so all the tanks and P.C.s do neutral steers. That's where the track on one side goes forward and the track on the other side goes in reverse. The track vehicles stay in one place and spin around on their center axis. Pretty cool, except it is easy to throw a track when doing a neutral steer. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has Fanelli and the loader watching our track as I slowly spin 2-3 around. All the tanks and P.C.s are successful as well and that's number one, because it would be a number ten to throw a track here. It would be a boo coo difficult place to get a track back on.

We take turns leading the way as we break brush on our way to resupply, so we're not mine sweeping. The tanks and P.C.s have different spacing between the tracks so we can't always drive exactly in the tracks of the lead track. When a tank is in the lead, the P.C.s can only line up one of their tracks with the trail so there is always the possibility of hitting a mine. When a P.C. is in the lead the tanks only have one track to line up with. So when we're on the move either the tank crews or the P.C. crews are extra nervous if we don't mine sweep.

We finally arrive at resupply and the convoy is already here. The LT is correct as we can see the dozer on a trailer behind one of the deuce and a halfs. There's also a truck loaded with ammo to replace what we shot off last night during the Mad Minute. The main gun ammo for the tanks is in wood crates that we have to pry open. The 105mm shells are well wrapped in packing materials and after taking the round out we replace it with one of the spent shell casings and put the wrappings in one of the burn holes. Fanelli, the loader and myself also hump several boxes of .50 Cal. and M-60 ammo over to 2-3. The tanks don't have an M-60 but the coax machine gun uses the same 7.62mm ammo. It's also the same ammo the M-14 uses.

After stowing away all our ammo, we know we can't put it off any longer and with some resignation we head over to the hot chow line. I'm starting to think the hot chow is intentionally bad to make the c-rats seem better. Someone will have to drive the dozer to our RON, and I have no concerns because some of the guys actually want to drive the dozer. That would not include me. Although it's a toss up as to which is worse, driving the dozer or

driving for Our Dear Platoon Sgt.

After resupply we start back towards the area we spent most of the day. The dozer slowly leads the way. The LT wants to get part of the way back there so we can set up our RON before dark. It's dark by 6:30 p.m here by the Tropic of Cancer, which is the northern edge of the tropics.

We park the dozer in the center of the RON with the mortar track and the medic track. The rest of the tanks and the P.C.s form a circle on the outside. It's my fourth day as driver on 2-3 and as a crew we're beginning to get our routine down as we set up our night defenses. Fanelli and I put out the concertina wire while the loader gets the RPG screen ready to set up. I put out the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader pound the engineer stakes into the ground and wire the cyclone fencing to the engineer stakes which we use as our RPG screen.

During this time Our Dear Platoon Sgt. covers us in his position behind the .50 Cal. More importantly he is next to his bottle. I'm not sure if he's protecting us or his bottle and its precious contents. He stays up there as we tie our shelter tarp to the side of 2-3. Then I climb up on the turret and connect four detonators to the four claymores I set out. We're always worried Our Dear Platoon Sgt. will grab one of the detonators when reaching for his bottle and set off one of the claymores when someone is outside the RON on listening post (LP) or ambush patrol (AP).

It's been a long day, so Fanelli and the loader sit in the turret while I sit in the driver's compartment, and we all try to relax. My seat isn't all that comfortable, but it's number one compared to the seating in the turret. When we have our full base load of main gun ammo, the only place to sit is the gunner's seat and the loader’s seat. The gunner's seat is all about looking out the gun sight and not about comfort. The loader’s seat, while just a small fold-down affair, is more comfortable than the gunners seat, so Fanelli often makes the loader sit in the gunners seat. This also allows Fanelli to quickly stick his head out of the loader’s hatch for some fresh air when the loader farts, which is most of the time. Around 10 p.m. we all turn in as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has first shift of guard duty. I have last shift.

While the rain held off all day and evening soon after we get under the tarp to sleep it starts to rain. No surprise, as it is still monsoon. When does monsoon end I wonder?

*April 15, 1876*

*Saturday*
*Baker's Battleground camp*

*A very easy guard last night only three hours to stand post. A large wolf came running up to where I was staying, momentary scare, that was all. Could not tell what it was at first, it was so dark.*

*Company B rear guard for 15 days, very tiresome. Marched 17 miles and camped at Baker's Battleground. Where he camped at that time and where we are camped now is a clear space surrounded by a belt of cottonwood trees and brush and contains about fifty acres and a very beautiful place to camp, but a rather dangerous place when hostile Indians are around. We have a Gatling gun and twelve pounder pointing manfully to the front. 18 men on guard. 6 posts of three men each.*

*Couple of wagons broke down and mules nearly played out. Game brought in by Indian scouts today and say there is plenty of it from the river back 10 or 12 miles.*

*No Sioux saw today. What a beautiful place to live I thought. Here were thousands of acres of rich sandy loam, but a dangerous place for white men when Indians are around.*

February 5, 1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province

It rained steadily all night and although our tarp on the side of 2-3 keeps us dry on top, it does not prevent water from flowing under it and under us. The loader wakes me at 4 a. m. for my turn on guard. As I get up, I realize my butt has been in a water filled hole most of the night. We only need three sleeping bags for four crewman because someone is always awake in the field. All the bags are disgustingly damp and smelly, and they're covered with grease and oil so we hardly care which one we're in. Apparently the loader was tired enough not to mind plopping his butt down in the water filled hole my butt had just vacated.

As I take my post up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. I consider my options for drying myself. I consider lighting some C-4 and putting my helmet over it resting on some sticks for spacers and sort of sitting on it. If I do that, I need to wait until it gets light so I consider other options. I have one

pair of clean and dry pants left but monsoon might last another four or five weeks so I might need them if I get really soaked. I have two pair of pants that are dirty but somewhat dry, and other than walking around in the buff, those are my options. I stand up in the turret with my head and shoulders outside and try to let my pants air dry by not sitting on the seat. The material the jungle fatigues are made of is designed to dry quickly. By the end of guard duty my pants are fairly dry, so my problem corrects itself.

It's 6 a.m. and guard duty is over, so I heat water in my canteen cup to make some instant coffee. As I sip my morning cup of java I carefully blow the dead and dying bugs that land in my coffee to the far side of my canteen cup. Should you forget and try to pluck a bug out of your hot coffee, there is an immediate oil sheen on top of the coffee from our bug repellent. We constantly have to slather it on ourselves, especially when it's raining, as the bug juice is not waterproof and just washes off in the rain. For a c-rat breakfast change up I have one of the pecan rolls instead of pound cake.

As I eat, I think about improving my sleeping arrangement. Sleeping under the tarp on the side of 2-3 leaves us very exposed to the elements and gun fire as well. I also don't like sleeping with my butt in a water filled hole. Fanelli and the loader get up and so does Our Dear Platoon Sgt. I check my pound cake stash, and I have five left, plus four pecan rolls. When I was on 2-4 I noticed that Sgt. Green had two shelter halves that make up a small tent like Wack uses.

While Fanelli and the loader get their breakfast and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. Shaves, I put four cans of pound cake in my helmet. Then I saunter over to 2-4. Wack and the other side gunner are having breakfast and Sgt. Green is in his P.C. smoking a cigarette. I climb inside 2-4 and cut right to the chase, offering to trade him the four pound cakes for his tent. He doesn't need the tent since he sleeps in his P.C. He considers my offer for a second or two and accepts - if I throw in a carton of smokes, specifically Kools. I have some cartons of cigarettes but no Kools. I promise to get a carton of Kools for him somehow. He decides to trust me and lets me take the tent back to 2-3. When I return, Our Dear Platoon has finished shaving and is up at his usual position behind the .50 Cal. and next to his bottle.

Fanelli is shaving now, and as far as I'm concerned, Fanelli is The Man. I watch and try to follow his example with one exception: I hate to shave and although when in the field we're supposed to shave, some of us don't. What can they do? Send us to the rear for not shaving? So far, even when we're low

on water Fanelli and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. shave like it's their religion.

I guess Fanelli to be in his early twenties, about 5'10", and physically in excellent shape. He has his jungle fatigues tailored so they fit him like a glove, and there is no visible fat on him. C-rats are a fattening diet so Fanelli keeps trim by not eating them. He subsists by eating noodles and broth for breakfast, lunch, and sometimes dinner if the hot chow they bring out on resupply is particularly abysmal (which is most of the time).

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. looks to be in his forties, but I suspect his drinking may have prematurely aged him. He's probably only about thirty five years old. He keeps himself trim by a mostly liquid diet. A southern white "good ol' boy" with blond hair, he's very fair skinned and gets sunburned easily. He's usually red in the face for one reason or another.

Guys are already snuffling around the dozer all wanting to drive it. The control levers for steering the dozer are very similar to the steering levers on the P.C.s. But if one of the P.C. drivers drives the dozer someone else will have to drive one of the P.C.s. No one wants to drive the P.C.s because the driver is so exposed right up front with no protective armor at all. There is also no protective armor for the driver of the dozer so these are probably the same guys who volunteer to clear tunnels when we find them. I only look them over as they hang around the dozer. I don't waste my time learning their names.

Orders go around to prepare to break camp, so I go and bring in the claymores and the trip flares and stow everything. We uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5 which is behind the dozer, and we sky. For once, we think, we know where we are going and what we'll be doing for the day. We proceed at a walking pace behind the dozer and someone mine sweeps, because to get to where we are going we have to drive on an existing trail.

It's still morning when we arrive at our destination. The trail looks exactly as we left it yesterday. We drove in single file and lined up like sitting ducks with the vegetation coming right up to the sides of all the tanks and P.C.s. This time we arrange ourselves, as best we can, along the front edge of the forested area where the short green scrub abruptly ends and the forest starts. 2-3 is at the front of the trail we have been making so we are closest to the area the dozer is working on. It hasn't rained since last night but it's gray and overcast and could start at any moment. The dozer and its contingent of volunteers head into the bush for a day of clearing the trees Fanelli and I blew over yesterday. I thought the army had a Corp. of Engineers to do stuff like

this. I must be wrong. The rest of the platoon busy ourselves securing the area. Orders for the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times are given to all the track crews.

None of the other crews come over to 2-3 unless ordered to, so Fanelli and I saunter over to

2-6 to check on Zack and Big Al. It's been about ten days since their TC wounded himself and his replacement hasn't arrived yet. That means only three guys to share guard duty at night. Zack and Big Al are bleary eyed from lack of sleep and not in their usual joking mood. The whole crew on 2-6 stays up until midnight and then they start their shifts of guard duty. They all only get about four hours of sleep and are understandably cranky. Xin loi, guys.

"If we wanted to be around a grouch we would have stayed at 2-3," I say to Zack and Big Al. We all have a laugh about what a loser Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is.

Fanelli says to them, "You guys are lucky not to have to crew for Sarge." They look so pathetic and miserable, it's hard to tease them without feeling guilty. They both continue to say nothing and just sit there with a forlorn look on their faces.

We decide that Zack and Big Al are not going to be any fun so we saunter over to 2-4 to chat with Wack. Wack is always in a good mood and jokes around all of the time. Around here that's what we have to do to try to stay sane. I think it would be considered gallows humor. We should probably call it body bag humor here in the Nam.

Wack is not on guard duty when Fanelli and I arrive at 2-4, and we decide to walk down the newly created trail to watch the dozer work out. There is skill involved operating a dozer and that skill is lacked by most of the volunteers who are attempting to clear the trees we blew over yesterday. While we're watching, they change drivers. The guy riding shotgun on the dozer begins to drive, and it quickly becomes apparent that the new driver on the dozer knows what it's all about. In the next half hour he clears an area double what the last three guys did in about two hours. We still can't figure out what this trail is about, and Higher isn't saying anything.

It's early afternoon when the LT gives orders to prepare to didi to meet resupply. We don't mine sweep on the way to resupply and instead of leading the way, the dozer is bringing up the rear and keeps falling behind. Charlie Brown, the TC on Double Deuce, is just in front of the dozer and is keeping an eye on how far behind the dozer is getting. He calls the LT on the horn,

who then orders the Second platoon to stop to let the dozer catch up. No one is fighting over whose turn it is to drive the dozer now. After a lot of stopping and starting we meet the resupply convoy outside Cam-lo. The deuce and a half with the dozer trailer is there, and I for one will not miss that thing. It took so long to get to the resupply point we can't be going too far to our RON, because it will be dark soon.

They have mail call, and I still don't get any. The hot chow is boo coo bad as usual, but we like to see how nervous the REMF KPs are from being in the field. Especially when they know it will be dark in about an hour, and they're still outside the base camp perimeter by boo coo kliks. We finish re-fueling all the tracks and rid ourselves of the dozer, pull the concertina wire in, and sky for our RON. We drive up some hills that overlook Cam-lo and as it is fairly clear of brush, we just form our circle and park the tracks. We all dismount and search the area as usual and find nothing of concern. I get busy setting out the trip flares and the claymores while Fanelli and the loader attend to the RPG screen and the concertina wire.

While up on the turret connecting the claymores to the detonators, I overhear the LT tell Our Dear Platoon Sgt. over the horn that the reason we are here overlooking Cam-lo is because tomorrow is the start of the Chinese New Year. Cam-lo, being the first village still inhabited south of the Z, would be a convenient target should Charlie plan a repeat of the attacks that happened during the TET offensive in 1968. Not exactly good news for us but then given our situation, hardly anything is good news. We put the tarp on the side of 2-3, and I also set up the tent I just got. I position the tent directly behind the tank track for some frontal protection while sleeping. The sleeping bags we have are goose down, more appropriate for Alaska than the tropics. But because the mosquitoes are so bad, we get into the sleeping bag and fold the top over our head. The result is that we look like we had a steam bath with our clothes on when we crawl out. I decide that this is the next part of my sleeping arrangement I need to improve.

No Mad Minute tonight because we are too close to Cam-lo and since we're sort of protecting Cam-lo it would be number ten to make them think they are under attack. I have last shift on guard duty, and I decide to try out my tent for the first time. I have it all to myself, my hated .45 and about a million mosquitoes. When does monsoon end I wonder? I try to fall asleep with bugs hovering and landing on every square inch of exposed skin.

*April 16, 1876*
*Sunday, Easter*
*Camp Briar Creek*

*Broke camp this morning at ten o'clock and marching four miles crossed the river. Took nearly two hours for us to cross. Cavalry crossed first then sent their horses back for the Infantry to cross. After crossing went about one mile and a half to Briar Creek, a narrow but very swift stream, and very much swollen by snow melting in mountains. Had to dig the bank down so the wagons could get across.*

*Our Indians were standing and watching very intently. Red Fox, the Chief, came up to me and stuck a feather in my hat adding at the same time, "Heap Brave" said he and seemed to be greatly pleased with himself and everybody else.*

*Mounted detachment came in one of the men having found an old gun out in the hills where it was supposed the Crows and Sioux had a fight at some time.*

February 6, 1970
Friday, Start of the Chinese New Year
Quang Tri Province

It's the start of the Chinese New Year, and I watch it get light over Cam-lo while on my guard shift. I can see the smoke from their cooking fires, but we are boo coo far up wind, so I can't smell the village from here.

It rained on and off last night and my new tent performed well in keeping dry, but sleeping on the ground is risky. There are all kinds of insects and snakes moving around. The insects are big and the snakes can be poisonous. I need to do something about that. It's hard to convey in words how omnipresent the insects are here. They fly in your eyes, up your nose, in your ears, and if you open your mouth they don't just fly in your mouth, they fly right down your throat and make you gag. When eating, most of the time if a bug flies in your mouth, you just eat it. It can only improve what we have to eat here.

It may be Chinese New Year but it's just a same-same day for us in the Second platoon here in the Nam. At 6:30 a.m. everyone is getting something ready for their breakfast. It's also one of the times that necessity overcomes

your fear of stepping outside the perimeter defenses. Performing your morning constitution down range of the .50 Cal. and in the bush all at the same time is not ideal. If we have time, we dig a tee tee hole and bury our crap, but we don't always have time. Xin loi.

Eventually orders go around to break camp. I bring in the claymores, trip flares and help Fanelli bring in the concertina wire. We roll up the RPG screen and tie it to the side of 2-3. We uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5 and we sky. We seem to be in no hurry and mine sweep the existing trail instead of breaking brush. We finally hit the redball just outside of Cam-lo, and we drive towards the village in a single file. As usual I can smell it before we actually get there. As we drive through Cam-lo, there are decorations up and other signs that it's a holiday. We drive through without stopping and turn off the redball and head up a trail to a hill on the opposite side of Cam-lo from where our RON was last night. We mine sweep, so it's a walking pace as we proceed to our destination. For the rest of the morning and into the afternoon we are arranged in a single line along a hilly ridge overlooking Cam-lo.

It's a pretty slack day and each of the track crewmen takes a turn sitting behind the .50 Cal. while the rest of the platoon walk around and socialize a tee tee bit. Some of the drivers are doing some routine maintenance and making some notes about things that need attention when we have enough time to complete a repair in the field. Since being assigned to drive for Our Dear Platoon Sgt., this is first time I have been able to really go over 2-3 and check out what needs to be done. Overall Fanelli and Pruitt stayed on top of everything, and I'm happy nothing serious has to be done. We have several dead track blocks which is only a concern if we were to drive fast and far which won't happen here. I mention the track block situation to Our Dear Platoon Sgt., and he tells me not to worry about it because in about a week we are going to turn in the M48A3 we have now for the new Sheridan tank. This is sort of good news because although 2-3 is currently in good condition, it's still an old tank that has been exposed to the ravages of war and will constantly need maintenance and repairs.

Some of the guys are walking around and several of the transistor radios have made it out and are tuned to the only station we can get. The volumes are set pretty much at full blast. I catch up with Zack and Big Al on 2-6 to see how they are holding up as a three man crew. I would guess Zack to be about 6 foot tall, the same as me, although I think Zack, like Fanelli, is in much

better physical condition than me. Zack sort of resembles Errol Flynn, the actor, with blue eyes, curly hair and mustache. I bet back on the block he's a major lady killer, as we say. Problem is, no ladies to kill here, only Charlie. Xin loi, Zack. Zack mentions that resupply today could be a good time to score a slingshot. Since it's Chinese New Year and resupply will be close to Cam-lo, there will be a lot of locals selling and trading stuff.

Back on the block they probably call Big Al "Fat Albert" but here in the Nam we don't insult our friends. Especially when they walk around with loaded automatic weapons. I would think Big Al to be about 5'8" and what we call a hefty guy, tipping the scales at something over 200 lbs. Just like the rest of us, the c-rat diet adds to his bulk daily. As we chat, I mention that we are getting new tanks in a week so they can probably slack off on 2-6's maintenance. I quickly realize I didn't need to tell them that, because as a three man crew, they slack all the time and can only do the things that are absolutely essential.

More for something to do than anything else, Zack and I walk around 2-6 and note a number of dead track blocks and a few other deficiencies. 2-6 is a deferred maintenance nightmare. It's a good thing we're exchanging the tanks next week. Of the 100+ track blocks on each side, nearly half are right out dead or questionable. It would be boo coo easier to just lay out all new track at the motor pool, break the old track open, and drive it off the old track and right onto the new one. That's not going to happen here. Too logical and boo coo too expensive although cost is usually not much of a consideration here in the Nam from what I can tell. It would be impractical to replace all the dead track blocks on 2-6 one by one. That's at least one good reason for exchanging our tanks next week, as it would take forever to change all the dead blocks.

Late in the afternoon we start down the hill to meet resupply. Just off the redball outside of Cam-lo we arrange the tanks and P.C.s in a big circle and put out the concertina wire. We're close enough that as the dust settles down I can smell Cam-lo. As Zack had predicted, our resupply site is thronged by locals trying to sell and trade stuff. Mostly the locals want c-rats, cigarettes or MPC. Mostly what we want is beer or pot or both. I, on the other hand, am trying to find a slingshot. Fanelli is dealing with his mamasan to buy some packaged dried noodles (which is just about all he eats).

I saunter around the inside of the concertina wire barricade to find Smitty trading some cartons of cigarettes for several bottles of Tiger beer. The young

boy that Smitty is trading with is complaining that he doesn't want Kools, he wants Salems, but he reluctantly accepts the Kools, and Smitty gets his Tiger beer. Not wanting to screw up Smitty's deal before it's complete, I wait and then I motion for the kid to follow me around the concertina wire over near 2-3. When I get back, Fanelli is still chatting with his mamasan.

I get my two cartons of Salems and to my surprise, when I hand them to the kid he gives me four cartons of Kools. It turns out the Vietnamese smokers prefer Salems to Kools so strongly, they trade two for one. I'm not completely at ease trading cigarettes with children. This kid is probably 11 or 12 and he is smoking as we talk. The Kools are number one because I owe Sgt. Green a carton, but what I really want is a slingshot. I can see he has a couple in his back pocket, and I gesture towards them and ask him how much? He pulls one out and gives it to me for free in appreciation of getting Salems instead of Kools. He won't take anything for the slingshot. I'm trading cigarettes with a kid who is smoking, for a slingshot. Seems like it should be the other way around. We walk around armed with automatic weapons most of the time so the slingshot seems boo coo ridiculous. War is so weird it can never really be explained.

We make ready to didi from the resupply site and as we pull in the concertina wire, the inside of the site is swarmed by all the locals picking through all of our burning trash pits. It's boo coo dangerous because we throw unopened cans of c-rats in the burn holes. We see them explode all the time, spewing hot peanut butter or jam or cheese. The kid I just got my slingshot from is still hanging around the edge of the resupply site, and as I drive by I toss him a can of pound cake from my stash, and he waves back.

We sky back to where we camped last night on the hill overlooking Cam-lo. We go over the RON looking for anything unusual even though we just left here this morning. Once again we find nothing of concern and that is number one. Setting out the claymores and trip flares is becoming routine, and it doesn't take me as long as when I first started. When I finish, I walk to the center of the RON to chat with Doc and to watch the mortar crew dig their pit. I am boo coo glad I don't have to dig anymore. I notice the mortar crew have two tents set up, and I can see they are using stretchers from the medic track to sleep on. This could be good.

"Hey Doc, what does one have to do to get their hands on a stretcher, besides getting wounded?" I ask.

"All mine are claimed," he says, "but sometimes when they send out

replacement stretchers on resupply one or two get broken and sent back." He says he will keep an eye out for one for me. I thank him, and then I didi.

It gets dark so early here in the Nam, I sky back to 2-3 to get my fair share of abuse from Our Dear Platoon Sgt. As usual he is ensconced in his position behind the .50 Cal. celebrating the Chinese New Year with his good friend Jack Daniels or Jim Beam or maybe both.

Fanelli is excited because his mamasan says she could get him a case of the noodles he lives on. It's been dark for at least an hour, and Fanelli and the loader and I are leaning against the rear of 2-3 chatting when we hear the sound of tee tee explosions off in the distance. Given our current situation, it is not unusual at all but we look toward Cam-lo (mostly because we're supposed to be guarding it). We see it's fireworks being set off in Cam-lo for the start of the Chinese New Year. We are visually treated for about 20 minutes by the fireworks. While not a perfect night for fireworks, it is not raining and the sky clear in places which is boo coo amazing since it's monsoon. War is so weird.

No one I ask knows when monsoon will end, not even Fanelli. He got here during the dry season and said monsoon started in December so that means it's lasted over two months so far. I get last shift for guard duty and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. takes the first shift. Fanelli jokes, but it's probably truer than not, that it's best for Our Dear Platoon Sgt. to have the first shift because then none of us have to try to wake him up for guard in the middle of the night. He is always the last one up in the morning. After all the excitement of the fireworks display I decide to turn in.

*April 18, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp Pompey's Pillar*

*As we did not move today went and washed some clothes. Then went to the top of Pompey's Pillar. The mass of rock is about 300 ft. high and about that in diameter it being of a circular form and at two places the rock resembles a human face.*

*In a large crevice at the top were buried several Crow Indians. Here we found names cut all over the rock of persons who had been here before us. Among them the names of the first explorers of this country, Lewis & Clark dated 1806.*

*On guard tonight, looks as if it is going to storm. Man out of K Co. caught asleep on guard and has charges proffered against him.*

February 7, 1970
Saturday
Quang Tri Province

For the second day in a row I watch it get light over Cam-lo from our hillside RON as my stint at guard duty ends. It's partly cloudy but with enough blue sky visible when the sun rises that it's by far the prettiest sunrise I've seen since being in the Nam.

I'm having my usual canteen cup of instant c-rat coffee as Fanelli and the loader get up. The first thing that Fanelli does is shave, and I like to tease him about it.

I say, "Man, Fanelli, you know how number ten nicks and cuts are here. They almost always get infected." Fanelli smiles a knowing smile as he's aware of all this.

"I hope I get infected," he says as he proceeds with his shave. I will say he does shave boo coo carefully for someone professing to want to get an infection.

I round out my breakfast repast with one of the c-rat pecan rolls and a can of fruit cocktail. I feel full, and I'm pumped up by the canteen cup of java but my high spirits only last until Our Dear Platoon Sgt. awakens and starts to stumble around. He's looking boo coo rough this morning and as usual he starts it off with a smoke. He smokes several packs of Lucky Strikes every day, and I assume it's the chill morning air that makes his hand tremble as he holds his cigarette. I also assume he puts a couple of shots of whiskey in his morning coffee to ward off the morning chill as well. And not to steady his hand enough so he can shave without cutting his nose off. I have a pretty good beard going and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. doesn't approve but he doesn't order me to shave it off either. Sort of a Mexican Stand off, I guess.

We still don't know what we'll be doing today but Fanelli is beside himself with excitement at the prospect of getting a whole case of the noodles he subsists on. Normally he can only get five or six packages at a time so he is always worried about running out and having to eat c-rats.

Word goes around to prepare to break camp. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares as usual. I am starting to realize how important they are at

night, and I have been watching some of the other drivers to pick up any tricks they might have for setting out the trip flares in particular. We bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen and tie everything to the side of 2-3.

All the tracks uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5 and we sky. Where to? We don't know but we appear to be in no hurry, and we mine sweep the existing trail down the hill towards the Cam-lo River. From here the Cam-lo River flows easterly to the China Sea. We are lined up on the river single file on the west side of Cam-lo. Orders given that we are guarding the river today. One man is to be behind the .50 Cal. at all times. It's not completely overcast, and it's also not raining so it's a number one time to be here at the river. It's cold, clear and fast flowing with a very rocky river bed and bank.

The number ten part is that in order to be at river's edge you have to also be in front of the .50 Cal. A decidedly unhealthy place to be. It's still morning as the platoon members not on guard walk around a tee tee bit to visit the other crews and to check out the river. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is sitting behind the .50 Cal. up on the turret of 2-3. He's trying to wash the taste of the instant c-rat coffee out of his mouth with something from his bottle. I make a mental note to be sure not to be in front of 2-3 when I go to the river's edge to wash some clothes later.

A couple of locals from Cam-lo show up and go from track to track offering to wash clothes. I decline their offer since I plan to wash my own clothes. You can always tell the guys who have their clothes washed by the locals by all the broken and missing buttons on their jungle fatigues. I will say it's boo coo impressive how clean they get the clothes by pounding on them with rocks in the river. It also make new fatigues look old boo coo fast which the FNGs greatly appreciate.

Instead of pounding my dirty clothes with a rock, I have a bar of soap to try instead. The water is boo coo cold and my fatigues have at least three kinds of oil, grease, grime, mud, sweat, and you name it, so I'm only hoping to freshen up my wardrobe a tee tee bit today. We have the RPG screen set up in front of 2-3 and it makes a convenient clothes drying rack for my clean but wet laundry.

A lot of transistor radios tuned to the Armed Forces radio channel. It's the only one we can get. Even with the volumes set at near full blast we can't hear the radios on the other tracks because we are spaced about 50 to 80 feet

apart. You can only hear the radios when you're on or next to one of the tracks. The Cam-lo River has a boo coo loud sound of churning water due to the rocky river banks and bottom. Except for the few guys at a time in the river we're mostly grouped around each of the tracks, eating c-rats, smoking and joking. Fanelli and I have to spend some time at 2-3 with Our Dear Platoon Sgt. if only to take our turn behind the .50 Cal.

Beer and whiskey aren't allowed in the field anymore but Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has a connection to keep his bottle full. That it was allowable to have beer and whiskey in the field at one time, but not anymore, is just not acceptable to some of the juicers. It's hard to believe it was ever acceptable. War is so weird.

We on 2-3 would just like to get some ice to get our Cokes cold. Since we can't get any ice, at night we open our thermo chest with the Cokes and I close it when I finish guard at 6 a.m. The Cokes aren't cold but later on in the day when it's 80+ degrees, they feel and, most importantly, taste cool.

It's so humid I'm worried my wet clothes won't be dry by the time we sky for resupply. After an uneventful afternoon guarding the Cam-lo River, orders are given to prepare to meet the resupply convoy. My laundry is as dry as I can expect with the high humidity here. I climb into the driver's compartment and start 2-3's main diesel engine while Fanelli and the loader take down the RPG screen and secure it to the side of 2-3.

The trail along the riverbank consists of two to three meandering two tracks that occasionally all come together at certain obstacles we can't drive over. We have to go slow because it's rocky and no one wants to throw a track. Especially now that we're finally on our way to resupply. We mine sweep at a walking pace for the rest of the way to the redball. Once on the redball we sky to the resupply site, a tee tee bit west of the village of Cam-lo. We circle up just about the time the deuce and a halfs show up and the convoy trucks drive right into the center of our circle. Fanelli and the loader jump off 2-3 and start putting out the concertina wire just as the rest of the crews are. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. talks me into position over the intercom, and when he is finally satisfied I shut the engine down and climb out of the driver's compartment.

Today there's another big crowd of locals from Cam-lo milling around outside the concertina wire. Fanelli's mamasan is there, and as promised she has a case of noodles for him. No hot chow for Fanelli tonight. Normally Fanelli pays a dollar a piece for the packages of noodles, but today his

mamasan sells him 24 for $20. Either way they're boo coo expensive, and I don't buy any. I've been sharing my Cokes with Fanelli and the loader, so as Fanelli passes me to put his case of noodles on 2-3 he flips one of the packages to me.

It says Ramen on the package. I haven't really paid much attention to these noodles that Fanelli subsists on. Mostly because they're too expensive. I look over the package and the only English looking word on the label is Ramen, so that's what we call them. Looks like no hot chow for me tonight either. Fanelli comes back while I'm still looking over my package of Ramen and introduces me to his mamasan. It's boo coo amazing how well we can communicate with the locals here using a very limited vocabulary of slang and corrupted versions of French and Vietnamese. Tee tee for *a little* or *a little bit*, boo coo for *a lot, much* or *very much,* number one for *very good* and number ten for *very bad,* same-same for *the same* and of course hand gestures help a tee tee bit.

Fanelli's mamasan has two children with her. A young girl named Lon and her younger brother. Both Lon and her brother speak some English and do most of the translating for Fanelli's mamasan. Considering we are in the middle of a war zone, these two kids seem amazingly resilient. They are both chatty, and they joke around with Fanelli who has known them for a couple of months, I think. Fanelli's mamasan is happy because she has $20 in MPC.

Lon is translating for her, and she tells Fanelli, "Mamasan is going to buy some flour and bake some bread. She wants to know if you want to buy some. Maybe tomorrow."

"Bread number one, mamasan," says Fanelli.

Lon doesn't need to translate that and Fanelli's mamasan nods her head to indicate she understands. We would be boo coo happy to buy her bread. Everyone is happy and all smiles, given our circumstances. I haven't had any bread since being in the field and can hardly wait until tomorrow. Both Fanelli and I decide not to go to the hot chow, and we have Ramen for dinner. The Ramen is boo coo good but it could just be that I, like everyone, am getting tired of c-rats. If I start to eat Ramen three times a day, like Fanelli, I will tire of it also. And at a dollar a piece, the Ramen is boo coo expensive. The c-rats are free.

The wind shifts and suddenly we can smell Cam-lo. Good thing we already ate.

We finish loading our supplies and prepare to didi. We bring in the

concertina wire and head into Cam-lo on the redball following the resupply convoy as we proceed through the village. After we are a couple of kliks to the east of Cam-lo, the Second platoon pulls off the redball. The resupply convoy continues on the redball to base camp near Dong ha. We work our way slowly up a hill where we can see, but not smell, Cam-lo.

We clear the area by driving around in circles until everything has been flattened. We dismount and carefully inspect the area for any tunnels. We find nothing, so we proceed to set up the RON. I put out the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader put out the concertina wire and set up the RPG screen. I set my tent up behind 2-3 and Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3, and we're ready for The Scary Time. At least as ready as we can be. No Mad Minute tonight since we are so close to Cam-lo. So because I have last shift at guard I decide to crawl into my tent a couple of hours after dark, hoping to catch up a tee tee bit on all the sleep we miss.

But instead, the Second platoon is awakened in the middle of the night with our eyes and throats burning and by shouts around the RON of, "Gas! Gas! Everyone to their battle stations!"

I make it out of my tent and stumbling, half blind, I make it to the front of 2-3 where I push down the RPG screen and climb into the driver's compartment. I close the hatch and start the main engine. I put on my commo helmet so I can listen to the platoons horn chatter.

Each tank and P.C. in the platoon carries just one CS gas grenade as part of the assortment of grenades we have and can fire off with Thumper the M-79 grenade launcher. My eyes are still burning and watering and I can still barely see as I listen to each track verify they each have their one CS gas grenade. That is until Double Deuce comes on the horn and has to admit they don't have their CS gas grenade. Apparently, whoever was on guard on Double Deuce accidentally gassed the whole Second platoon when they shot what they thought was a frag grenade at some suspect noise. In reality they shot off a CS gas grenade. The mistake is so boo coo stupid it makes me think it was done on purpose. Xin loi, guys. The alert is over so I set the RPG screen back up as best I can in the dark before retreating back to my tent. My eyes and throat are burning boo coo so I get little sleep.

*April 19, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Camp Cottonwoods*

*Broke camp this morning and marched along the river. The train crossed twice while we did not cross at all. One high rock I noticed in particular which resembled a castle in many respects. It was a about 75 feet high and about the same in diameter.*

*Enjoyed a meal of my own cooking. Have a good camp. Cottonwoods between us and the river.*

*General Crook had a fight with Mad Horse and his warriors and whipped them badly so said the report that reached us here.*

*19 miles today. Weather pleasant.*

February 8, 1970
Sunday
Quang Tri Province

This is one morning when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. isn't the only one with blood shot eyes. I have a sore throat and my eyes are red as are the whole Second platoons'. No fireworks over Cam-lo last night, but we had our own exciting incident. The LT and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. have been talking about going around to each track to collect all the CS gas grenades so we don't have a replay of last night. CS gas is similar to tear gas, just boo coo stronger.

"Just don't give any CS grenades to the crew on Double Deuce," says Fanelli. In the end that's what the LT decides to do. Xin loi, Double Deuce.

We like having all the optional grenades available during guard duty at night. Thumper - that's what we call the M-79 grenade launcher each track has - is one of the most useful weapons we have. There are several types of grenades we keep in a box up on the turret. If we hear a noise or perceive some movement, we call in to the Sgt. of the guard. We are always given permission to fire off a grenade, usually a fragmentary (frag for short), at our target. The CS gas grenade and the phosphorus grenade are boo coo longer than the fragmentary grenade and the shotgun type round we typically have in our grenade box. Someone on Double Deuce really screwed up, because even in the dark you can feel the difference between the frag and the CS gas grenade. Whoever did it may have done it on purpose hoping to be sent to the rear for being an idiot. The responsible person better hope to be sent to the rear before the rest of us figure out who it was.

It's a slow morning, not because it's Sunday, but because everyone in the

Second platoon feels like crap after being gassed by Double Deuce last night. It's cloudy and overcast, and we expect rain as it’s mostly held off for the last couple of days, but it's still monsoon.

Word goes around to prepare to break camp so I bring in the trip flares and the claymores. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen. We uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5. As we slowly make our way down the hill we're on, it starts to rain lightly. Just to improve our day. The rain makes it a boo coo fun job for the guys minesweeping the trail.

We return to the Cam-lo River. When we get to the river, orders are given to line up along the river bank at about 50 foot intervals with the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times. The rain continues, so we rig a poncho like an umbrella over the TC hatch and the .50 Cal. The two other tanks follow suit. During the morning and early afternoon rain, I sit in the drivers compartment trying to nap but Our Dear Platoon Sgt., Fanelli and the loader are all crammed into the turret and talking too much for me to get a nap. I try to read one of the two books I brought, but my eyes rebel and refuse to focus enough to read. I decide to make a few entries in my journal mostly for something to do.

Day time is of course the best time for us. If we are going to get attacked we always hope it is when it's light. But of course that's rarely the case here. When it gets dark it's The Scary Time. We can't see a thing, and we're usually 3 or 4 kliks south of the Z, and we camp out at platoon strength. For the Second platoon, that ranges between 39 to 50 guys depending on how many guys are on R&R or sick or wounded or worse. If attacked, we can expect 100 to 200 well equipped NVA, so we can be outnumbered by as much as 4 to 1.

It's not a happy thought so I try to think about something else. I have been in the Nam almost a month, and I have not eaten or even seen bread here. If Fanelli's mamasan comes through at resupply it will be a welcome treat. The on and off rain makes the prospect of missing resupply a definite possibility. We hate that. But around 3 p.m. the rain stops, and the sky clears a tee tee bit. We hope the rain holds off for a while. The LT calls the rest of the Second platoon over the horn and orders us to prepare to sky to resupply to take advantage of the break in the rain. It makes it easier on the guys doing the mine sweeping, so we make better time.

We are between Cam-lo and Dong ha when we finally make our way to

the redball. There's an open area that's big enough for all three platoons to park about half a klik toward Cam-lo. Fanelli is hopeful the villagers will come to our resupply site. One of the platoons is already there when we arrive, and as we circle around, the last platoon shows up. As if on cue the resupply convoy arrives and drives into the center of the resupply site. Fanelli and the loader start putting out the concertina wire as I adjust 2-3's position to suit Our Dear Platoon Sgt.

By the time I have 2-3 positioned to his satisfaction, Fanelli is already dealing with his mamasan. I shut down 2-3's main engine and climb out and head over to the concertina wire. Lon and her brother have again accompanied Fanelli's mamasan to our resupply site. All of the villagers here appear to be in a festive mood and are still celebrating Chinese New Year. Fanelli and I are able to chat with Lon and her brother for a while. I guess Lon to be 12 to 14 years old, but it's hard to tell as the Vietnamese are typically very small. We must look like giants to them. Lon could easily be 15 or 16, but I doubt it. Her brother is probably 10 or 11, and we only assume that Fanelli's mamasan is their mother. We're pretty sure they are related in some way, but Fanelli's mamasan looks pretty old to have two young children. It's fun for us to talk to someone, anyone, not in the army, and Lon and her brother are what we would call “street smart” back in the Real World.

After more small talk and joking around, we get down to the business at hand. Evidently Fanelli is mamasan's favorite and the most reliable customer for the Ramen she usually sells. So our crew gets first crack at buying her bread. The loaves are about 6 to 7 inches long and shaped like tee tee footballs. Fanelli's mamasan, according to Lon who is translating, wants one dollar MPC for each loaf. Fanelli buys five, and as I always try to follow his example, I buy five also. The loader buys another five, and to our complete surprise, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. comes over to the concertina wire and buys five, too. Fanelli's mamasan has twenty bucks already from her first customers. She and Lon and her brother are even happier than we are. When Our Dear Platoon Sgt. leaves and heads back to 2-3, I tell Lon that she and her brother should check our burning trash pit first because I'm going to put a couple of boxes of c-rats for them on one side, away from the fire. But they need to hurry before the c-rats catch on fire and explode. Both Lon and her brother thank me, and we say goodbye. They have to move on with Fanelli's mamasan to help sell the rest of their bread.

Fanelli is the happiest I have seen him since we've met. He tells the loader

and me that he's going to show us how to make something that's number one for dinner, so forget about the hot chow they brought out on resupply. First he rummages through our c-rat stash and picks out three cans of c-rat Spiced beef and throws one to me and one to the loader. He then gets three of the tee tee cans of cheese and tosses one to each of us. We all get some C-4 and heat the Spiced beef and the cheese.

Next Fanelli instructs us and says, "Tear the loaf open, about halfway. Okay, now dump the beef into the bread pocket and pour on the cheese and eat."

It is sheer ambrosia. All three of us just scoff our beef and cheese stuffed loaf of bread as fast as we can. We have to rip open both fresh cases of c-rats to get enough Spiced beef and cheese to all have another round. This time we eat them slowly and savor them as much as possible. They are number one. Even though I don't have much money with me, I mention I should have bought more bread.

Fanelli laughs and says, "If you buy too many they get moldy boo coo fast."

Once again a good thing I followed Fanelli’s example and only bought five.

As I slowly consume my second loaf of bread with spiced beef and cheese, I tell Fanelli between bites, "This is the best thing I have eaten since being in the Nam. Number one, man, and look, there's even some caraway seeds."

At this point, Fanelli, who is sitting guard behind the .50 Cal. up on the turret, starts laughing. He almost chokes because he has his mouth full. He's laughing so hard that he almost falls backward off the turret.

Finally Fanelli manages to compose himself enough to swallow his mouthful and with his first breath blurts out, "They're not caraway seeds FNG, they're fuckin' bugs!"

Upon closer examination I see Fanelli is quite correct. I'm about half finished with my second loaf of bread, and as I finish it, the knowledge of the bugs doesn't diminish my enjoyment one bit. If it doesn't bother Fanelli, it doesn't bother me. I figure the bugs are at least well cooked, and we eat them raw often enough when they fly into our mouth. Just some added protein to our poor diet.

After we finish loading up our supplies, we make a dash over to mail call. Our dinner was such a luck out that we can hardly expect any mail. In that we respect are not disappointed as none of us on 2-3 get any mail. We saunter

back to 2-3, and I put all of our trash into the burn hole. I put two boxes of c-rats off to the side, and I'm boo coo careful not to splash any diesel fuel on them as I douse the trash with fuel to make it burn.

Lon and her brother are waiting on the other side of the concertina wire in front of 2-3 when Fanelli and the loader open the wire. I start up the main engine as we prepare to didi. Lon and her brother are the first ones inside the resupply site as we start to uncircle and line up behind 2-5 to sky. Just as we're about to didi, Lon and her brother both wave to me and each of them hold up their box of c-rats. They both have big smiles on their faces.

We drive onto the redball towards Cam-lo, and I catch a whiff of the village almost immediately. As we slowly drive through Cam-lo there's an old guy next to the road who looks like he's giving the finger to us as we drive by. I think this is one brave (or stupid) guy.

"Hey Fanelli" I ask over the intercom. "Did you see the old guy flipping us the bird?"

Fanelli laughs. "Yeah," he says. "I see him do it all the time."

When I ask him why he does it, Fanelli says the old guy is hoping we'll throw some cans of c-rats at him, and he's pretty sure some of the guys in the platoon did. Some of the guys in the platoon hate and detest all of the Vietnamese.

I have a plan for the next time we drive through Cam-lo, but for now we're about a klik west of Cam-lo and we turn off the redball towards the Cam-lo River. It's still boo coo low for monsoon, and we cross over the river and start to work our way up some hills. It's slow going because we have to mine sweep as we proceed to our RON. There aren't many open areas big enough and suitable to accommodate the whole platoon that haven't been camped on previously. But the LT manages to find a new location, so we drive in circles flattening all the vegetation. We dismount and carefully search for tunnels and booby traps. Once again we find nothing of concern, and that is number one. We hustle to get all our night defenses out before it starts raining again and just as we finish getting the tarp tied to the side of 2-3, it starts to sprinkle a tee tee bit. By the time I have my tent up, it is raining for real. When is monsoon over, I wonder again?

We put a poncho over the TC hatch and the .50 Cal. so we can all pull our stint on guard duty tonight at least partially out of the rain. Fanelli and the loader and I are all crammed inside the turret. I have to sit on some of our gear placed on top of the main gun ammo. It's not comfortable, but it is dry

and out of the rain. It gets lonely sitting by myself in the driver's compartment, and it's not that much more comfortable. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. tries out our rain umbrella while he works on his ever present bottle.

Eyes can be accustomed to the dark (or as we say “acquire night vision”) more quickly in red light, so we have both red and white interior lights inside the tank. We have the red lights on now. It adds a certain eeriness to an already eerie situation. I also have a pair of red sunglasses I made from a nice pair of gold wire rim glasses and some lenses I cut out from the driving goggles we have. I sometimes wear them just before it gets dark on the few days it isn't raining. When it's raining, which is most of the time, we sit inside the tank with the red lights on. It's most dangerous here when it's dark, so it's important to get your night vision as soon as possible. We usually try to stay up together before turning in, but it's so crowded in the turret, I head out to my tent for some shut eye. I have last shift for guard, mostly because no one else wants it. My tent is number one for keeping the rain off, but there is no netting so the mosquitoes and other bugs appreciate the dry space as well.

*April 24, 1876*
*Monday*
*Ft. Pease*

*Had a very easy guard last night. 2 hours on post.*

*Scouts (Crow Indians) came in reporting Indians close to camp. Lieut. Bradly started out immediately to find out how true the report was. He found a small trail of about a day old and they got away with our scouts ponies during last night.*

*Company building shades in front of tents. Boys again in the river boat riding. Hiller in the guard house again for missing retreat roll call this evening. Have miserable bread to eat, no yeast powder have to bake it without any and it is not fit to eat. Hard and heavy as rock.*

*Dick Cuneiform made corporal. Enlisted same time as I did.*

February 9, 1970
Monday, One month in-country
Quang Tri province

It's not raining at 6 a. m. when I finish guard duty. Even though it's past

sunrise, it's barely light because it's so gray and misty. So misty and damp it might as well be raining. Eventually it gets light enough that, despite the mist, I can see Cam-lo from our vantage point on this hill. I used to deliver newspapers early in the morning back in the Real World when I was younger. I liked listening to all the birds waking up in the morning and making their individual calls until it all blended together into a boo coo loud symphony of bird songs. There are no birds or bird songs here in the Nam, and I really miss them. No birds is probably one of the many reasons the bugs here are so insufferable.

I decide to save my bread for lunch and dinner and have a pecan roll with my morning java. I finish that with a can of fruit cocktail, and I'm ready for the day. Fanelli has some of his bread torn open and he's pouring hot c-rat cheese on it. Darn, I wish I had thought of that. I don't worry because I know my bread won't go to waste. I'll just do that at lunch.

No one tells us what we're doing most of the time, so most of us assume we're still on a guarding mission for Cam-lo. We haven't been farther than 2 kliks from Cam-lo for several days now. Orders come over the horn to prepare to didi. I bring in the trip flares and the claymores, and although I put my tent away, we still have the tarp on the side of 2-3 for some shelter from the on and off drizzle. We take it off and roll it up and finally bring in the concertina wire and take the RPG screen down and tie it all in place. We're ready to sky and slowly line up behind the LT on 2-5. We make our way down to the river at a walking pace, mine sweeping all the way. It's late morning before we get to and cross the Cam-lo River and space out about 50 feet apart along the river with orders given for the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times.

Wack stops by and invites me along over to 2-6 to see Zack and Big Al. Fanelli and the loader are working on the coax machine gun, which we usually refer to as the Little Bastard. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is working on his bottle for an early liquid lunch, so we didi mau for 2-6. Zack, Big Al and their gunner are still without a TC, and as a three man crew get even less sleep than we normally do, which isn't much to start with. Wack got some bread but Zack and Big Al didn't know anything about it, so we get to add to their misery with our tale of fresh bread with hot cheese poured over it. We don't mention the bugs, only to sustain their fantasy. I think they are about to cry, so we change the subject to their lack of a TC. Zack tells us they are supposed to have a new TC in a couple of days, so they are hopeful, but they

know better than to count on it.

It's not too long after we set up that some local villagers from Cam-lo arrive and go from track to track offering to wash clothes in the river. It's so damp today that nothing washed would dry so no one takes them up on it. After a short while they all leave. I'm ready for some lunch, but Wack is not interested in going back to 2-3 and hanging out with Our Dear Platoon Sgt., so I leave him with Zack and Big Al at 2-6.

For lunch, I plan on having some of the bread I have left. We ate all of the spiced beef, and I think of my alternatives as I saunter back to 2-3. Fanelli is having Ramen with one of his loaves of bread when I get back, so I look through our c-rat stash and decide to try the chicken with some heated cheese. I quickly heat everything with C-4 and eat. It's not quite as good as the spiced beef to be sure, but compared to the hot chow they bring out to us on resupply, it is number one. I round out my lunch with some c-rat peaches, which are also number one.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. climbs down from the turret and has me replace him behind the .50 Cal. From up here I have a good vantage point to look up and down the Cam-lo River. The water level is still low despite the continuing monsoon rains. I can tell by how far the rocky river bank extends from the water’s edge that when the river is high, we would be under water in our current position. I keep myself amused listening to the platoon's horn chatter and occasionally I get in on the conversations myself now that I know some of the guys.

If there's a crew in the Second platoon considered to be comprised of the biggest screw-ups, it would be Double Deuce. It's not Charlie Brown's fault, as TC of Double Deuce, that he's been assigned boo coo losers. But the rest of the platoon likes to tease him anyway. Xin loi, Charlie Brown. We've all pretty well recovered from our gassing the other night, but no one wants to let up on the crew of Double Deuce, especially Charlie Brown, who takes the ribbing boo coo well. Since we walk around with loaded automatic and semi-automatic weapons most of the time, ribbing has to be done with a judicious amount of caution.

I still don't know many of the guys in my platoon, mostly because no one comes over to 2-3 unless ordered to do so. We spend the rest of the afternoon guarding the river. It is still there when we didi about 3 p.m. to meet the resupply convoy. It doesn't take too long to mine sweep our way to the redball, and we turn east and head toward Cam-lo. I have something for the

old guy who gives everyone the finger when we drive through Cam-lo, so I'm counting on him being there.

The wind is blowing towards us, and the smell of Cam-lo hits me full force before I can even see it. My view out of the driver's hatch is somewhat limited, plus I sit as low as I can, thereby leaving the least amount of my head exposed. Although we wear commo helmets, they're just fiberglass and bullets would easily go right through. We finally reach Cam-lo, and we slow down to 10 to 15 mph as we proceed through the village. Water buffalo and fowl often run out into the road, and we try our best not to hit anything. Sure enough, the old guy is beside the road flipping each track the bird as they pass. I raise my seat as high as it will go so my head and upper shoulders are out of the driver's compartment. As I come up to the old guy, I flash him the Peace Sign and gently toss him a full box of c-rats making sure not to hit him with it. I'm pretty sure he gets it, but as soon as we pass him he's out of my line of sight, so I don't know for sure.

We continue through Cam-lo and head to a place about half a klik east of the village where we had resupply yesterday. Today we're the last platoon to arrive, and we circle up and take our positions in the resupply site. We hustle to get the concertina wire out and connected to the wire already set out so no locals can get into the resupply site. They have mail call, and I get two letters from friends back home. It's hard to explain how important letters from home are. Just knowing the Real World is still there and that people remember you. I'm too elated for words, because I've got mail and I still have some bread left for dinner and don't have to eat the hot chow.

Lon and her brother show up without Fanelli's mamasan. They said she couldn't get any Ramen to sell, and they already sold all the bread she made. Fanelli isn't worried yet because he still has several Ramen left in his stash. Fanelli and I decide to sort of adopt Lon and her brother as our personal charity case. We tell them we'll do the same thing we did yesterday and put some c-rats in our burn hole for them. We have a nice chat with them, but eventually we have to finish loading our supplies and re-fuel 2-3. So we let them go on their way but remind them to be in front of 2-3 when they see we're getting ready to didi.

It can be a mad rush of people running into the resupply site as we prepare to sky. We usually don't have enough time to wait for the trash fires to really get going before we have to didi and the locals know that. But they also know the cans of c-rats will eventually explode so it's a number ten situation and

quite dangerous. Some of the guys in the platoon hate the Vietnamese and urinate on their trash before starting it on fire. It makes it a tee tee bit harder to light, but if you put enough diesel fuel on everything and then get it going with some C-4, it will eventually burn.

Fanelli and I open up both new cases of c-rats we just got on resupply so we can have the last of our bread with the spiced beef and c-rat cheese. We don't even go over to the hot chow line to see what it is. Fanelli was right about not buying too much bread, as both of ours have a few spots of mold on them. We just pick the mold off and eat them anyway. Despite the mold, the bread is as good as it was yesterday. Fanelli jokes that the only reason Our Dear Platoon Sgt. bought bread is because it's boo coo herky-jerky riding on the tank up at the TC position, so if he spills some of his whiskey he can sop it up with the bread so as not to waste any.

Lon and her brother return as we get ready to didi, and I put another two boxes of c-rats in our burn hole. Everything goes just like yesterday with Lon and her brother getting the c-rats, except as we are lining up behind the LT, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. asks over the horn who lit the burn hole. Fanelli says he did. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. growls at Fanelli, because he could see Lon and her brother got stuff out of our burn hole. It's number one he doesn't know Fanelli did it on purpose. Fanelli quickly points out that the villagers were getting stuff out of all the burn holes, which they are, so Our Dear Platoon Sgt. ends his tirade. I decide we'll have to do it differently in the future.

I have been in-country for 30 days and things continue to go from bad to worse. My hope is that as Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s driver, I have hit rock bottom, and except for getting killed, it can hardly get any worse for me. We head east on the redball for about one klik and turn off at a dirt trail. We proceed slowly at a walking pace, mine sweeping our way to our RON, which is a hill from which we can see Cam-lo. We drive around in circles, but it's a previous RON and is already fairly clear of standing brush. We dismount and carefully search the site for tunnels, and nothing of concern is found. I start putting out my trip flares and claymores while Fanelli and the loader set up the RPG screen and put out the concertina wire. I set the pins on my trip flares so that if the trip wire is barely touched the flare goes off. Consequently, I set off my own trip flares just trying to get back to 2-3 sometimes.

Fanelli and the loader put the tarp on the side of 2-3 while I set up my tent

directly behind one of the tank treads. It's just starting to get dark, so while Fanelli and the loader sit in the turret with the red lights on, I get into the driver's compartment and turn on my red light and read the letters I just got today at mail call. All is well and good back in the Real World, which makes my current plight seem all the worse. But still, getting mail is number one. One month down and eleven to go if I don't get wounded or worse, killed. Eleven more months seems like an eternity, as this last month felt like a year.

When I finally have my night vision, I get out of the driver's compartment and head for my tent. When we sleep under the tarp beside 2-3, we put our heads next to the road wheels and the track. There's no telling what we drive through all day but I know I don't want to park my head next to it.

I set my tent up 5 to 10 feet behind the track and I can still smell the oil, grease and diesel fuel on 2-3 and that's enough. I'm still sleeping on the ground and I don't like it, as the down sleeping bag compacts and I might as well be sleeping directly on the dirt. The mosquitoes continue to make sleeping a challenge but exhaustion usually wins out eventually. I once again have last shift on guard duty, so I turn in hoping to get some sleep, but the mosquitoes have other plans as usual.

*May 6, 1876*
*Saturday*
*Ft. Pease*

*Our Indians horses were all stolen last night also Bob Sticks our guide's horse and pack mule. A trail of ten or twelve Sioux found this morning but they had crossed the river and got away. Two of our scouts borrowed horses from the mounted detachment and went to see if they could find stray horses and came in with two so they had a medicine dance and had a big time.*

*Two citizens came down the river in a small boat today. Expect steamboat up the river about the middle of the month.*

*River is rising rapidly. Day cloudy with an occasional shower of rain and a little cool. Indications of rain this evening.*

February 10, 1970
Tuesday
Quang Tri Province

Another guard duty for me ends at 6 a.m. It might be my imagination but I think it seems warmer than usual. Instead of being cold and wet, I feel warm and wet. I'm not sure that's an improvement, more like a noticeable change. Could it be that monsoon is nearing its end? No one here seems to know.

I start heating some water in my canteen cup to make some instant c-rat coffee. The canteen cup holds about three measuring cups of water, so I put three packets of instant coffee and three packets of non-dairy creamer in when the water boils. Three cups of java really wakes me up and gets me ready to go.

Fanelli and the loader get up and start getting ready for the day. Fanelli starts with a shave, and I stand next to him so I can see my face in his mirror to compare my three week beard with his morning beard stubble. My beard isn't very full or thick but most of the guys in the Second platoon are so young that many of them don't need to shave yet. So by comparison, my beard is awesome. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. disagrees but apparently I have turned out to be a satisfactory driver, and he's not going to send me to the rear as punishment.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has a habit of calling just about everyone “boy”, and we all resent it, especially the Brothers. We have three Brothers in the Second platoon currently: Sgt. Green, Johnson and No Jets. I don't know No Jets' real name, but I do know why he is called No Jets.

One morning he stopped by 2-3 for a reason unknown to me. After conferring with Our Dear Platoon Sgt., he was given an order to do something, and he sauntered away.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt., who was on top of the turret at the TC position, yelled after him "Double time it, Troop!"

That, in itself, is unusual, because he called him “troop” instead of “boy”. So in giving him another order, he was being technically respectful.

Maybe “technically respectful”, but not respectful enough for No Jets, who promptly stopped, turned, and asked in a disgusted tone of voice, "You see any jets on my ass!?"

We all have a good laugh, including Our Dear Platoon Sgt. He was being insubordinate (and not technically), so it's number one for No Jets that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. thought his response was funny.

To keep the fun going Fanelli, gets on the horn, "Two-Niner Tango Charlie, this is 2-3 Golf, over."

"2-3 Golf, this is Two-Niner Tango Charlie, over."

"Two-Niner Tango Charlie, was 2-7 Golf observed to have any jets on his ass when he passed Two-Niner, over?" Fanelli asks as No Jets, whose call sign is 2-7 Golf, passes.

"That's a negative, 2-3 Golf. We observed no jets on 2-7 Golf as he passed us, over," replies Two Niner Tango Charlie.

"Roger on that, Two-Niner Tango Charlie, out," says Fanelli.

The reply is the same from each track as 2-7 Golf passes. And that's how you get a nickname here in the Nam. We use the military phonetic alphabet when referring to our official radio call signs. Over the horn, my call sign is 2-3 Delta, the Delta standing for driver, while Golf stands for gunner, and Lima stands for loader. Tango Charlie stands for TC or tank commander and track commander on the P.C.s.

When addressing me face to face, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. usually calls me Wolf. But over the tank intercom he refers to me as Driver. "Turn left here, Driver." "Stop here, Driver." "Where the Hell are you going, Driver!?" Who the hell did he think would turn or stop the tank, the loader? At least he doesn't call me “boy” too often.

We are given orders to break camp and prepare to didi. I bring in my claymores and trip flares as Fanelli and the loader bring the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen. After tying the RPG screen and the concertina wire to the side of 2-3 we uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5 and we sky. We slowly head down the trail, mine sweeping our way as we head to the Cam-lo River. When we get there, we spread out with about 50 feet between all the tracks along the river bank. Orders are given for the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times.

It's mid-morning by now and it hasn't rained, but it's so humid it doesn't seem to matter. We haven't been here long and an Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) infantry company passes us by as they walk along the river heading west. I can't help noticing that they all have brand new M-16s, and their jungle fatigues look new as well. While I don't care about the new fatigues, I do mind about the M-16s when all I have is my hated .45.

Most of the guys in the Second platoon are in their twenties, but some are still in their teens, so in reality we are boys being used for men. The ARVNs are so small and young looking that while we may look like boys, the ARVNs look like tee tee kids playing soldier. War is so weird.

I complain to Fanelli about the ARVNs having new M-16s.

He just says, "Fuck the M-16s I'd rather have an AK."

We spend the rest of the morning and afternoon sitting alongside the river. Just another same-same day guarding the river. Eventually we line up behind the LT on 2-5 and sky for resupply. The river is close to the redball, so it doesn't take long to get there. Since we are east of Cam-lo, we set up for resupply where we did yesterday. The resupply convoy isn't here yet, but we put the concertina wire out. In a short time some locals from Cam-lo start to arrive.

The young boy I traded with for my slingshot is talking to Smitty. Most likely about Tiger beer. Lon and her brother arrive without Fanelli's mamasan, because they have no Ramen or bread to sell or trade. I tell them that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. saw them get their c-rats yesterday, and he will be watching today. I have an empty sand bag that I put some c-rats in. When the resupply convoy gets here, there will be a boo coo commotion unloading supplies and fueling up all the tracks. During all that commotion, I tell them, I will come over to the concertina wire and hand the sand bag to them. I only have the one sand bag, so I tell them to bring it with them when they can meet us at resupply in the future. It's boo coo dangerous getting stuff out of the burn holes when resupply is over, and Lon and her brother know that. They both smile and thank me before hand.

The resupply convoy arrives, and as we open the concertina wire to let the deuce and a halfs in, there is a swirl of dust and debris that seems to hang in the air forever. A good time to hand Lon and her brother the bag of c-rats. Especially since Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is off somewhere. Probably scoring his daily bottle. The hand-off goes without incident, and I feel boo coo better just knowing Lon and her brother won't have to brave the danger of the burning trash pits to get their c-rats. We chat briefly, but I don't want Our Dear Platoon Sgt. to get wise to the situation, so I let Lon and her brother go on their way before he returns.

Fanelli and I reluctantly decide to check out the hot chow after we finish loading our supplies and topping off 2-3's fuel tank. The hot chow is a disappointment as usual, but we have some if only to make the c-rats seem more palatable. Zack and Big Al are at the chow line, and they tell us that tomorrow at resupply their new TC should arrive. Could be number one, could be number ten if he's a Lifer like Our Dear Platoon Sgt.

Resupply ends, and the convoy heads back to base camp. We bring in the concertina wire, uncircle and line up behind the LT. I have a box of c-rats with me in the driver's compartment in case we drive through Cam-lo on our

way to the RON. We get on the redball and sky west towards Cam-lo. The sun is out for once and low in the sky, so I have to put on my red sunglasses.

Cam-lo comes into smelling distance and then into sight, and we drive through boo coo slow at about 10 mph. Even though it's more dangerous to expose myself, I put my seat up all the way so that my head and shoulders are out of the tank. There are only three tanks in the Second platoon, and I'm the only tank driver that wears red sunglasses, so if the old guy is out by the road today he should recognize me.

Sure enough, the old guy is in his usual spot by the side of the road flipping the bird to all the tracks as they pass by. Because I'm fairly far back in our procession, I can see some of the guys throwing cans of c-rats at him. As 2-3 approaches, the old guy recognizes me and does a perfect Asian type bow of respect and then flashes me the Peace Sign. I return it, and because we are going so slow I can almost hand the box of c-rats to him. But 2-3 is boo coo wide, and I don't want to run him over, so as we pass I toss it to him.

We continue through Cam-lo and drive another 2 kliks before we turn off the redball onto a dirt track. We proceed at a walk as we mine sweep to our RON. The RON site has been used before, but not for a while so we drive around a tee tee bit to flatten any of the vegetation that has recovered since the last time. Most of us dismount and search the site for tunnels or anything unusual. There's a shout from someone, and it turns out there are some tunnels here. I cannot believe how many guys are volunteering to go down in and clear them. I wouldn't go down one of these tunnels at gunpoint, so it's number one so many guys are idiots. Fanelli and I just watch and wait for the tunnels to be cleared before we set our night defenses out. We might not stay here if the tunnels system is too big and complex for us to clear. The Vietnamese are small so their tunnels are also small. Even the shortest guys in the Second platoon have to squeeze in. Glad I'm six feet tall.

The first two guys who attempt to enter the tunnel are too big and can't even get all the way in. The bottom of the pit we found has a small tunnel at 90 degrees to the pit which is only about 2 feet wide. The next volunteer is short and wiry and he manages to get in the tunnel. The Vietnamese are known for their elaborate tunnel systems. There are dead ends, hidden passages and booby traps. It gets pretty tense as we wait for a sitrep from our tunnel rat, as we refer to the guys brave or stupid enough to enter the tunnels. The tunnel entry is near what will be the center of the RON if we stay here. The medic track and mortar track are both standing nearby waiting, like us,

for a decision by the LT and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. about our RON.

I don't think I've ever seen the LT and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. standing side by side. They usually communicate over the horn, as I'm quite sure they don't like each other. That's a safe bet because I don't know anyone in the platoon that likes Our Dear Platoon Sgt. and vice versa.

While Fanelli and I standby watching the tunnel situation unfold, Doc comes over to chat. He and the mortar crew are extra anxious about the tunnels, because they will be set up right next to them if we stay here. It's getting near 6 p.m. and is going to be dark soon. Fanelli has a nervous look on his face that I have never seen, so I know this is a time to worry.

While we nervously wait, Doc mentions to me that he's saving a broken stretcher for me, so that after we set up tonight, wherever that may be, I can come over to the medic track and get it. I thank him, and he heads back to his track. Despite our current turmoil, I realize I won't have to sleep directly on the ground tonight. Fanelli makes it clear to me that he doesn't want to stay here tonight. He's worried the tunnel rats will miss a hidden passage and thinks we should didi. If I were in charge, that would be all I would need to hear to move to a different RON. But I am not in charge, so we wait.

In the end we stay, and Fanelli is upset to say the least. We head back to 2-3 with Our Dear Platoon Sgt.

Fanelli pleads his case but Our Dear Platoon Sgt. says, "It's the LT's call so yer wastin' yer breath, Fanelli."

When we get back, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. relieves the loader, who was manning the .50 Cal. while the tunnels were explored. He helps Fanelli and I put out our night defenses, and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. helps himself to his evening sundowner.

I sense from Fanelli that we are in a more dangerous place than usual, so I take extra care putting out the claymores and the trip flares. When I finish, Fanelli and the loader are done putting out the concertina wire and setting up the RPG screen. They start tying the tarp to the side of 2-3, and I walk over to the medics track to get my stretcher. The mortar crew is still digging their pit, because like everyone in the platoon, they got a late start setting up as a result of the tunnels. It's getting dark, so I thank Doc again for the stretcher and sky back to 2-3. I set my tent up in the last remaining light.

Now is The Scary Time, and the dark lasts for 12 hours every night here in the tropics. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. and Fanelli and the loader and myself are crammed in the turret, so I'm sitting on

the main gun ammo. We have the red light on getting our night vision. Maybe it's the red light, but I think Fanelli looks especially nervous tonight, and I ask him why?

Fanelli says, "When I got to Nam it was the dry season. At night all the P.C. crews left the rear ramp down. Sometimes the top covers were off for maximum ventilation in the heat. The P.C. crews slept in the P.C.s when not on guard duty. One night, we unknowingly set up the RON over a tunnel system. Later that night when I was on guard behind the .50 Cal., there was an explosion in the RON. When I looked over, I could see one of the P.C.s on the other side of the RON on fire. Just moments later, the P.C. next to it exploded into flames. Then the ammo stored in the first P.C. on fire started to go off. In the light of the burning and exploding P.C.s I could see someone running inside the RON, coming towards me. He ran past one of the other tanks, and that's when I was able to make out that it wasn't someone from the Second platoon. When the next P.C. exploded into flames, I realized this guy was throwing satchel charges into the open P.C.s as he ran by. It was still dark, and while somewhat illuminated by the three burning and exploding P.C.s., I knew it would be next to impossible to shoot this guy in the dark with my .45. I was thinking I was going to have to swing the turret of 2-3 around and start shooting up the inside of the RON with the coax or the .50 Cal. I was already sick about the situation, and then to have to start shooting up the inside of the RON with either the coax or the .50 Cal. would mean even more guys in the platoon would be killed or wounded. This time by friendly fire. Just when I was about to swing the turret around, someone shot the satchel charge guy. He had apparently just pulled the pin on his last satchel charge, and he was blown to tee tee bits by it. That's pretty much what happened to the guys in the P.C.s that were blown up. That's why no one is supposed to sleep in the P.C.s anymore."

"Thanks for the number ten bed time story, Fanelli," I say. "I know I won't be sleeping tonight."

"Ya think I'm sleeping tonight?" He asks.

"Nah, I guess not," I answer.

I leave Fanelli and the loader in the turret and climb off 2-3 and into my tent onto my newly acquired stretcher. It is most comfortable compared to the ground. But I can't sleep while thinking about the tunnels and Fanelli's story. As I lay awake with the bugs swirling and buzzing around my face, I am a tee tee bit comfortable at least.

*May 7, 1876*
*Sunday*
*Ft. Pease*

*Today very pleasant several of us went down the river to get wood. Everything indicates the near approach of Spring. Leaves coming out and some few flowers can be seen in the woods.*

*Detailed for guard tonight. H and A Company with supply train are expected today or tomorrow. A scouting party leaves tonight with two men out of each company. Volunteers from our Co., Clark and Hastings. Do not think Hastings would amount to much should they happen to get in a fight.*

*Although today is Sunday it does not seem so as one day here is the same as the other. I sadly miss the ring of church bells and many other things I would take pages to tell of.*

*River lowered considerable last night. Lieut. Bradly goes in charge of the party tonight as his detachment is the largest part of it.*

February 11, 1970
Wednesday
Quang Tri Province

When the loader wakes me at 4 a.m., it feels like I had just finally dozed off. I couldn't stop thinking about the tunnels, and if Fanelli is worried then I'm worried. First time I made sure I could put my hand on my hated .45 in my tent in the dark. I hate that.

On guard duty behind the .50 Cal. I have to call in my sitreps every 15 minutes over the horn to the LT's track, as do all the guys on guard.

When my turn comes, the Sgt. of the guard calls over the horn, "2-3, what's your sitrep, over?"

I call back to the Sgt. of the guard, "This is 2-3 Delta, sitrep, negative, over."

The reply from the Sgt. of the guard is, "Roger, 2-3 Delta, out."

If someone falls asleep on guard it won't be longer than 15 minutes before they are found out.

Guard ends at 6 a.m., and I get my morning canteen cup of coffee started by heating up some water with C-4. Fanelli and the loader stay in their

sleeping bags until 6:30 a.m., and I can tell when they get up that neither of them got any sleep last night. We are a total mess as we go about our morning routines this morning.

Eventually word is given to start to break camp and prepare to didi. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader attend to the concertina wire and the RPG screen. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. attends to his bottle as he sits up on the turret waiting for us to finish. We uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5 and slowly make our way towards the Cam-lo River, mine sweeping as we go.

When we get to the river we are west of Cam-lo, and we can see the company of ARVNs that passed us yesterday while we were guarding the Cam-lo River. Over the horn we are informed we will be doing a support operation with the ARVNs today, so we join up with the company of ARVN infantry.

The LT confers for a tee tee while with the CO of the ARVNs before we prepare to move out. We have all of our tanks and P.C.s lined up facing west and spaced about 25 feet apart. Then we proceed in as straight a line as we can maintain with some of the ARVNs spaced between the tracks, but most of them bringing up the rear. We try to stay in a straight line, but we are driving through an area of small trees and short scrub. Our forward view is fairly clear so we're not too concerned about an ambush, but it's hard to stay lined up as we move between trees and other obstacles. Spread out like we are is boo coo more dangerous, because even though we are all breaking brush, we could still hit a land mine, and all the ARVNs walking between the tracks could also step on a mine. We are usually boo coo careful when we proceed into unknown areas. I'm really concerned that we are just crashing through this place and not mine sweeping. We continue moving west along the Cam-lo River through an area just south of the river for the rest of the morning.

Around noon, we halt our forward movement and are told to break for lunch. The ARVNs are nearby, and they have lunch as well. We can't help but notice that the ARVNs not only have brand new M-16s, but they also have long range patrol rations (LRPs), which are freeze dried packets of food. While Fanelli doesn't care about the M-16s, he does care about the LRPs. We can't get LRPs on resupply when we try to order some. We can't even get them on the Black Market, so both Fanelli and I are upset. We have to console ourselves by the fact that the ARVNs may have LRPs, but they don't

have any C-4, so they have to heat up the water for their LRPs with heat tabs. Yuck!

There is a downside to LRPs. You can't eat them cold like c-rats. That's not our preference, but when we don't have time to even heat them with C-4, we can eat them cold. I usually keep a couple of boxes of c-rats in the driver's compartment. When we're just stopping and going and stopping and going and sitting still for extended periods, I can snack on them in a pinch. Fanelli still has Ramen, so that's what he has for lunch, I have my usual, c-rats.

After lunch we and the ARVNs move out again. I don't like how we're positioned with the tanks and the P.C.s abreast in a fairly straight line moving forward at a walking pace. We are going a tee tee bit slower than we were this morning, but we're still moving through way too fast to see anything in time to react. Well, to react properly. Higher said we are supporting the ARVN operation but for the most part we're in the lead, hardly what I'd call support. The ARVN infantry mostly follow us with a few walking in between the tanks and P.C.s but being careful to not get in front of us. That's actually boo coo wise, as I myself don't like to be in front of the .50 Cal., and that's not to mention the 105 mm main gun on the tanks.

This is the most dangerous operation I have been on since being Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s driver. In order to see where I'm going while driving this M-48, I have to sit with my seat all the way up so that my head and shoulders are out of the driver's compartment. I am exposed on both sides and in front. Even though I'm driving with my hated .45 sitting on my lap, it's hardly a comfort. I can hear several of the other track drivers complaining over the horn about our plight and wanting to know why the ARVNs aren't in front of us. Either the LT isn't listening, or he just isn't answering, but every time we stop or slow down, so do the ARVNs. It turns out to be a trying afternoon for all of the track drivers, and we are all relieved when our “support” operation ends later in the afternoon.

We leave the ARVNs at the Cam-lo River, and we line up single file behind the LT on 2-5 and sky for the redball, mine sweeping as we go. It's not far to the redball, and we head east towards Cam-lo with the LT still in the lead. It hasn't rained yet today, so that means it's even more likely to rain today sometime. It's been a gray day with boo coo high humidity so everything is damp or wet, including us.

Before we get to Cam-lo we pull off the redball at a large open area we have used for resupply often. After we circle up and start putting out the

concertina wire, I can smell Cam-lo. It's an interesting aroma that is acrid and smoky, where water buffalo piss, chicken crap, and human waste odors combine for a heady stench that is not soon forgotten, if ever. It's not long before the other two platoons are all in position and the resupply convoy arrives and pulls into the center of the site.

The local villagers from Cam-lo also start to arrive, including Lon and her brother. They remembered to bring the sand bag I gave them yesterday, and they hand it to me over the concertina wire. Fanelli comes over and we chat and joke around with them. While Fanelli continues to chat with them, I go over to 2-3 and start to put some c-rats in the sand bag while Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is busy with resupply. I'm not sure that we'll be around Cam-lo for resupply for a while, so I put some of our extra c-rat fruit and main meals along with the two full c-rat meal boxes into the sand bag. It's boo coo heavy, so I lug it over to the concertina wire before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns. I'm really worried about how heavy the bag is, but Lon and her brother show no concern and say they will drag it if they have to. They are so small, they very well may have to drag it, at least part way. They both thank Fanelli and me, and because they have boo coo to carry, they didi for Cam-lo.

I decide to check out the hot chow after going to mail call. Mail call, as usual, turns out to be a wait for nothing, but that is something at which we are expert. I saunter over to the hot chow line, and I catch up with Big Al and Zack. They introduce me to their new TC, Steve, a Spec 5. Steve's not a Lifer, so Big Al and Zack are relieved, plus they're a four man crew and might get a tee tee bit more sleep now. (Not if Fanelli tells them any bed time stories though.)

The hot chow, as always, is horrid. Since 2-6 is on the other side of the RON, I sky to 2-3 when Zack, Big Al and Steve didi for 2-6. Fanelli still has Ramen, so he didn't have to suffer the hot chow. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. isn't at 2-3 when we're ready to didi, and Fanelli tells me he went back to base camp with the resupply convoy.

Fanelli jokes, "His whiskey connection must have failed so he pulled some Lifer strings so he could go to the rear where there is boo coo juice."

It slowly dawns on me that now I'm in a three man crew situation until Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns. And except for guard duty, we won't miss him.

Fanelli gets up on the turret at the TC position and talks me back as we uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5. The rain that had been holding off all day now starts. If it continues, setting up our night defenses should be

even more fun. Fanelli is boo coo chatty with me over the intercom compared to Our Dear Platoon Sgt. Plus, he calls me "Wolf" and not "Driver." The LT heads west on the redball, and we follow. We go past the turn off where we stayed last night, and Fanelli and I both let out a sigh of relief even though it will be harder to set up somewhere new, especially in the rain if it continues. We hope there will be no tunnels.

After about a klik further, the LT turns off the redball and we mine sweep at a walking pace for a short while. Since the area is fairly clear of brush, the order is given to just circle up. We dismount and go over the area more closely than in the past. It's still raining a tee tee bit, but we finally clear the area and start putting put our night defenses out. I put out the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader put the concertina wire out and then the RPG screen. We get the tarp tied to the side of 2-3 and rig our poncho over the TC position and the .50 Cal. to keep our guard position a tee tee bit dry. Finally I set up my tent just behind 2-3, and we are ready in the same amount of time it usually takes us even without Our Dear Platoon Sgt. The only thing he does while we set up is lift and tip his bottle.

We decide on guard shifts, and I volunteer to take the last shift so Fanelli and the loader just have to decide who will be first and second. The loader is sitting behind the .50 Cal. while Fanelli and I are in the turret which seems spacious with Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s absence. We have the red lights on. None of us slept much last night, and although we all plan to stay up till midnight, I keep nodding off as I sit on the loader's seat leaning my back against the inside of the turret wall. It isn't comfortable at all, but I am so tired I could sleep standing up. We take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. for one hour shifts until midnight while the two of us in the turret nod in and out of sleep while we try to stay awake. At midnight I crawl out to my tent, and even with all the bugs swirling around I fall fast asleep.

*May 12, 1876*
*Friday*
*Camp Buffalo*

*Broke camp this morning traveled along the river bottom several miles then struck across the hills. Prickly pear, Sage brush plenty in some places. The pears were so thick we could scarcely walk. We could get no water from the time we left camp until we left the dry table land and touched the river*

*where we camped.*

*Having marched 20 miles we were all very tired. E Co. came in after we did with half a dozen deer which they had killed. Buffalo, large herds of them on both sides of the river a mile or two from here. Game of every kind around us.*

*Day very pleasant. Orders to carry overcoats after today. Appearances of rain.*

*Country splendid on the other side of river.*

*Two Sioux within 100 yards of camp last night. The guide found the trail this morning. Supposed they were trying to steal horses.*

*On guard tonight.*

February 12, 1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province

The next thing I know, Fanelli is waking me up at 4 a.m. for my turn at guard. The three tank crews in the Second platoon are sort of like orphans in that most of the platoon members are 11 Bravo, which is infantry, while us tankers are 11 Echo or armor. So they treat us like we're dog robbers. Especially Fanelli and me because we crew for Our Dear Platoon Sgt. (as if we want to).

First off, the P.C. crews are jealous because they have to dig foxholes most days, and the tank crews don't. But secondly, I didn't realize how much crewing for Our Dear Platoon Sgt. kept us from being assigned to number ten details until he didi maus for the rear.

Yesterday one of the tank platoons had one of their tanks hit a bomb rigged as a land mine. So today, the three tanks of the Second platoon are being sent to look for the remains. Fanelli and I think this is total insanity. Our acting platoon Sgt., 2-5 Tango Charlie, is sending us where one tank crew was already blown to tee tee bits. We hate that!

Our crew on 2-3 is short one guy. On 2-6, one of the other tanks, this is the new TCs first full day in the field. This is a dangerous mission, and the acting platoon Sgt. knows this. That's why he's sending the tanks only. The tanks can definitely take a small land mine without any serious crew injuries, but the P.C.s are very light duty and some of the P.C. mine related injuries are from being blown high into the air. The injuries usually occur when they hit

the ground. We tankers worry very little about hitting small land mines, as they make minimal damage to an M-48A3. M-48s tip the scales at about 50 tons (depending on how much ammo we are carrying), so mines usually just damage the track. But if we hit a bomb, that's more than serious, it's fatal.

The day started out as usual, but without Our Dear Platoon Sgt. being present, so things were going smoothly with none of the cussing and growling we are used to. The four hours of sleep I got almost rejuvenated me, but my canteen cupful of java has to have helped a tee tee bit. While we were having our usual c-rat breakfast, we heard for the first time about the tank from another platoon hitting the bomb over the horn.

I take my tent down and stow it, and then I start bringing in the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen. The three tanks pull out of our positions in the RON, and we drive slowly out leaving the P.C.s and their crews. We on 2-3 are in the lead because Fanelli, who is acting TC on 2-3, is the only one of the three tank TCs who actually knows where we're supposed to go.

Because we are short one crewman, they assign Wack to 2-3, and he take turns with the loader to mine sweep for our mission. The scary part is we don't know for sure if we can detect a rigged bomb with our mine sweeping equipment, which are just metal detectors. The bomb can be fairly remote from the detonator because they use unexploded 500 lb and 750 lb bombs. The VC or NVA leave the bombs wherever they find them and rig a detonator to it. You don't have to be real close to a 500 lb or 750 lb bomb to get killed when it explodes.

At a walking pace, it's slow going to the area we're supposed to search for remains. Doc gave us some body bags, should we actually find anything. It takes us until almost noon to get to the search area. It is an unbelievable sight. High rolling hills devoid of any vegetation and pock marked with boo coo bomb craters. I have no idea how we can drive around much without sliding down into one. As it may be our last meal, we decide to have lunch before we proceed any further.

If this search area isn't actually in the Z, it's so close it doesn't matter. The whole place has been fiercely fought over by the look of it. It's scary with just the three tanks here and not the whole Second platoon.

We all have c-rats for lunch, except for Fanelli, who has his usual Ramen. Wack is impressed with our c-rat assortment due mostly to the fact that Fanelli and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. rarely eat them. We have all three tanks set

up in a tee tee circle with the main guns facing out, sort of a mini-RON. We have a chance to socialize while we eat lunch. Wack, being good friends with Zack and Big Al, gets to meet Steve, the new TC on 2-6.

We decide to take an attitude check before we continue on our mission.

"Attitude check!" says Wack

We all reply, "Fuck it!" in unison.

Now, I think, I am starting to get it. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. may or may not have been out of whiskey, but he surely would have known about this mission. That's probably the real reason he went to the rear and basically ran out on us. I'd rather have Wack here anyway. Xin loi, Wack.

After a leisurely and satisfying lunch of c-rats for us and Ramen for Fanelli, we prepare to search for remains. (I lie of course about the leisurely and satisfying part, except for Fanelli who was satisfied with the Ramen.)

We're really not quite sure what to do. Not about finding remains, but about not finding bombs by accidentally detonating them. Using unexploded bombs for a mine is something new to us, and we have had zero, I repeat, zero training or information on procedures for locating or dealing with one if located. We definitely don't want to walk around here at all. The whole area is so pock marked with bomb craters, there are very few places to walk and even less to drive a tank on. It makes a very easy place to set mines out effectively. We really hate that!

Wack starts out sweeping in front of 2-3, and he does it like it's his religion. He and the loader have been taking turns mine sweeping on our way here while Fanelli is at the TC position and I drive. Now that we are looking for bombs, Wack is the only one mine sweeping as he is our best mine sweeper. When you are a mine sweeper you are either boo coo good or you are boo coo dead. Wack is really boo coo good which is number one for us and him. We go boo coo slow as we proceed with our conga line of three tanks. We let ourselves space out as far apart as we think a bomb would be lethal. Xin loi, guys.

The other two tank drivers and I are not excited about taking our turn leading the way, but we do. We spot something that could be part of the blown up tank we're looking for. After a half an hour of slowly working our way toward it, we can see it's part of a tank’s turret. It's actually most of it, but the main gun is not with it, nor is the entire hull, which weighs about 40 tons. We don't want to walk around the turret, as Charlie would expect us to come and at least have a look. It's sitting right side up so we can't see inside

unless we flip it over. It probably weighs about 10 tons. We don't really want to see what, if anything, is inside. Although we have tow cables and could pull the turret over, it would be boo coo difficult, and we risk sliding down into a bomb crater doing it. It could also be booby trapped.

We decide we have found all we will find, and if we don't start back soon, we will be out here in the dark without the rest of the Second platoon. We would hate that. Too scary to think about, so we start to make our way back driving exactly in the tracks we made getting here as if it were also our religion. It's a tee tee bit faster going back, because we don't have to mine sweep. But we have to carefully drive exactly in the tracks we made on the way here. We chat over the horn between the three tanks, and we're wondering out loud about whether the tank was blown up by a 500 lb bomb or a 750 lb bomb. Fanelli comes on the horn, and since he has done search missions such as this before, pronounces the bomb in question to be 500 lbs.

"Fanelli, how do you know that?" I ask.

Fanelli just says, "Because we found the turret."

We are boo coo glad to be heading back and can't get out of this place fast enough to suit any of us. We joke with Steve, the new TC on 2-6, how he shouldn't get the wrong idea because of his first full day in the field with the Second platoon.

"It's usually not this bad," I tell him, "It's usually boo coo worse!" Especially when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is with us.

We eventually meet up with the rest of the Second platoon, who apparently spent the day waiting for us to complete our mission so we can all sky for resupply. Some guys have all the luck, and I'm not talking about the tank crews. Although I would guess we used up a boo coo amount of our base load of luck today. I wonder sometimes just how much luck does one get? Around here it appears that not everyone gets the same amount.

We make our way to the redball going single file as usual following the LT on 2-5. When we get on the redball we head east towards Cam-lo, but before we actually get to Cam-lo we pull off into the same area where we had resupply yesterday.

It's been warmer the last few days, but still humid and damp when it's not raining. When does monsoon end? The other two platoons arrive, and we form up into a boo coo huge circle consisting of about 30 track vehicles with the resupply convoy positioned in the center. Fanelli guides me into position over the intercom while the loader puts out the concertina wire and connects

it up with the crews on each side of us. 2-3 needs a lot of diesel fuel because of all driving up and down all day on our mission.

The resupply site is so huge we worry whether Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother will be able to find us. After a tee tee while, Lon's brother shows up. No Lon and no Fanelli's mamasan. We realize now that it is Lon who does most of the talking and translating. Although we can chat with Lon's brother a tee tee bit, we can't figure out his name. He can communicate better than Fanelli's mamasan, but not as well as Lon. He did bring the empty sand bag, and he hands it to me over the concertina wire. While he and Fanelli continue to chat I walk over to 2-3 to put some c-rats in it. We are overflowing with extra c-rats with Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s absence adding to it. I have to say that I too have rarely seen him eat c-rats. Maybe he eats when we're driving around. From my position in the tank I can't see the rest of the crew.

Because Lon's brother is by himself, I don't fill the bag too full, but I put two full c-rat meal boxes and several assorted cans in. Johnson hasn't been around for the Ham and Eggs, so I put a couple of those in as well. I pick the bag up and give it a heft and realize it's pretty heavy, but I think he can carry it. I head back to the wire and pass it over to him. Fanelli has run out of things to talk to him about, and Lon's brother has to carry the sand bag back to Cam-lo by himself, so he didis.

Being a three man crew, we have to get going on our resupply duties so Fanelli and I walk back to 2-3 to finish stowing our supplies. We head to mail call, and we all get nothing. Fanelli heads back to 2-3 for a Ramen dinner while the loader and I reluctantly head to the hot chow. No mail is always a boo coo big disappointment but not as big a disappointment as the hot chow. No ice either, so everything we drink is warm. When the loader and I return to 2-3, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is back. I can tell by his breath that if he went to the rear to score some whiskey, he was successful. It suddenly strikes me as to how small he is, not much bigger than the Vietnamese. He doesn't walk around on the ground much. Usually he stays up in the TC position or walks around on the top of the tank when he's not too loaded.

We finish with our resupply duties and prepare to didi. Because the resupply site is so huge, there is a mad rush of civilian locals into the center of the site as soon as we pull in the concertina wire. They all run to the burning trash pits and start pulling stuff out as we sky. We follow the LT on 2-5 on the redball towards Cam-lo, and the smell of Cam-lo is soon upon us.

When we get to Cam-lo, we slow down to 10 mph and drive through. The old guy is at his spot by the side of the road giving every track in the platoon the finger.

Because he doesn't want me to miss him, Fanelli comes on the intercom and says. "Hey, Wolf, yer guy is on the side of the road."

I see him right away myself, and I have my seat all the way up and my red sunglasses on and a box of c-rats at the ready. He is giving each passing track the finger, but when he sees me, he gives me a big smile and flashes me the Peace Sign which I return. As we slowly pass by, I toss him the box of c-rats. War is weird.

We drive about a klik east of Cam-lo before we pull off the redball on a dirt trail and slowly proceed as we mine sweep our way to our RON. We drive around to flatten everything and park the tracks in position and then most of us dismount and search for tunnels. We find none and both Fanelli and I are relieved. I attend to the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader put out the concertina wire and set up the RPG screen. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. attends to his sundowner. Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3, and I set up my tent and put my stretcher inside it. Being off the ground when I sleep is a definite improvement in my sleeping arrangement.

We have all four crewman for guard tonight and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. takes the first shift. I, as usual, have the last shift. It's been raining lightly since resupply, so we're all in the tank with the red lights on. I'm in the driver's compartment, because it's too crowded in the turret, and I can hear Fanelli and the loader talking but not very well. I write a couple of letters to send to my friends back in the Real World and then make a few entries in my journal. It's been dark for a couple hours, and since I had so little sleep last night, I climb out of the driver's compartment and get into my tent for some shuteye. Of course the mosquitoes and the other bugs think otherwise.

*May 13, 1876*
*Saturday*
*Camp Buffalo*

*Do not move today rain last night but as I had rubber blankets did not get wet. Was on picket post No. 1 which was among the brush and was so dark we could hardly see our hand before our eyes. River raising rapidly.*

*Commenced making me a straw hat out of cottonwood bark. Day pleasant. Indication of rain.*

*Drew my ration of flour and went to baking slapjacks. Hunters out after game of which plenty is coming in now.*

February 13, 1970
Friday the 13th
Quang Tri Province

I am not a superstitious kind of guy, but when you are 2 or 3 kliks south of the Z on Friday the 13th, it makes you a tee tee bit more cautious, if that is possible. When you're on High Alert, most of the time being cautious goes without saying. When I finish my stint at guard duty, it is starting to get light but is not sun-up yet. Not that I expect to actually see the sun, as it is gray and overcast and looks like rain sooner or later. I heat up some water in my canteen cup to make some c-rat coffee, and before the water even boils there are bugs floating in it. Probably attracted to the bright flame of the burning C-4.

It starts to get noisy in the RON as the last shift of guards start making their breakfasts, and it's best to get up before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. goes around growling at any malingerers he finds. He's especially grouchy in the morning before he's had his morning bracer. With the return of Our Dear Platoon Sgt., Fanelli and I are joking around.

He says to me, "Just like old times."

Making sure Our Dear Platoon Sgt. can't hear me, I reply, "As long as there are boo coo big screw-ups, like the crew on Double Deuce, we can try to stay on his good side. If he has one, which I doubt."

"Were you talkin' to me, Fanelli?" asks Our Dear Platoon Sgt.

"Nah, Sarge. I was talkin' to Wolf, " answers Fanelli as he smiles at me.

We get two cases of c-rats per day, and we don't eat it all. So we have what we call our “treasure chest”. All our “good” cans of c-rats out of the open meal boxes are put in there so we can burn all the cardboard boxes they come packaged in. We keep all the cans of fruit and of course the pound cake and the pecan rolls. We either give away or throw away the Ham and Eggs and the Ham Slices with Lima beans. Our treasure chest is just overflowing with extra c-rats, even with what we give away to Lon and her brother. I try to think of what I want to try to trade for. I also have several cartons of

cigarettes and chewing tobacco, which might be useful for bartering. Maybe, I think, I can get some Cokes from the locals instead of buying them at resupply.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. says we are going to base camp tomorrow, which is Saturday. I've been in the field for less than a month, but it will feel number one to sleep in a bed. Maybe a hot shower and maybe even stay dry for a couple of days. Maybe, but probably not.

The morning goes as usual, and at 9 a.m. orders come over the horn to prepare to break camp. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen, and tie it all to the side of 2-3.

Apparently no one in the army is superstitious, or they would have us spend Friday the 13th in the rear instead of the field. We slowly uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5, and we slowly make our way back to the redball at a walking pace, mine sweeping as we go. We are being watched, as the guys mine sweeping find a land mine in our path of travel.

The real reason we carry boo coo amounts of C-4 explosives with us is not to heat up our c-rats. It's to use to clear any land mines we locate while mine sweeping. There is none of the digging around in the ground with a bayonet with your fingers crossed for luck like in the war movies. We just put a wad of C-4 near the mine, and when we detonate the C-4, the mine explodes as well. The mine sweepers set a C-4 charge, take cover, and clear the mine. We continue on our way at a walking pace and find several more mines. We really are being watched. We hate that, especially on Friday the 13th.

We make it to the redball a tee tee bit east of Cam-lo, and we drive a short distance west towards the village before we pull off at a trail that leads to the river. Because of all the land mines found earlier, we mine sweep like it's our religion until we reach the Cam-lo River. Fortunately, we find no more land mines. The LT gives orders to space out at 50 foot intervals and the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times.

It's late morning before it finally starts to rain. It's Friday the 13th, why wouldn't it rain? Fanelli and I rig the poncho over the .50 Cal. to try to keep us a tee tee bit dry.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. seems in unusually high spirits. He says we will be at base camp for five days to turn in our M-48s and to have some training on the new Sheridan tanks. His high spirit level may be from the liquid spirits he consumed for his breakfast. Fanelli and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. are more

excited about some R&R at base camp than they are about giving up the M-48s for a new (and unproven in combat) Sheridan tank. We take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. guarding the Cam-lo River. When the order is given to prepare to didi for resupply, the Cam-lo River is still here, so we did our job.

Because it's Friday the 13th and because we know we are being watched after all the land mines we found and cleared this morning, we are being boo coo cautious as we mine sweep our way back to the redball. We make it to the redball without incident, or at least without finding anymore land mines. For Friday the 13th, that is number one.

We head west toward Cam-lo to where we had resupply yesterday. It has stopped raining and there is a slight breeze blowing east, so when we get to the resupply site we can smell Cam-lo even though we can't see it. There are two deuce and a halfs for the convoy that bring the supplies out. One with the hot chow and the other with all the supplies we ordered this morning.

All three platoons are set up, so the resupply site is boo coo huge, bigger than two football fields side by side. Today there is a circus-like atmosphere for some reason. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. directs me into position, and when he is satisfied I shut the main engine down and climb out of the driver's compartment. Fanelli and I put out the concertina wire, and as we finish, Lon's brother shows up with Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy. No Fanelli's mamasan and no Lon today. Lon's brother seems nervous for some reason, and Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy nudges him and says something to him in Vietnamese that we don't understand. Finally, after chatting a while, he hands me the empty sand bag.

As he passes me the bag, he pleads, "Please, no more Ham and Eggs!"

Fanelli and I just about die laughing. Since Lon isn't here to translate, we're not sure whether or not we're freaking him out with our laughter. Fanelli didn't even know I was giving them the Ham and Eggs, and it makes him laugh until he almost cries.

I feel so bad that when I fill the sand bag with c-rats, I put some pound cakes and pecan rolls in with the c-rat meal boxes. Fanelli is still chatting with Lon's brother when I return with the full sand bag. It is boo coo heavy, but I think Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy is going to help him. While we chat, Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy takes out a small bottle of green liquid with a small stopper. He takes the stopper out of the bottle and swipes it across his upper lip.

"Why did you do that?" I ask him. After re-moistening the stopper, he

offers it to me. From the smell, it's some sort of liquid menthol. When I give my upper lip a swipe, it is similar to inhaling Vick's Vaporub from back in the Real World. I can tell this stuff is boo coo strong, and it's a good thing I have a mustache to protect my lip from actual contact with the oil. I quickly realize this stuff could be boo coo useful with all the strong aromas wafting from Cam-lo and from all the guys farting near non-stop in the Second platoon. I give Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy a carton of Salem's and he gives me five tee tee bottles of the liquid menthol.

"Man, Wolf, you're dinky dao if you use that stuff, " says Fanelli.

Fanelli thinks I am dinky dao anyway. I'm still leery about trading cigarettes with children, especially when Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy smokes openly. I guess him to be 11 or 12 years old. He shows me how to put a tee tee bit - and I mean a tee tee bit - of the menthol oil on my eyelids. Very cool and soothing, but if you put on too much, oh man does it ever burn. My first eyelid goes fine and it feels number one, so I put some on my other eyelid, but I didn't realize how critical it is to not put on too much. Wow, what a mistake! It feels like a sharp stick in the eye, only it lasts longer. Fanelli is probably right about me being dinky dao.

We think we make it clear to Lon's brother that we won't be around for at least five days, but we're not sure. We're probably breaking Regs by telling any of the locals what we're up to. As if we ever know what we're up to. I'm half out of it with my stick in the eye, and Fanelli is just about laughed out after the Ham and Eggs snafu, so Lon's brother and Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy didi.

Fanelli and I sky back to 2-3. Fanelli, as usual, starts heating water to make his Ramen while the loader and I head over to check out the hot chow on Friday the 13th. What were we thinking? It's usually horrid, but today it is ghastly. The KPs are understandably nervous when most of the Second platoon go through the chow line with their loaded weapons. Everyone is on edge. It's Friday the 13th. We're 3 kliks south of the Z, and it will be dark and The Scary Time boo coo soon.

And soon it's time to go. The deuce and a halfs didi mau for base camp, and the Second platoon uncircles and lines up behind the LT on 2-5 to sky for our RON. We head east on the redball toward Dong ha, where base camp is. When the LT pulls off the redball onto a trail, we start to mine sweep. We don't go far and the LT orders the Second platoon to drive in circles around the site until everything is flattened. We dismount and scour the area for

tunnels. Tonight, Friday the 13th, we find nothing. That is number one. I attend to the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader put out the concertina wire and set up the RPG screen. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. attends to emptying the bottle he has with him up on the turret.

Yeah, I think, just like Fanelli likes to say - Just like old times.

Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3, and I set up my tent behind the track on one side. It's not dark yet, and we are ready for The Scary Time on Friday the 13th. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has first shift on guard duty, and I have last. Just like old times.

*May 14, 1876*
*Sunday*
*Camp Alarm*

*Broke camp this morning at quarter to eight o'clock and kept along the bottom for nine miles and then struck across the hills. Very few Prickly pear on the march today. We also came to a beautiful spring where we all had a good drink and felt much refreshed. Made camp 5 o'clock pm. Was all very tired have a very good camp. Water and wood plenty. Day warm.*

*This evening we are going to have a heavy thunderstorm. Here I will have to stop for it is beginning to rain so will have to fix tent.*

February 14, 1970
Saturday, Valentine’s Day
Quang Tri Province

I'm up at 4 a.m. for my shift at guard duty. It rained quite a bit last night and while my tent kept me dry, the rain caused a hoard of insects to seek shelter with me. We were doubly nervous last night, it being Friday the 13th. It would hardly be considered ironic being attacked just before going to the rear for five days. Last night was uneventful, and we are all relieved.

Today is Valentine's Day. Not a typical same-same day in that we go to base camp at Dong ha sometime today. But there will be no candle-lit dinners with girlfriends or wives for any members of the Second platoon. Heck, there won't even be Valentine's cards or boxes of chocolates for the Second platoon.

It's not full light at 6 a.m. when guard duty ends, but it has stopped raining.

I heat some water in my canteen cup for my morning java fix. Fanelli and the loader get up and start their breakfast preparations. Fanelli doesn't shave this morning, and I notice right away because it's always the first thing he does. Since we are going to base camp, I would think he'd want to look strack. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. arises from his slumber, and although he is going to shave, he can't do it first thing. He trembles and shakes so much when he first gets up, he would surely cut his nose off trying to shave before his morning bracer. He lights up a Lucky Strike and climbs up to the TC position on the turret to start his day as usual, emptying his bottle. Fanelli and the loader and I are all in good spirits.

Fanelli cautions us though. "The rear sucks. After two or three days we'll be happy to get back to the field." He may be right, as I've only spent a total of two days at base camp, and they were both unpleasant to say the least.

We stay at our RON until about 10 a.m. when orders go around to prepare to didi. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen. They tie everything to the side of 2-3 for the last time. Fanelli has been on 2-3 for over 7 or 8 months, and he says he's going to miss the old tank.

I myself don't have much history with 2-3, so I'm not going to mind turning it in for a brand new Sheridan tank. However, concerns are already being raised by the Lifer tankers that the Sheridans are too light to be effective here. The M-48s weigh in at about 50 tons and have 16 inches of homogeneous steel at the front edge of the hull while the Sheridans weigh a mere 15 tons and are made of an aluminum alloy. I've actually been to Sheridan tank school, and that's probably why I'm here now. We uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5 and we sky. Because we found so many land mines yesterday, we are mine sweeping with great fervor this morning. But we are close to the redball, so it doesn't take boo coo long to get there.

Once there we head east to Dong ha base camp. There are fields and rice paddies on both sides of the road. I can see farmers out in the fields with their water buffaloes. I haven't had any close encounters with any water buffalo, but the other track drivers have cautioned me about them. They seem fairly docile when with their handler, but they are big, strong, and have sharp horns, and so they are not to be messed with. Especially if they have escaped from their owner.

We arrive at base camp about 11 a.m., and we drive right to the motor pool. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. instructs us to collect our personal gear and stow

it in the barracks while we are here. I get my waterproof bag and put all my gear from the thermo chest into it, along with a couple of cans of pound cake just in case I get hungry. I get the .50 Cal. ammo box with my personal effects in it, and I'm ready to sky, as are Fanelli and the loader.

We saunter towards the hootches we use for barracks here. On the way, the smell of urine and burning shit is almost overwhelming. I stop a moment and get out my vial of menthol oil. I carefully give my upper lip a swipe with the stopper, which is hard to do because of my mustache. I offer the vial to Fanelli and the loader, and the loader gives it a try but Fanelli declines.

He says, "Man, yer both fuckin' dinky dao."

I make sure to caution the loader about not getting any of the menthol oil in his eye.

I realize now how scruffy looking Fanelli is when he doesn't shave in the morning. As we continue on our way to the barracks, we arrive at a small 3-sided hootch with what looks like a barber chair and some chairs for the waiting patrons to use. Fanelli grabs me by the arm and says to come on and get a shave and a haircut.

He tells me, "The First Sgt. is a real mother fucker about long hair and beards. We gotta wear a hat at all times when outside. If ya get caught screwin' up, he'll put yer ass on bunker guard."

As I have already experienced bunker guard here, I decide to take Fanelli's advice. Besides, it's only a dollar for a haircut and a shave. All three of us sit down to wait our turn.

Fanelli wants me to go first. I am still a tee tee bit leery when Fanelli is nice to me. Not to mention that I have never been shaved with a straight razor. My beard is so long, the barber has to use his scissors first. The barber is a local from Cam-lo who speaks very little English, but the haircut is fast and efficient, as is the shave. But the surprise is the neck massage everyone gets after their haircut. The barber puts both of his palms together and with the fingers spread apart he rhythmically beats them along my shoulders and the back of my neck.

When I tell him how number one the neck massage is, Fanelli smiles and says, "That's why I wanted you to go first."

I'm beginning to think he's my friend.

He says, "I love the close shave from the straight razor, but the neck massage is my favorite part, too."

I wait for Fanelli and the loader to finish with their haircut and shave, and

then the three of us continue to make our way to our barracks hootch. Our hootch reeks of piss inside and out, but my menthol oil keeps things bearable.

Although lunch doesn't start until noon, most of the platoon members dump their gear on a bunk and then run for the mess hall, myself included. We are not running there to get a good place in line because the food might be good. We all know the food will be awful. What we want is milk. Any FNG dining room orderly (DRO) who isn't made aware that some of the armor crews are coming in from the field might get run over in the stampede. It would be unhealthy to get in between any of the crews and the milk dispensers, as guys run through the mess hall like a plague of locusts knocking over tables and chairs. Each guy in his turn fills a glass with ice cold milk and chugs it down. This is repeated three or four times before he finally fills the glass one last time and then walks away, slowly sipping the last glass of milk as if it were a fine wine. After drinking all that milk, we don't feel much like eating lunch, and that is just as well because the food is terrible. It's no wonder the hot chow they bring out to us in the field from here is so number ten. Like almost everything here, the food starts out bad and just gets worse.

After our milk orgy we're hoping we can take a nap back at our hootch, but we have to fall out for formation for the First Sgt. I think I'm pretty safe, having taken Fanelli's advice about the shave and a haircut. Sure enough the First Sgt. goes around assigning night bunker guard to all the unshaven guys in the company. Just when I think I have it made, Fanelli, the loader, Wack, and I get put on sand bag filling detail. We are pissed. But not as pissed as the guys on bunker guard, because there is supposed to be a Rock Concert for our entertainment tonight. A Rock Concert tonight? Well it is Valentine's Day. War is weird.

So Wack, Fanelli, the loader, and myself spend the afternoon filling sand bags at what appears to be a new bunker. Bunker construction pretty much consists of digging a trench and piling the dirt from the trench around it. Into the hole goes the biggest steel culvert available, usually about 6 feet in diameter, and then adding as many 10 foot long sections of culvert as needed. On our detail, the hole has been dug, the culvert is in place, and now we are filling the sand bags with the dirt from the hole. Then we stack and pile the filled sand bags along both sides, one end, and the top. The other end is left open for entry.

This bunker isn't even finished yet, and it already smells like piss.

Someone must have christened it already. Because there are few or no women at base camp, when someone has to piss they just whip it out and go wherever they are. There are piss-tubes all over the place, but other than myself, I have never seen anyone use one. I've actually seen guys take a piss on the ground less than 10 feet from a piss tube. I find another use for the menthol oil as I take the stopper out and swipe it across my upper lip to ward off the bunker odor. Wow! It's really cold on my freshly shaved face. I offer the vial to the loader, and he gives his upper lip a swipe. Wack has seen the menthol oil around but has never tried it, so he gives it a go after I caution him to not get it in his eyes.

Fanelli just says, "You guys are all dinky dao fer usin' that stuff. Probably make ya go blind."

"Just like ya kin go blind from jackin' off, aye Fanelli?" asks Wack.

"Fuck you guys!" says Fanelli, who is getting a tee tee bit agitated. Clearly, the rear doesn't agree with Fanelli. It doesn't really agree with me either.

It hasn't rained but it's misty and humid and warm. We spend the afternoon filling and stacking sand bags until we are released from the detail about 5 p.m. Fanelli is right as usual. The rear sucks!

We get cleaned up and head over to the mess hall, expecting to be disappointed with the food, and we are. Several glasses of milk help, but not enough. We finish our dinner and saunter back to our hootch. Several of the guys in the platoon are trying to sleep because they have bunker guard tonight. Fanelli and Wack have been here in the Nam far longer than the loader and me, so they both sky separately to look for some of their buddies in the other platoons. I don't even know all the guys in the Second platoon, let alone anyone in the other platoons, so I just stay put, relaxing on my bunk. Even though I've been sleeping on a stretcher in the field, this bunk feels number one. If I'm not careful, I'll fall asleep and miss the concert.

In the end, I do take a short nap, and then the loader and I sky for the concert. It turns out to be a boo coo big shindig. They have set up bleacher type seats on both sides of a large stage. The area directly in front of the stage is filled with all the standing guys who didn't get here in time to get a seat. That would include the loader and me. Since we're just standing in a big crowd and not in a particularly good spot worth saving, the loader and I decide to walk around to see what's up.

There are probably a thousand or more guys here, and I can hardly believe

what a boo coo big deal this is. We find a concession stand with a boo coo long line. One thing that you learn to be expert at in the army is standing in line. So the loader and I, being experts ourselves, get into the line for the concession stand. It's actually getting dark, and we assume that's what they have been waiting for because now there’s some activity up on the stage. The concession line, being long, takes us about 30 minutes to get to the stand. All they have is a couple of kinds of soda pop, but no beer. I didn't want a beer, but the loader does.

"Gotta go to the PX for beer," the concessioner informs him.

They have some cheese waffle crackers in cardboard tubes with a screw on metal cap. No potato chips or pretzels. The guy at the concession stand says that the salt on the chips and pretzels makes them get soggy right away. So there are no chips or pretzels in the Nam. I buy a couple of tubes of the cheese waffle crackers, and although I miss the pretzels and chips, the crackers are number one and more than make up for it.

The loader, however, is disappointed. He wanted a beer, so unlike me, he stood in line and got nothing. Of course, that is just another thing we are expert at; standing in line for no good reason, and then getting nothing for our line standing efforts.

We make our way back to the sea of GIs filling the open area in front of the stage. We don't know what to expect for the band, but eventually they come onto the stage. A fairly typical looking five member rock band, it appears at first. Three guys and two women. We like that part of the band right away. The women I mean, as we haven't seen any in a while. A tee tee Valentine's Day present for all the troops, after all. The guys in the band are OK, I guess. We hardly notice them for a while, being somewhat distracted by the women. Two guys on guitar and another one on bass, with one of the women playing the drums while the other sings. At one time or another, everyone in the band sings.

We are told they are from either Mexico or the Philippines. It doesn't matter to us, because after a couple of songs, we all realize they are boo coo great. They play all the popular songs by the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Beach Boys, and lots of the songs currently on the radio. If you turn your back when they play a popular song, you'd swear the real artist is here performing. Of course most of us have had our hearing damaged from the constant exposure to loud explosions and the firing of large caliber weapons and mortars without any hearing protection. We are fairly easy to please as long as we can

hear it. The loader and I both think the band is number one. Plus, it's boo coo fun to see a couple of women again. Just to remind us what they look like. Everyone here thinks the band is number one, and they do several encores to tremendous applause. For a minute there, I almost forget where I am.

The loader and I make it back to our hootch, and the guys on bunker guard have left. It's quiet until the rest of the platoon straggle back to the hootch in twos and threes. We are all talking about how number one the band was. Fanelli and Wack return, and as they left earlier, they actually had seats in the bleachers and a much better view of the band. It being Valentine's Day, they are both in love with the two women in the band. Heck, we all are. But they have definitely been here too long, and I'm sure they would both agree.

*May 15, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Alarm*

*Our storm last night turned out to be a hail storm. My tent which was pitched in a low place was soon in about a foot of water. Bedding, guns, ammunition all under water and three of us inside holding the tent shut so the wind would not blow it away. Finally after the storm had ceased we went to work and moved our tent to drier place.*

*This morning half of the tents were down by the wind last night. The thunder and lightning were terrific all through the night. Expected our tent to come down every minute but we finally went to sleep and forgot everything.*

*Cold and damp all day. Managed to write a letter to T.C.T. Baked some slapjacks for dinner then took a sleep and so think I done pretty well.*

*Lieut. Bradly and detachment go out tonight to Tongue River. Think he will go once too often and get his hair lifted.*

*We were put on half rations today for fear we would not have enough to last us until supply train reaches us. Do not think we will move for some time.*

*One of the large Cavalry Bell tents blew down and after much growling and swearing was put up again. Our camp is in a very nice place. Cottonwoods nearby and seems almost like a park. Birds singing and everything seems pleasant. After all the hardships of camp life, I like it. The latter part of day pleasant.*

February 15, 1970

Sunday
Quang Tri Province, Base camp at Dong ha

Weekends are just regular work days in the Nam, even here at base camp. War, it seems, doesn't take off for the weekends or holidays. War is pretty much 24/7 if you didn't know.

It feels weird to wake up on my own instead of someone waking me for my turn at guard duty. At first I can't figure out where I am, but reality slowly comes to me as my nostrils fill with the stench of fresh and stale piss. During the night, any of the guys who have to piss just stagger to the doorway of our hootch, open the door, and whiz right there on the ground. When entering or exiting the hootch, most of us jump over the first 4 or 5 feet of ground just outside the doorway, so as not to collect the urine soaked dirt on the soles of our jungle boots.

Many of the guys take their boots seriously. Not to the point that they would actually polish and shine them, except for some of the REMFs. Fanelli and some other guys have had a side zipper sewn into their jungle boots. This way they can get them on fast when necessary. We can also buy a zipper with lace holes on both sides. You lace the zipper in place, and then your boots just zip on and off. I don't have much money, and payday is almost two weeks away, so I take a pass on the boot zippers. I usually sleep with my boots on in the field, not unlaced but loosened up a tee tee bit. If you take your boots all the way off, you might be able to get them on faster if you have zippers, but you will also be taking them back off just as boo coo fast if you forget to check your boots for visitors like scorpions.

What brings this to mind is I realize I got to sleep with my boots off last night. Even though the hootch seems bug free, I still check my boots for scorpions before I put them on. The scorpions here are boo coo big. As big as your hand, and they take shit from no one.

It is number one to fall asleep and just naturally wake up on your own. No reveille being sounded or being awakened for your turn at guard duty. The hootches are not as well ventilated as the tarp we tie to the side to 2-3 in the field. With a mostly c-rat diet, everyone (myself included) farts all the time. As a result, this place smells more like an outhouse than a barracks. Our diet is so bad that if you offered most of the guys the choice of a steak or a salad, they would choose the salad. Furthermore, they would just about kill anyone who tries to take the salad away from them. But we haven't seen steaks any

more than we've seen any salads lately. A salad would seem so Real World.

I try to lay here and luxuriate in my bunk with a real sheet and a pillow, but I can't. I need to get some fresh air before I suffocate from the stench inside our hootch.

Fanelli is up and getting ready to go shower and shave. A shower, I think, would be number one, as I haven't had one in almost a month. I'm not so excited about shaving, but less so about perimeter bunker guard, so I grab my toiletries and follow Fanelli to the showers. Once there, we find fairly rustic facilities with a three sided shower, a curtain, and the top open to the sky. As I had hoped, the shower feels number one, and we even have hot water.

Fanelli and I take our stuff back to the hootch, and then sky for the mess hall. We don't expect much, as the breakfast here is as bad as the hot chow they bring us for dinner in the field. If we wanted powdered eggs for breakfast, we could just open a can of c-rat Ham and Eggs. The coffee tastes several days old, but it is hot, so I guess that is something. Fanelli passes on the breakfast offerings, and I don't even finish my coffee.

We head back to our hootch but stand around outside rather than subject ourselves to the odors within. Things have to start early in the tropics because there are only 12 hours of daylight. It's barely 7 a.m. when they call us to formation. The First Sgt. does a cursory inspection and once again assigns perimeter bunker guard to the scruffiest looking guys in the platoons. Once again, I am glad I followed Fanelli's lead and shaved this morning.

We head off for the motor pool. At least they don't insult us by making us march to the motor pool like a bunch of trainees. As soon as we get to the motor pool, almost everyone gets out the C-4 and starts making some instant c-rat coffee and heating up some c-rats for breakfast. Evidently, Fanelli and I weren't the only ones put off by the mess hall chow.

All the old tanks are sitting next to the new replacement tanks and eventually Our Dear Platoon Sgt. arrives at the motor pool. He gives us our orders for today, which is to remove all the gear we have tied or bolted to 2-3 and lay it on the ground next to the new tanks. All the equipment bolted to the bustle rack has to come off. The spotlight mounted on the main gun also has to be removed.

It's still monsoon, but it hasn't rained yet today. I'm thinking it might be getting near the end of monsoon, because instead of it being cold and wet or damp, now it's often warm and wet. It doesn't take long before we are all hot and sweaty with the heavy lifting we have to do. Nothing, I'm sure, compared

to the heavy lifting Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is doing at the NCO club while we toil away at the motor pool. He is probably drinking with both hands as he didn't hang around to help us after giving us our orders. He's not really missed. We start going through all the boxes and compartments on 2-3. We pile up the stuff we intend to keep, and throw away the stuff we don't need or don't have room for.

The new Sheridan Tanks are smaller than the M-48s we are turning in, so we can't carry as much gear. I find a canvas bucket with holes in the bottom. Before I throw it away, I ask Fanelli what it is.

"Don't throw that away," he immediately says. "If it ever gets hot again and stops raining, we can use it to take showers." He says we can fill it with water and hang it on the end of the main gun for a pretty fair shower. Since all the water we have is warm already, it would even be a warm shower. It actually sounds pretty good, but I think I can wait, for now.

With Our Dear Platoon Sgt. Absent, we spend some time socializing with the other guys in the troop while we strip the stuff of the old tanks. We're still not finished when it's time to break for lunch. About half the guys head off to the mess hall while the rest of us stay at the motor pool and heat up c-rats for lunch. Except Fanelli. He still has some Ramen left, and even though he ate that for breakfast, he has it for lunch too. And he thinks I'm dinky dao.

It's warm and humid, but at least it's not raining so as to add to the fun they have planned for the rest of our day. The guys who went to the mess hall for lunch eventually return to the motor pool, no one having been poisoned today, although I'm quite confident that could happen.

As we get back to stripping the things off of 2-3, we start to realize just how much of the gear from Old 2-3 is not going to fit on New 2-3. The spot light is really a problem. It is boo coo big and the main gun barrel on the M-48 is long so the spot light is easily mounted to it. The main gun barrel on the Sheridan is so short that once we mount the spot light on it, the main gun won't be visible. It doesn't really matter whether the main gun is visible or not; it's still there. While the main gun on the M-48 is only 105 mm, it looks very impressive, as it is big and long. The main gun on the Sheridan is quite unimpressive looking, especially if we have a spot light mounted on it. However, it is 152 mm and a much more sophisticated weapon.

Fortunately, our problem with the spotlight solves itself. Someone goes around to all the tanks and gives us a large bracket. He says it's for mounting the spotlight to the turret next to the main gun. This is so unlike the army we

know that we hardly know how to act. Anyway, we mount the spotlight to the turret with the bracket provided, and I have to say it does look better. All the better to kill you with, my dear.

Most of the tank crews paint their tank's nickname on the main gun barrel. *Canned Heat, Eliminator,* and *Terminator* are some of the tank names in the troop. I can see someone has painted *Grim Reaper* on one of the main gun barrels. Fanelli and the loader and I can't agree on a name for 2-3, so we don't put anything on the gun barrel, which suits Fanelli fine. I wanted to put *Willie the Pimp* on it, but they said no. Instead, in small white letters, no more than two inches high in a semi-circle over my driver's hatch, I paint the words *Hot Rats*. It's the name of an album by a favorite musician of mine, Frank Zappa. It's in a very discrete location so that when the main gun is in its usual position - front and center - *Hot Rats* is not visible. Incidentally, I tell Fanelli, “Willie the Pimp” is the name of a song on the *Hot Rats* album. Fanelli is unimpressed.

We start bolting all of our thermo chests to the bustle rack on the back of the turret. As we get more and more of our gear mounted and bolted and even tied to New 2-3, we slowly take on the look of a gypsy caravan again. The outline of the tank seems to disappear under all of our gear. For me, the driver's compartment has more space than the M-48. The driver's seat is also boo coo more comfortable, and my driving position is less tiring.

This tank is actually brand new, so I walk around it and count the track blocks on both sides. The left and right sides have the exact same number of track blocks. At tank school we were taught that there should always be one track block less on one side to create a sort of toe-in effect. Automobiles that don't have enough toe-in when the front end alignment is set tend to wander all over the road. Tanks will also wander all over the road if they don't have proper toe-in. When it gets going fast, it would be an unhealthy situation for anything in the tank's path. It takes Fanelli, the loader, and me a little over an hour to break open the track on one side and remove one track block, and then put the track back together and adjust the track tension. As everything is brand new, it comes apart and goes back together number one.

It's late afternoon, and we're pretty much done with transferring of the gear from Old 2-3 to

New 2-3. We just need to load up with ammo and c-rats. Several guys in the platoon say that because it is Sunday, the dinner at the mess hall is supposed to be edible. Fanelli and I have reservations, but we and the loader

decide to give it a try. I think Fanelli is getting tired of Ramen, but he won't admit it.

We clean up at the shower area of the latrines and are immediately engulfed in the stench. At least the motor pool is not downwind of the latrines when they burn the shit in the morning. We were hungry when we started on our way to the mess hall, but our appetites are fading fast.

We arrive at the mess hall, and the one encouraging sign that the Sunday dinner will be worthwhile is there is a line to get in! A good sign, we think, and since we are all expert at standing in line, we get in it. Through our perseverance and high level of skill at line standing, we make it inside the mess hall. The food, however, is nothing to write home about, but it's better than usual. Since it's usually so bad, it's easy to improve upon. Normally dinner is slices of rehydrated dehydrated potatoes, some sort of meat (never clearly identified), and a canned vegetable. Today there is mashed potatoes with gravy and meatloaf that might actually be beef. It tastes like beef, and for most of us that is enough. The hard part is trying to eat it off a paper plate with a little plastic fork and knife. Just like having a picnic except no ants. After several glasses of ice cold milk, we all feel number one.

We head back to our hootch. I realize that I don't have guard duty tonight, and I'm going to sleep on a real bed on real sheets with a pillow, and I smile. We get to our hootch about 6 p.m. It will be dark soon. It reeks of piss and farts inside the hootch, but it is screened, so no insects. There are boo coo insects outside, and there will be boo coo more when it's full dark, so we finally head inside.

I give my upper lip a swipe of my menthol oil, and it is a definite improvement. Some of the guys are playing cards and some are reading or writing letters. First I write a few letters, and then I make a few more entries in my journal. When I finish, I take my boots all the way off and lay down on my bunk. It is number one, and I nap off and on until they turn off the lights, and then I fall fast asleep. Sometime during the night, base camp starts taking incoming, and it wakes us all up.

I watch Fanelli, and he just rolls over and says, "I'd rather die here than to get up and go into one of those piss reekin' bunkers."

I follow suit and lay back down and try to fall asleep as I listen to the incoming rounds exploding somewhere on base camp until it finally stops, and I do fall back asleep.

*May 16, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp Alarm*

*This morning very pleasant. Went to the woods on the river bank. A very pleasant place. Reminds me of a park at Cleveland. The same species of birds singing as there are here.*

*After that went hunting. Consistently found quite a number. Came back to dinner. Then went to I Co. and had a talk with my friend Chaplin.*

*Country here on each side of river is high and broken with few pines, but no grass or herbage.*

*It is doubtful whether the mails go up the river anymore or not but one or two are expected from down river.*

*For dinner we had what we call soft bread and a stew. Learned how to get up a new dish. Took some meat, cut it fine. Soaked some hardtack in water, put them together and fried them. Poured some soup, thickened with flour, over it. Then eat it. Tiptop dish for the army and especially for a hungry man.*

*Think we will move tomorrow. Hope not. Day pleasant.*

February 16, 1970
Monday
Quang Tri Province, Base camp at Dong ha

When I wake up this morning, I have to ask a couple of the guys whether I was dreaming last night or did we take some incoming? We all have a good laugh about half sleeping through a mortar attack. Definitely body bag humor.

We've been told that the tank crews are going to have Sheridan tank training today. (We have class today, students.) War is so weird. I don't want to suffer through another bunker guard on the base camp perimeter, so I get up and Fanelli, Wack, the loader, and I all head for the showers. For the base camp REMFs, the showers must seem primitive. But to us in the Second platoon, it's like the Hilton Hotel. We all shower and shave, hoping to avoid any unsavory details. Although our hootch reeks of piss, it's nothing compared to the stench in the guard bunkers. Even the menthol oil wouldn't help much.

We all saunter back to our hootch, and then we sky for the mess hall.

Why? We don't know, but we go anyway. No line, that's usually a bad sign, but at least we don't have to wait for our disappointment. Fortunately, they have some tee tee boxes of breakfast cereal, so I grab about 6 and sky for the milk dispensers. Since we have class today, I'm not concerned about loading up on protein to make it through a typical grueling day of hard work.

After our breakfast, we head back to our hootch and stand around outside waiting for formation to be called rather than assault our noses by waiting inside. The First Sgt. Arrives, and we all form up. He does his morning inspection and assigns perimeter bunker guard to the scruffiest and unshaven members of our troop. Some guys never learn. Xin loi.

Wack and the other P.C. crew members head to the motor pool to work on their P.C.s while Fanelli and the loader, Zack, Big Al, and I sky for school. All twelve members of the Second platoon's tank crews have class today, along with the tank crews from the First and Third platoons. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is also in attendance, as are the two other platoon Sgt. I've been to a month long Sheridan tank school back in the Real World, so this morning's class is just review for me. Some of the tank crew members have never even seen a Sheridan tank before.

We have our class in a hootch that has been converted to a classroom. At least it doesn't smell like piss, but it's full of a bunch of guys farting non-stop, so I'm giving my upper lip boo coo applications of menthol oil. It's been raining most of the morning, so being inside out of the rain has been number one.

At mid-morning we have a break. Really it's a smoke break, because just about everyone here smokes cigarettes. We all go outside for some fresh air, and all the smokers light up.

"Smoke 'em if ya got 'em!" as they say here.

It's still raining during our break, and all us draftees are lined up under the edge of our classroom roof that extends for a couple of feet beyond the exterior wall. The Lifers are all standing out in the rain, smoking.

We look at them, laugh, and say, "Too dumb to get out of the rain."

They, in turn, hear us laughing. As they look at us trying to stay out of the rain, they laugh and remark, "Look at the babies. Too afraid to get a little wet!"

We're not afraid to get wet. We're usually wet all the time. But we're smart enough to try to stay dry when we can.

Back in class, we get some info on the modifications or “improvements”

that have been made to our new Sheridan tanks to prepare them for our particular combat situation. Our main concern here is land mines, followed closely by RPGs. With 16 inches of steel at the front of the hull on the M-48s, most land mines just damage the track and the road wheels. But the Sheridan tank hull is not steel. It's an aluminum alloy. There have been reports of RPGs penetrating the hull of the Sheridans and instantaneously igniting the main gun ammo, causing it to explode. The tank itself caught fire and melted into a puddle of aluminum. The crewman were all killed. Such a comforting thought and useful information to us Sheridan crews. Xin loi!

To beef up the Sheridan for land mine encounters, the army has installed a two inch thick steel plate from the front edge of the hull to about one third of the way toward the rear. Far enough back to cover over the driver's compartment escape hatch. It seems no one is concerned about covering over the escape hatch except us, the drivers. Often enough, the only way out of the driver's compartment is out the escape hatch. Why do you think it's there? Also, two inches of steel hardly compares to 16 inches of steel for protection.

During training, when I drove the Sheridan tank we didn't carry any main gun ammo. I didn't realize why the driver's compartment seems so spacious, compared to the M-48. It's because main gun ammo is stored on both sides of the driver's seat, as well as on the floor of the turret.

During a firefight, the driver has to hand main gun ammo to the loader through a pass-through opening between the turret and the driver's compartment.

We break for lunch and some of the guys head for the mess hall while most of us sky to the motor pool to heat up some c-rats for lunch at our tanks. That includes Fanelli, the loader, and me. Fanelli hasn't had any Ramen yet today, so he is probably going through withdrawals. The mess hall has milk, but they have no bread. We would just about kill for bread. The rest of the platoon members of the P.C. crews are at the motor pool. Some stay for a c-rat lunch, and some sky for the mess hall.

I have another look inside the driver's compartment. Now that I realize where some of the main gun ammo is stored, I can see it's going to be a tight fit. Plus what the tight fit is from: live ammo right next to me on both sides. If I hit a land mine and the ammo next to me goes off, they won't even find my dog tags! No wonder everyone thinks the drivers are dinky dao.

We are often ordered to do things we normally wouldn't. So you can sometimes feel like an idiot for following an order. But we take solace in the

fact that idiots are not allowed in the field. Therefore, we cannot be idiots. We hope. A strong case for an exception can be made for the Lifers, as they are known to be idiots, but I repeat myself.

The motor pool is not downwind of the latrines where the REMFs burn shit in the morning, so it only smells like diesel fuel and piss. Even though the shit burning only lasts for about an hour, the smell lingers all day over most of base camp. We finish our c-rat lunch, except Fanelli who has Ramen, and then we all saunter back to class. When we arrive, most of the guys who had lunch at the mess hall seemed to have survived, as they aren't playing taps for anyone. A good sign we think.

The Lifers are not happy about trading the M-48s for the Sheridans. As tankers they have no use for the P.C.s, and they consider the Sheridan a fake tank. It only looks like a tank, they say, buts it's really a light assault vehicle. Not much more than a P.C. with a main gun.

I'm not completely happy myself now that I know where much of the main gun ammo is stored. What we think apparently doesn't matter. It's a done deal, because when we were at lunch at the motor pool, it was quite noticeable that our old tanks were already gone. We didn't even get to say goodbye to Old 2-3.

Tank class lasts the rest of the afternoon. For me everything they cover is nothing more than review, but class is more fun than sitting in the rain. At the end of class, we are told that tomorrow we will load all the tanks with a full load of ammo and go to the firing range to check out the weapon systems and zero all the gun sights. I can hardly wait to plop myself down in the driver's seat between all that live ammo. Fanelli might be right about me being dinky dao.

It's time for dinner, and I don't want to go to the mess hall, and I really don't want to go and eat

c-rats at the motor pool, so I wait to see if something turns up. Wack and some of the crewman on the P.C.s start to show up at our hootch from their day at the motor pool. Fanelli takes off to visit some of his buddies in the other platoons. Wack, Zack, Big Al, the loader, and myself resign ourselves to dining at the mess hall.

As we discuss our options of where to eat (as if we have options) Wack says the magic word, "Milk." The word milk is all it takes, and off to the mess hall we go.

When we arrive, there is no line. Not a boo coo good sign, but at least we

don't have to wait for bad food. We don't wait, and the food is number ten, but the milk is ice cold and in unlimited supply. Still no bread.

By the time we leave the mess hall and head back to our hootch, it's already starting to get dark. It stopped raining, but it's still cloudy and overcast. We get back to our hootch, and even though it smells better outside, we go in to get away from the bugs that really come out once it gets dark.

Some of the guys are laying on their bunks reading and some are writing letters. There is at least one card game always going. The most popular card game is not Poker, but Hearts, which is a form of Old Maid. War is so weird.

I myself play some cards for a while. For once I'm not so tired that I can't wait to go to sleep, because for two days in a row I've gotten eight hours of uninterrupted sleep, with the exception of a tee tee bit of incoming last night.

They turn the lights out at 9 p.m. so as to not be a target for any incoming, and most of us turn in. I have to be boo coo careful to not get used to this.

*May 17, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Camp Alarm*

*On guard last night had to stand post from eight o'clock to ten. Just before to be relieved and had raised my head to look around when I heard a shot. Seemingly to be fired directly behind me. I woke the other two fellows sleeping beside me (we were out from camp fifty yards) telling them to get up that I thought there were Indians around.*

*As a shot was fired we all made ourselves ready, expecting to be jumped by Indians. Directly four more shots were fired, we then found where they were fired. A guard was placed over the boats about 500 yards from camp and the shots were fired there. We could not tell by whom, them or Indians.*

*Officer of the guard and Officer of the day came running up to us, wanted to know what we knew about the firing, by that time the Companies had all fell out (and) two Companies of Cav. We ran down to where the shots had been fired. Found the boat guards had seen signal lights shown by Indians and so they alarmed the camp. Companies all turned in again and all was quiet.*

*This morning Lieut. Bradly and party came in from the other side of river. Reported a large camp of Sioux on Tongue River 30 miles from us. Council held by officers after which orders were issued for every man to have 8 days*

*of rations cooked and be ready for a night march.*

*We tried to swim the horses across the river but after drowning 5 or 6 of them it was given up and I believe that most of us were glad as it saved us a long nights march.*

*Buffalo in herds coming over the bluffs on the other side of river.*

*Came off guard with an aching tooth.*

*Thunderstorm this evening.*

February 17, 1970
Tuesday
Quang Tri Province, Base camp at Dong ha

No incoming at base camp during the night, so I got over eight hours of sleep last night, which I could easily get used to again. Eight hours of undisturbed sleep is rare in the army. I'm one of the first ones up, so I grab my towel, soap, and razor and head for the showers to beat the rush, if there is a rush. I hate shaving. But I hate perimeter bunker guard duty boo coo more. So I shave. When I get back to the hootch, Wack, Zack, and Big Al are just leaving for the mess hall, so I tag along. Not all the REMFs have to get up early, so there is no line at the mess hall, and we breeze right in. There are the tee tee boxes of cereal again and since there is also milk, that's what I have. I think maybe when I get to the motor pool - if there's some slack time - I'll have some of the c-rat fruit we have on 2-3. The coffee here is undrinkable, so that will have to wait for the motor pool as well.

Zack and Big Al both like their new TC, Steve. I let them know how lucky they are to not be treated like dog robbers the way my crew is. Wack is one of the few P.C. crewmen that doesn't consider us tankers to be dog robbers. We finish our breakfast and head back to our hootch to wait to be called to fall out for formation and our First Sgt.'s morning inspection. Today at inspection everybody is well shaven. However, some guys have mustaches, which are technically allowed but frowned upon by the Lifers. If I could have communicated with the barber when I got my shave and haircut, I would have had him leave my mustache. But since I don't speak Vietnamese, he shaved it off. I have continued to shave it until we go back to the field, and it turns out to be lucky for me. Because everyone is well shaven this morning, the First Sgt. assigns perimeter bunker guard to the guys who have mustaches. Like I said; *allowed* but frowned upon by the Lifers.

Fanelli and the loader and I head for the motor pool with Zack and Big Al. When we arrive at the motor pool, several deuce and a halfs also start to arrive loaded with main gun ammo and ammo for the .50 Cal. and the coax. It's boo coo hard work to unload, unpack, and then load it into the tank. It takes most of the morning.

With almost half of the main gun ammo being stored in the driver's compartment, I climb in to check out my accommodations. I have about 10 to 12 inches of space on each side of me between the rounds of main gun ammo. Not as tight as I thought it might be, but not exactly spacious like the driver's compartment on the M-48s. The driver's seat on the Sheridan is boo coo more comfortable, and my driving positions are improved as well. On the M-48s, the driver's entry hatch cover is a flat disc that pops up and then swings off to the side. There is no protection for the driver's head from being hit by the turret as it swings around.

The Sheridan driver's hatch is a standing clam shell that is split in half. The front half rotates and nests neatly in the rear half when opened. Even if I drive with the seat all the way up, with my head and shoulders out of the compartment, the turret can't hit me in the head. I can also drive with the seat half way down, and then just my head sticks out. With my seat all the way down and the hatch closed, I can see my way out the three vision blocks that I have. One vision block in front and one on each side. The vision blocks are solid plastic periscopes. My view out the vision blocks is very limited, so I have to rely on the TC for directions over the intercom. Besides the poor vision, with my seat all the way down, it is also the most uncomfortable driving position. I almost never drive with the hatch closed, although that's the safest way.

After lunch we are going to the firing range to try out all of our new weaponry and to adjust and zero all the gun sights. Some of the troop's members head for the mess hall, but more than half stay here at the motor pool and eat c-rats for lunch. Except for Fanelli who, of course, has Ramen for lunch. But his stash is getting low, and he's nervous about that. I'm starting to tire of the c-rat fruit cocktail and have started eating the peaches, which are number one. The guys who had lunch at the mess hall start to return and once again no one appears to have been poisoned. Must be a record of some kind, I would think.

After all the tank crews are finally assembled, we start our engines and slowly follow one of the other platoon Sgt.'s tank to the firing range. I'm

driving the New 2-3 for the first time with the main gun ammo all around me. It's such a dicey situation, I can't even think about it. Hundreds of negative scenarios want to run through my mind, so I don't think about it at all.

One thing I like about the driver's hatch on the Sheridan is that it protects my head from the turret. I can be all the way up in my driver's seat and the turret can be moved in any direction, left or right, and the main gun can go up or down, and my head is protected by the hatch cover.

On the M-48 if you want to keep your head where it is, there are times when the turret rotates around, and it is boo coo important to keep your head inside the driver's compartment.

There are nine tanks in our procession, three tanks from each of the three platoons. I can tell by the way some of the tanks in front of us are wandering all over the place that some of them did not take out a track block on one side. Not worth me saying anything as a PFC FNG, as no one is interested in anything I say.

I can hear the horn chatter of all the platoons as we drive, and I hear some of the tank TCs chiding their drivers about why can't they drive in a straight line. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. does not chide me, because I am driving in a straight line. Not that he would notice after his liquid lunch. After about a half an hour of driving, we arrive at the firing range. We are to test our weapons and zero the gun sights this afternoon, for tomorrow we are going to have a shooting contest between the three platoons. A shooting contest? War is so weird.

The Sheridan is all new stuff for Fanelli and the loader and for Our Dear Platoon Sgt. as well. For the loader, the new stuff is number one in that loading the main gun, which is his main function, is boo coo easier and seemingly safer. On the M-48 the main gun breach block is down and open when it's ready to be loaded. The 105mm main gun round looks like a huge bullet with a long brass shell casing and what looks like a giant projectile on the end. The bottom of the shell casing is flanged, and the lip of the shell casing is what prevents the round from going in too far when loading and the shell casing flange hits the breach block release. The breach closes automatically, pushing the loader's hand up and out of the way. The breach block comes up boo coo fast, and there's the illusion that if your hand goes in too far, the breach block will chop your hand off, which it could. But as long as you are loading a round, it's not possible.

Another good difference for the loader is the Sheridan's main gun ammo

doesn't have a brass shell casing. During a firefight on the M-48, every time the main gun is fired, it ejects a very hot brass shell casing onto the turret floor. Loaders have to be nimble after several rounds have been fired and all the hot shell casings are laying about. If and when there's a lull in the action, the loader can pitch the shell casings out the loaders hatch, if he dares to open it.

The shell casing on the Sheridan's 152 mm main gun ammo is made from highly flammable paper. After the round is fired, the gun barrel is purged of any unburned debris by a blast of compressed air. There is no shell casing ejected into the turret after the main gun is fired. For the loaders, that is number one.

The M-48's main gun is fired by a conventional firing pin similar to most rifles and hand guns, just boo coo bigger. The Sheridan's main gun round is fired electrically, so that the Sheridan's main gun ammo is inherently more dangerous just sitting around, compared to the M-48's main gun ammo. The paper shell casing is very fragile and can be easily damaged or accidentally detonated. Because of this, it has a rubber cover over the paper shell casing that is peeled off just as the shell is pushed into the main guns breach. The shell casings also have an asbestos base cover over the rubber cover, to protect it from open flames. The rubber cover is to prevent the round from being accidentally detonated by an electrical short or a spark.

The loader picks up a round, pulls off the asbestos cover, and then puts the business end of the round into the open barrel of the main gun. He then puts his fist on the rear end of the round, grips the rubber cover, and peels the rubber cover back and over his fist as his pushes the round the rest of the way into the barrel. Then he sits back in his seat and pushes the breach closing switch. The breach block automatically swings over and screws shut and the main gun is ready to fire.

The main gun recoils quite far into the turret when fired. Astute loaders keep clear of the area designated with red lines on the turret floor marking the recoil zone.

Loader is the entry level position for tank crews, but because I went to tank school, I got to skip it and start as driver. Also, no one really wants to drive for Our Dear Platoon Sgt., myself included. Basically I have a job no one wants. I hate that. Although the Sheridans are new to him, for Fanelli, the role of the gunner is similar to the M-48. The M-48 has an elaborate binocular sighting system that uses triangulation to zero in on a target, while

the Sheridans have calibrated markings on a telescopic sight. Either way, he puts the target in the sight cross hairs and fires. I know I made that sound easy. It isn't.

We mostly fire the main gun from the TC's position, and since the TC doesn't have a sight up on the turret, he has to aim by what's known as *burst on target*. We shoot a round at the target, and depending where the round burst is seen, we correct our aim and fire another round. Kind of a wasteful way to do things, but waste is not much of a concern here in the Nam.

A bigger concern is that we can't carry as much main gun ammo on the Sheridans as we could on the M-48s.

It's finally our turn on the firing line, and Fanelli zeros the main gun sights with only having to fire three rounds, which is boo coo good. He then zeros the coax machine gun to the main gun sight, and we are done.

Well, sort of done. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. wants to fire off a couple of rounds from his position, which is fair enough, since it's his first time on a Sheridan. Probably a good idea to try out the main gun for the first time at the firing range rather than in actual combat.

He fires off a couple of rounds and misses the target both times.

Next he decides to test fire the .50 Cal., and he does a much better job of hitting the target. Which only goes to prove that even a drunk can hit the target with the .50 Cal., as it is a pee bringer.

We are in what would be considered a secure area, although that could be easily debated. Never the less, we drive around with impunity and do no mine sweeping. It's a dirt trail back to the motor pool, and only the lead tank will not eat the dust and mud of the tanks ahead.

This is foremost on my mind when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. says to me over the intercom, "Head back to the motor pool, Driver."

The engine on 2-3 is already running, so I just put it in neutral and do a quick neutral steer about 180 degrees. Then I quickly put it in drive, and we shoot out of the firing range and down the trail back to the motor pool before any of the other tanks. We eat no dust.

We also make boo coo good time on the way back compared to the tanks that can't drive straight. We're just about done packing up 2-3 at the motor pool when the rest of the tanks, covered in mud and dust, finally make it back to the motor pool. Xin loi, guys.

Fanelli and the loader and I wait for Zack and Big Al and Steve. But it turns out they're one of the tank crews that need to take a track block out to

correct their toe-in. We decide not to wait, and we sky to our hootch.

On the way, Fanelli punches me on the arm, not hard, and says, "Good call on the track block, FNG." He really might be my friend, I think.

He helped the loader and me take the track block out, but he thought we were wasting our time. At the time, I pointed out it would be a good way to practice track separation and re-connection under ideal conditions rather than learning in the field under rough conditions. Also, the track on the Sheridans is quite different than the M-48s, much lighter duty, so we can expect to be replacing them boo coo more often.

Some of the P.C. crews are back at the hootch when we get there, including Wack. We hang out and joke around for a while. But it smells too awful to stay in our hootch, and we all decide to try our luck at the mess hall, if only to get some milk.

No line at the mess hall, so at least we don't have to exercise our expertise at line standing. It smells better in the mess hall than our hootch, but not by much. Again the food is horrid, and trying to eat it off of paper plates with plastic forks and knives completes a sad dining experience. We're used to eating right out of the can, but I think I can still eat off of a real plate, should I be offered one. The paper plates sort of dissolve before you finish your food.

Of course, almost no one finishes their food here. I don't know for how long the military has referred to the dining facilities as the *Mess*, but in our case, the term seems more than appropriate.

We slowly saunter back to our hootch, as we are in no hurry to assault our sense of smell. We hang around outside as long as we can stand the bugs. As soon as it gets dark, the bugs are worse than the stench inside our hootch, but it will worsen as the guys start farting. If one guy farts, five guys have to fart back in retaliation, or so it seems. It's giving my little vial of menthol oil a workout on my upper lip, but I forgo any on my eyelids.

There is nothing to do and nowhere to go, except maybe the PX. The juicers all go to the PX to drink, so it's smoky and noisy. I stay at the hootch.

The guys are playing Hearts. Their favorite card game, I think, because they love to jump up and throw down the Queen of Spades while exhorting loudly, "Eat the bitch!"

I write some letters to send back to the Real World, if it's still there. When they turn off the lights, I turn in as does everyone else.

Around midnight we start to take incoming again, and it wakes us all up. I

look over at Fanelli, and he just rolls over and tries going back to sleep. I follow suit. Some of the guys sky for the bunker. It smells so number ten in there that obviously some of us would rather die. The incoming stops after a few minutes.

Before I fall back to sleep, someone jokes that that incoming stopped so soon because it was our own artillery dropping it on base camp. Higher must have complained.

*May 18, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Alarm*

*Last night the alarm was again sounded and we all turned out again but proved to be as the other, a false alarm. It was raining hard when we were compelled to turn out so that we all were thoroughly wetted.*

*Sioux Indians saw close to camp. Buffalo all coming this way. Our Indians went after a band this morning and succeeded in killing two.*

*Day very fine except this forenoon. Do not feel well, have a toothache.*

*Lieut. Bradly and party going on a scout up the river tonight. Two cavalry going down the river for the same purpose.*

*Four of our Indians going across the river to steal ponies of the Sioux. Reported through camp that we will move down the river 8 miles and make a permanent camp.*

*Had a hearty laugh this evening, one of the fellows went out to where there had been a beef killed and begun to cut some off when a coyote came up without him seeing it and layed hold of the meat at the same time letting out a fearful howl. Ha ha, see the fellow drop the meat and run.*

February 18, 1970
Wednesday
Quang Tri Province, Base camp at Dong ha

I have to be careful. I could easily get used to sleeping eight hours straight, occasionally interrupted by some incoming, some of which could be our own. It's not like I have a choice. We will be heading back to the field tomorrow. That's a good thing, in that I'm getting low on menthol oil. This is such a luxury for me, I don't even mind being the first one up at 6:30 a.m. and

heading for a shower and a shave before I subject myself to the mess hall.

Fanelli is up also, and we sky to the showers together. We're joking about how the Lifers want to make today's firing range qualification some sort of a contest. If we don't qualify, does that mean we can't go to the field until we do? We think not! War is so weird.

We're the first ones to arrive at the showers, so we don't have to demonstrate our expertise at line standing. The water is almost hot. I'd better not get used to that either. We head back to our hootch, and then sky to the mess hall.

No line again, and I'm just hoping there are some tee tee boxes of cereal. I'm in luck. I grab several boxes of cereal and join Wack, Zack, Big Al and a couple of other guys in the platoon. There are no bowls here, so I cut open the front side of the cereal box and fold back each half, pour in some milk, and eat. I only know I can do this because I used to do it when I was a kid, much to my mother's dismay. She would have preferred for me to use a bowl. Now it's me who would prefer a bowl, but there are none.

"We're going to miss the milk when we head back to the field, " I say to no one in particular.

"Sure not gonna miss the smell of burning shit, that's fer sure," says Big Al.

"How do the REMFs stand it?" asks Wack.

"I don't know, but it's boo coo number one that the motor pool is upwind of all the shit burning details," I say.

Zack is the driver on 2-6. As we walk back to the hootch, we compare notes on driving the new Sheridan tanks. Especially we talk about being boo coo nervous sitting between all that main gun ammo.

When we get back to the hootch, most of us hang around outside waiting to fall out for formation. Because the juicers know we're heading back to the field tomorrow, they have been getting drunk at the PX every night. As a result, there are many slovenly and unshaven platoon members for the First Sgt. to choose from. Fanelli and I look strack, and we are not assigned to bunker guard tonight. The tank crews head for the motor pool, and when we arrive there are some deuce and a halfs loaded with main gun ammo for us to unload, unpack, and load into our tanks.

We didn't use any of the main gun ammo in the driver's compartment, so I start handing ammo up to Fanelli who is up on the turret. Fanelli then hands it to the loader, who is inside the turret, and he stows each round in its place

and secures it. We load all the .50 Cal. ammo in the boxes on the bustle rack on the rear of the turret.

That doesn't take long. We don't carry much .50 Cal. ammo, because we can't. We don't have any place to put it, and what we do carry is not very conveniently stored for quick and easy access during a firefight.

Now comes the fun part, loading 3000 rounds of 7.62 mm ammo for the coax machine in its ammo box. The ammo box for the coax is mounted on the turret wall in a nearly inaccessible location.

It also has to be perfectly done to get all 3000 rounds in with the lid closed, and it has to be perfectly done or the ammo belt will jam up when firing the coax.

Because it has to be perfectly done, only Fanelli or I load the ammo box for the coax.

It's really the loader's job, but we don't trust him yet, and the only thing Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is capable of loading is himself.

The only thing more fun to deal with, besides loading the ammo box for the coax, is dealing with the coax itself, as it is even more inaccessible than the ammo box. I often feel sorry for the tank crews who had not been to tank school and thus didn't get a proper introduction to the coax machine gun we usually refer to as the Little Bastard. They taught us in tank school that the breach block must be carefully and meticulously cleaned after every use of the coax. Failure to keep the breach block clean results in ruptured shell casings which stick in the breach and have to be manually extracted with pliers. The turret location of the coax makes repairs difficult during a firefight, so it's best to keep the coax in tiptop shape and nothing less.

We just took the .50 Cal. and the coax off Old 2-3 and mounted them on New 2-3. They were both working fine, so we expect no problems. The coax on 2-6 has been giving Big Al and the gunner a big headache. Since I'm still an FNG, I don't offer any advice. I'm pretty sure their problem is using bug juice instead of gun oil. Some of the guys here seem to think they can use bug juice instead of gun oil on their M-16s. Maybe they can on the M-16s, but if you use bug juice instead of gun oil on the coax, you will find out why its nickname is the Little Bastard.

We are just finishing loading the coax ammo box when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. shows up at the motor pool. The New 2-3 is loaded and ready to go, and I can tell by his blood shot eyes that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is too.

It's almost lunch time, so some of the guys are heading for the mess hall,

while the rest of us fend for ourselves heating up c-rats at the motor pool. Except Fanelli, who has Ramen.

We talk about how absurd the afternoon's contest and qualification at the firing range is.

"One thing’s fer sure, Fanelli. We can forget any thought of winning the contest if Sarge insists on firing the main gun like yesterday," I say.

As the TC doesn't have a gun sight, he has to rely on the *burst on target* method which requires a skill level of marksmanship that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. lacks. In the morning, his hands are the steadiest they're going to be, and his condition is pretty much downhill from there.

It's really Fanelli's job to fire the main gun. The TC is supposed to sweep the area with coax gunfire between firing and reloading the main gun. The TC is also the only one who can fire the .50 Cal., which is mounted up on the turret in front of the TC. We can use the .50 Cal. against personnel, which is against the Geneva convention rules, simply by announcing over the intercom "Gunner, tank, .50 Cal." meaning our intended target is a tank, and then we fire away with the .50 Cal. War is weird.

The firing range qualification is in the afternoon, so we know Our Dear Platoon Sgt. will be in high spirits after his liquid lunch at the NCO Club rather than the mess hall. We debate a tee tee bit about when would be the best time for Our Dear Platoon Sgt. to do well at the firing range. After some discussion, we decide that early morning after he has smoked a couple of Luckys and has had his morning bracer and a shave.

After lunch, the rest of the tank crews return to the motor pool and get ready to head to the firing range. Although Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me move out of the motor pool to be at the head of the procession, one of the other platoon Sgt.'s is closer to the exit gate and beats us out. We have to eat a tee tee bit of dust and mud on the way to the firing range.

There is an actual course set up, and each tank takes a turn driving along a marked trail. At designated points along the way, we fire at different targets. At the end of the course, each tank crew is graded on the target hits, and how long it takes them to finish the course. As he did yesterday, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. insists on firing the main gun, and although he hits some targets, he misses more. 2-6 didn't do well because their coax isn't working yet and is still rupturing the shell casings. The First platoon’s three tanks all do boo coo well at the qualification course and are awarded Clean Sweep trophies, which consist of three brand new brooms that all three tanks proudly display on the

turret of each tank, sort of like a flag. War is so weird.

The winning crews also get to be at the front of our procession back to the motor pool, so that is the real prize of winning. We eat dust and mud on the way back. Seeing so much dust makes me think and hope that monsoon is nearing its end. It still rains on and off, but when it stops for a while it dries so quickly in places that it gets dusty here at base camp.

When we get back to the motor pool, you would think the First platoon had won a free pass back to the Real World the way they are parading around the motor pool with their brooms held high. It's too bad they can't eat them, as they might taste better than the food we expect at the mess hall. I don't know any of the guys in the First platoon, but Fanelli does, and a couple of them tease him about losing the contest. Fanelli assures them we don't care, and we don't. We pack up our gear on 2-3 and sky for our hootch for our last night in the rear.

We don't hang long at the hootch, as it is too odoriferous. To waste some time before we go to the mess hall, we decide to check out the PX. It's still 10 days till payday, and I'm low on money. Lots of stereo systems available for the REMFs but not of much use for us guys in the field. I splurge and buy a six pack of Coke and a couple of cardboard tubes of cheese waffle crackers. Compared to the c-rat crackers, the cheese waffle crackers are number one.

I'm tempted to just have cheese crackers and Coke for my dinner, but then Wack says the magic word again, "Milk." I'm going to really miss the milk when we're back in the field. The mess hall keeps the milk ice cold, and now that it's usually warm outside, it's number one to chug down a couple of glasses of moo juice. We saunter to the mess hall and as usual, there is no line. Why would there be? We only go for the milk. After a c-rat lunch, I'm hopeful there will be something edible at the mess hall. But there isn't. We push the stuff around on our paper plates as if we are trying to fool our mothers that we have eaten enough of our dinner to be excused. Most of the plates get thrown away with more stuff on them than was eaten by anyone.

After our dinner, we sky to our hootch. We're nervous about just hanging loose, because the Lifers hate for us to be bored with nothing to do and are near expert at inventing details and duties to keep us occupied. Except for the first day, Fanelli, Wack, Zack, Big Al, the loader, and I have managed to skirt all unsavory details, and we want to keep it that way.

Finally the bugs outside are worse than the odors in our hootch, and we head inside for some relief from the bugs, only to have our sense of smell

assaulted. I quickly get out the last of my menthol oil, and I offer it around. Most everyone puts a swipe of the oil on their upper lip, except Fanelli. He thinks we're all dinky dao now.

Being our last night in the rear, we are worried about being put on perimeter bunker guard. Even though the guard duty roster has been filled out for tonight, perimeter bunker guard has been assigned to a bunch of juicers. The base camp here at Dong ha is boo coo huge, and the juicers assigned to guard duty tonight can easily hide out from the Sgt of the Guard long enough that the Sgt will go around to the hootches and put the first guys he finds on perimeter bunker guard instead. The juicers who skip out on guard duty know it's unlikely that they will be punished since we go back to the field tomorrow, and the Lifers aren't going to keep them in the rear as punishment. I think the Lifers think being sent to the field is punishment. But I agree with Fanelli in that the rear sucks. We all luck out, as the Sgt of the Guard grabs a couple of guys from the First platoon in the hootch next to ours.

As the conscripts for perimeter bunker guard make their way past our hootch, we notice it's Fanelli's friends who earlier had teased him.

He can't help himself and yells, "Hey, Clean Sweep, don't forget yer fuckin' brooms. You'll need 'em in the bunkers."

Everyone has a good laugh, except, of course, the guys now on guard.

"Go fuck yourself, Fanelli!" they yell back.

I must remember to stay on Fanelli's good side.

Some of the guys get their card game going, and I play for a while, but my thoughts are on sleep. This will be my last night of uninterrupted sleep for a while, if we don't have any incoming tonight. It's boo coo warm inside our hootch, even though the walls are mostly screens. It only smells slightly better outside than it does inside, which is horrid. The menthol oil is number one, but it's up against some real powerful stench. When they turn the lights out, I turn in, hoping the best for our last night at base camp.

*May 21, 1876*
*Sunday*
*Camp Command*

*Had a very good guard although, pretty cool, all was quiet last night. About 8 o'clock this morning some of the cavalry came in with orders for us to break camp and move to where they were or rather where the command*

*were. Soon after the wagons came in with two men from each Co. to load their property. Started 9:30 am and after sticking in the mud several times we got to where the command were camped and where we would stay 3 or four weeks.*

*We have a beautiful camp. Our camp is in a woods on the river bank. The river bottom land is covered in rich grass, but back from river it is the same as here to fore. We crossed Porcupine Creek which is very high and muddy. Also passed Rosebud River which empties into the Yellowstone River on the south side. Day pleasant.*

*Lieut. Bradly found an Indian spoon made from horn of buffalo also a bowl made out of cottonwood and several curious stones evidently of some use to the Indians at one time. He also found a letter written by a white woman. The letter says she was captured by the Sioux and that if this Indian was captured by white men they should not hurt him as he was kind to her but suppose he either died or was killed by the Crow Indians where the letter would do no good.*

*8 miles today. 470 miles from Ft. Shaw.*

February 19, 1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province, Base camp at Dong ha

The previous night goes without incident but I just naturally wake up at about 6 a.m. I can't lay here long because the stench is over powering. My menthol oil has worn off during the night, so I get up for a shower. Fanelli and the loader are also up, so we sky together for the showers. Since we are leaving for the field today, I mention to Fanelli that I may forgo shaving and start my new beard. He cautions me that the First Sgt. will remember that the next time we're in the rear when assigning perimeter bunker guard. As always, I take Fanelli's advice seriously, and after shower I also shave. My new beard can wait until tomorrow, as I've been in a perimeter bunker once, and once was more than enough.

We head back to the hootch and meet up with Zack, Wack, and Big Al. Together we go to the mess hall. It must be the day that they actually make coffee instead of reheating it for so long that no one even remembers when it was made. The coffee smells so good, I decide to have some. It is freshly made and number one. It tastes good with just milk in it instead of cream. Not

that we get cream, but we dream sometimes. I have a couple of cups of java and several of the tee tee boxes of cereal. One of the best meals I've had at this mess hall. With the smell of fresh coffee lingering in the air, we hang around the mess hall until the DROs kick us out so they can clean the dining room.

We saunter back to our hootch and mill about outside, waiting for formation to be called. The First Sgt. arrives and has his inspection. The juicers are a mess, and the First Sgt. takes note as he reviews us. Fanelli, the loader, and I are strack, and we get no extra scrutiny. Fanelli is right, I think, about the First Sgt. having a long memory about past transgressions. He addresses the platoons about the guys who skipped out on perimeter bunker guard duty last night and tells them they will all be given an Article 15 in their record. Each guy will also be fined $50, to be taken out of their next pay. That makes the guys who got stuck on guard duty in place of the juicers feel a tee tee bit better. But not much.

After the sermon from our First Sgt., we head inside the hootch to collect our gear and then off to the motor pool to prepare for the field. I've got all my belongings in a waterproof bag and a .50 Cal. ammo box, so Fanelli and the loader and I sky for the motor pool. When we get there, the deuce and a halfs loaded with ammo are arriving for us to unload, unpack, and load on the tanks.

All three platoons are in the motor pool, so there are 9 tanks and 21 P.C.s all loading up ammo and supplies for the field. That makes about 150 guys and at last count, 10 dogs. The dogs hate the rear more than us. I can tell that if any of us are the most excited about leaving base camp for the field, it would be the dogs. Since they are unofficial and against Regs, the guys try to keep them hidden and out of sight. The dogs hate that, as they usually can come and go as they please. They will be boo coo happy about not having to hide out any longer. Also, they have had to survive (just like us) on mess hall food for the last few days. The exception being Snoopy, Charlie Brown's dog. Snoopy usually eats real dog food, as Charlie Brown spoils the heck out of that dog. While the rest of the dogs are still safely hidden, Snoopy brazenly walks around the deck on Double Deuce, impatient to get going.

We shot a lot of coax machine gun ammo during the qualification contest, so Fanelli carefully tops off the coax's ammo box under the watchful eye of the loader. At least we hope he is watching. We also have to re-fuel all the tracks, so it's about lunch time before everything is loaded up and ready to

go.

Some guys head for the mess hall for their last opportunity to be poisoned or possibly worse. The rest of us stay at the motor pool to eat c-rats instead. Even the milk can't get me to the mess hall for lunch. I feel I've just had the best meal I've had there. Why press my luck? Fanelli is getting nervous and not because we're heading for the field. He's getting nervous, because he's getting low on Ramen. I don't like it when Fanelli is nervous, so I don't add to it by asking him how many he has left. We won't resupply today, so no chance we'll see Fanelli's mamasan and no chance he'll get anymore Ramen. Fanelli has Ramen for lunch, and I have c-rats. Lately I've been eating the c-rat peaches, and they are number one.

Slowly the members of the troop start to return from lunch, and even the LT shows up. You would think we are excited about returning to the field the way everyone climbs up on the tanks and P.C.s and make ready to leave. The LT calls Our Dear Platoon Sgt. over the horn, and Fanelli has to inform the LT that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. isn't here yet. It isn't long before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. shows up at the motor pool. Once again, it makes me think the LT and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. have this ego thing going on between them as to who is more important and who is really in charge. War is weird. Finally all engines are running, and the First platoon's tanks with their award brooms affixed to their turrets lead the Troop out of the motor pool and head for the redball and out to the field.

We head towards Cam-lo, and we in the Second platoon are following the LT as he follows the First platoon. At one point, all thirty tracks are driving single file on the redball as we continue towards Cam-lo. At first the fresh air of the countryside is refreshing, but too quickly it starts to seem normal as the stench of base camp fades. The First platoon turns off the redball before we get to Cam-lo, but the LT continues west on the redball, and we follow.

After about another klik, the LT turns off the redball on to a dirt trail, and we start to mine sweep. Wack is first up and Sgt. Green on 2-4 is teasing him about whether he remembers how to mine sweep. The Third platoon continues down the redball towards Cam-lo. We turned off before we could smell Cam-lo, so my sense of smell is getting a vacation from stench for a while. It's only a vacation from stench, but not from other bad odors such as diesel fuel, diesel exhaust, and all the guys farting non-stop. Wack finds a mine right off, so it is quite apparent he remembers how to do it. He clears it with some C-4, and we continue on our way. We rarely find just one, and

today is no exception as we find several more before we stop to set up our RON. We are a tee tee bit more nervous than usual as we drive around in circles flattening all the vegetation. The RON site is too big to mine sweep before we drive around, so we don't. All of us tank drivers are extra nervous about mines in the new unproven Sheridan tanks, especially surrounded by main gun ammo in the driver's compartment.

All goes well, and most of us dismount and look around with the intense scrutiny of recent converts to the faith of tunnel searching. We find nothing and prepare for our first night back in the field much relieved. At least until The Scary Time, which will be soon. I put out the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader put out the concertina wire and set up the RPG screen.

As always, when I place the detonators for the claymores next to the .50 Cal. I worry about Our Dear Platoon Sgt. accidentally grabbing one when he reaches for his bottle. I set up my tent while Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of New 2-3. The side of New 2-3 is not as high at the top of the hull compared to the hull height on the M-48s, so the tarp is not as spacious. But with both ends open, it's still well ventilated.

It's starting to get dark, so Fanelli and the loader get into the turret, and I climb into the driver's compartment. We turn all the red interior lights on, and I settle into my seat. It's fairly comfortable, and in actuality, the most comfortable seat in the tank. It's a small consolation when I have to sit between boo coo rounds of live main gun ammo. Because of the ammo, there is a small opening between the turret and the driver's compartment so I can pass ammo to the loader during a firefight. I can hear the loader and Fanelli as they talk, and they can sort of hear me. I can get into the turret from the driver's compartment if the turret is swung around and the main gun is pointed to the rear. Since we are set up with the main gun pointed to the front, I can't get into the turret from here. We settle on guard duty shifts, and I take last shift mostly because no one wants it.

For dinner tonight, I have some cold c-rats that I keep in the driver's compartment just for situations like this. I'm feeling well rested, so I stay up fairly late chatting with Fanelli and the loader before finally heading out to my tent for some shuteye. My stretcher feels hard and confining after sleeping on a bed the last few nights. The mosquitoes welcome me back with a vengeance. I think they missed me.

*May 24, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Camp Command*

*This morning we were turned out about 2 o'clock and were marched out from camp fifty yards or more. We formed in skirmish order and layed down and stayed there until daylight. We then went back turned in and went to sleep.*

*Had breakfast at 9 o'clock am. After breakfast went down to the citizen boat where they were selling out everything all at a very high price. Potatoes 8 cts. a pound, eggs $2.00 per doz. Butter $1.00 per lb. Cheese 50 cents lb. He had only one sack of flour to spare which he sold for $12.00. He had also a barrel of sour kraut (which he said was for the Dutch).*

*One Sioux saw today in the timber below the camp but ran off.*

February 20, 1970
Friday
Quang Tri Province

My luck holds as the night passes with no attacks on us. Being our first night back in the field with new tanks that some of the crews hardly know how to use yet, it would have been number ten if we would have gotten hit. I decide not to dwell on that. Being the last shift for guard duty means I get to watch it slowly get light in the morning. For us, the dark of night is The Scary Time in the field. It's the most dangerous time. When the dark starts to give way to the light, I, for one, sigh with relief at making it through another night in the Nam.

A tee tee bit after 6 a.m., I heat up some water in my canteen cup and make my morning java. It’s instant c-rat coffee, but it's number one compared with the mess hall coffee. The one exception being the last time I was at the mess hall when they made fresh coffee. They don't make fresh coffee at the mess hall until the current urn of coffee is gone or a month or two goes by, whichever comes first. That would probably be the month or two.

I open a can of pecan roll, and my breakfast is ready. Fanelli and the loader get up, mostly because the C-4 is so noisy when it burns. It sounds like a welder's torch, and it's almost as bright. That's why I had to eat my c-rats cold last night. It was almost dark by the time we were done setting up. I

must be rusty at putting out the claymores and setting up the trip flares. Fanelli, as usual, prepares for his morning shave. I rub my chin and feel the start of my next beard. It feels number one not to have to shave again for a while.

I finish my breakfast with a can of c-rat fruit cocktail, which along with the canned peaches are still my favorites. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. arises, lights up a Lucky Strike, and inhales deeply. He looks like hell. Blood shot eyes and shakes so bad when he first gets up, I'm amazed he can get his cigarette lit by himself. He climbs up on the turret to the TC position, supposedly to get a sitrep from the LT. But it's really so he can have his morning bracer to get rid of his shakes so he can shave.

I can hear the LT's reply to Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s query about the plans for the day. The LT, being mindful of the new and unproven tanks and their crews, says we are going to drive along the Cam-lo River, do some recon, and try out the new tanks at crossing the river at some of our familiar crossing locations. I'm not concerned, having driven both M-48s and Sheridan's in the past. I think the Sheridan's will easily cross anywhere the P.C.s can make it across. The P.C.s are essentially rolling ammo boxes. The bottoms of most of the P.C.s are lined with two layers of ammo boxes filled with .50 Cal. and M-60 ammo. The P.C.s are really loaded down with ammo and get stuck more often than the tanks which carry much less .50 Cal. and M-60 ammo. Although the tank's coax machine gun is not an M-60, it uses the same 7.62 mm ammo that the M-60s use. Which is also the same ammo that the M-14 uses. A couple guys in the second platoon have M-14s they scored somewhere. Probably traded with a marine, as they often have M-14s.

Word goes around to prepare to break camp. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire, take down the RPG screen, and tie it all to the side of 2-3. After we get everything secured, we once again look like a caravan of ragtag refugees, and in a way we are. We uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5 and slowly make our way to the redball at a walking pace. We have to cross the redball to get to the Cam-lo River. When we get to the redball, we just cross over and mine sweep our way to the river. By the time we get to the river, it's about noon. LT orders all the tracks to space out at about 50 foot intervals facing the river and the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times and break for lunch.

Fanelli is extremely nervous about his Ramen stash situation, which is low. We didn't have resupply yesterday, having just returned to the field. That

meant no hot chow, which was no big deal because the c-rats are better. But it also meant no Fanelli's mamasan, and no prospect of getting more Ramen then. Fanelli has one of his last few Ramen for lunch while the loader and myself content ourselves with c-rats. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. sits behind the .50 Cal., mostly so he can have his liquid lunch uninterrupted.

After our modest repast, we proceed single file along the rocky banks of the Cam-lo River. This is an easy place to throw a track because of all the round and loose stone everywhere. We are mine sweeping, and we are going boo coo slow, so it is not very likely anyone will throw a track, but still possible.

We come to the first trail crossing, and the LT orders 2-6 to make an attempt at crossing the river. The water is about 2 to 2 1/2 feet deep here. 2-6 crosses over with ease. The LT has 2-6 cross back over, and then the whole platoon proceeds on the river bank to the next trail crossing point. The LT has 2-6 try crossing again, and they make it across with very little difficulty.

The LT then has Double Deuce take a crack at crossing the river. Double Deuce does make it across, but not without a tee tee bit of difficulty. The P.C.'s track is narrower than the tanks, and they carry boo coo amounts of ammo, so I'm not surprised. Because Double Deuce barely made it across, the LT has Double Deuce and 2-6 cross back over. The rest of the P.C. drivers are relieved they don't have to try to cross the river.

After 2-6 and Double Deuce make it back, we proceed along the river bank, mine sweeping as we go, until we come to the next crossing point. This is a bad one, because the river bank on the other side is a steep slope. We can tell from here it's wet and slippery. In the past it was the M-48s that were the deciding factor as to where the platoon could go. We now know that it's the P.C.s that will have a harder time at a crossing like this, so the LT orders 2-4 to try to get up the river bank on the other side of the river.

Sgt. Green, the TC on 2-4, is not excited about trying to get up the steep river bank, but he orders his driver to cross. They cross the river pretty easily, but they only make it half way up the river bank on the other side before 2-4 starts going sideways and then starts sliding backwards down the bank. The driver on 2-4 gets control and makes another attempt to get up the river bank, but the track breaks loose on the soft wet ground, and 2-4 starts going sideways again and eventually backwards down the steep bank.

It's scary watching them from across the river, so I know it's even scarier for the crew on 2-4, which includes my friend Wack. I call Wack over the

horn to get a sitrep on their backslide.

Wack says, "Oh man, we were both up on the side of 2-4 ready to jump which ever way we had to so as not to go on a Missouri River boat ride. Man, how ya gonna act?"

Having had their fill of excitement for the day, the LT lets 2-4 cross back.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. wants the LT to let him try to get up the steep river bank. After watching 2-4, I am not particularly inclined to attempt it. Thankfully, the LT tells Our Dear Platoon Sgt. to forget it. If the P.C.s can't make it up it to the top, it doesn't matter if the tanks can. But this fact is apparently lost on Our Dear Platoon Sgt.

We have been heading in a westerly direction along the river, and we are now pretty close to Cam-lo. Fanelli has high hopes we will resupply just east or west of Cam-lo, close enough that the locals will come to our resupply site.

Fanelli is in luck, and the LT has the mine sweepers head south for the redball, which shouldn't be far, and it isn't. At the redball, we head west towards Cam-lo. We don’t go far when we arrive at the familiar large open area on the east side of Cam-lo. One of the other platoons is already there, and as we start to position ourselves the last platoon shows up.

With the new tanks, Fanelli is worried that his mamasan will have a hard time finding us, if at all. His worries are unfounded, as after a short while I see Lon, her brother, and Fanelli's mamasan slowly making their way towards 2-3. Fanelli's mamasan is dressed as most adult Vietnamese women do in black silk pajamas. At least to us they look like pajamas. She also wears a conical straw hat. Lon wears black silk pants but with a white silk shirt. She has a conical straw hat too, but instead of wearing it like Fanelli's mamasan, Lon lets it hang on her back with the chin string around her neck.

Fanelli's mamasan is very short, as are most Vietnamese women. I don't think she's even 5 feet tall, and I would guess more like 4 feet 8 inches. Lon just comes up to Fanelli's mamasan's shoulder, so I guess Lon to be about 4 feet tall. Her brother is a tee tee bit shorter than that. We must seem like giants to them.

I'm standing on the front edge of my driver's compartment to get a better view over the concertina wire, and probably because I have my red sunglasses on and waving at them, they all see me at once and start running up to the edge of the concertina wire in front of the New 2-3. When Fanelli and I meet them from across the concertina wire, Fanelli's mamasan is talking

a mile a minute in Vietnamese, alternately crying and then laughing while Lon tries to keep up translating for us as. I had not noticed before that Fanelli's mamasan is a beetle nut chewer with completely black teeth. I really am getting used to this place, because now black teeth seem normal to me. Lon and her brother are not as emotional as Fanelli's mamasan and are just happily laughing at our reunion. If we weren't separated by the concertina wire, we would all be hugging each other, which would be number ten if Our Dear Platoon Sgt. saw us.

He would surely growl, "Hey, no fraternizing with the locals!"

Instead we squeeze each other's hands over the concertina wire. I can't tell you how touching it is for me to see how much they like us, and how much they missed us when we were only gone for less than a week.

Lon translates what Fanelli's mamasan said when they first arrived. "We saw 2-3 drive through Cam-lo with ARVN crew, and because we not see you lately, we thought we never see you again!"

Fortunately, Fanelli's mamasan has Ramen. I think it's Fanelli who is going to cry now, he is so overjoyed about getting his Ramen. And he thinks I'm dinky dao!

Because Lon and her brother thought we were gone, they didn't bring their sand bag. I tell them I will put some stuff in the burn hole for them, but next time they should bring the sand bag. Lon and her brother totally amaze me with their high spirits and laughter that I can almost forget where I am. Fanelli's mamasan only has five Ramen, but she said she would have more tomorrow. Fanelli buys them all. Fanelli tells her we get paid next week, so if she could get him another case, that would be number one. Fanelli's mamasan says she will try her best to get him another case of Ramen.

We have such a boo coo good time laughing and joking with Lon and her brother that we hate to break it off with them and deal with our resupply duties. In the end, the decision is made for us.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. growls at Fanelli and me, "Hey, you two, get goin' and quit talkin' to the locals."

We laugh him off and say our goodbyes to Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother. We keep waving to them until they are out of our sight.

It's been a week since I have had to suffer the hot chow, and so the loader and I saunter to the chow line. Fanelli has Ramen and is confident he will get more soon. We meet up with most of the rest of the platoon in the chow line. A week away from the hot chow. We should know better than to think it will

have changed. It hasn't. It's still awful as ever. I chat with Wack and Zack and Big Al as we all display our prowess and expertise at waiting in line.

Steve shows up and joins us in line. Steve's only been here a short while, and already he's on a new tank with new things to learn. I don't envy him. But then I don't envy anyone here.

I mostly hope there might be some ice. But there isn't, so the hot chow is a complete disappointment for me.

After hot chow they have mail call, and my luck changes a tee tee bit for the better, as I get some letters from friends back in the Real World. Knowing that the Real World is still there is almost the best part of getting mail from home. Fanelli and the loader and I head back to 2-3 after mail call to finish storing our supplies from resupply.

The platoon prepares to leave, so I carefully put three c-rat meal boxes in the burn hole next to 2-3. I give Lon and her brother a subtle little wave so that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. doesn't catch on, I hope. We pull in the concertina wire, and there is a mad rush into the resupply site, but Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has been working hard at his bottle and is beyond noticing much.

We uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5 and slowly move to the redball. We head west towards Cam-lo. It's not long before I can smell Cam-lo, and soon after it's in sight. I wonder if the old guy will be giving the tracks the finger as we drive through Cam-lo. I don't have to wonder long, as I can see him up ahead by the side of the road. Good thing I keep a couple boxes of c-rats in the driver's compartment. I'm not sure he'll recognize me in my new tank, but I have my red sunglasses on and my seat up all the way so from my mid-chest on up is out of the tank. I'm pretty exposed this way, but we don't expect trouble during the day, especially in the middle of Cam-lo.

The old guy does recognize me and flashes me the Peace Sign instead of The Bird. As we pass, I flip him a box of c-rats.

We drive through Cam-lo and go about 2 kliks west, then the LT turns off the redball at a dirt trail. We stop, and the mine sweepers start, and we follow at a walking pace.

We are on the opposite side of the redball from the river. We slowly work our way up some hills to an open area and then drive around in circles to flatten everything. We dismount and carefully search for tunnels. We find none. I'm getting back to my routine of setting out my trip flares and the claymores. At least I think so. We're on a hill of sorts, and the ground is very uneven. I have all my trip flares set on a hair trigger. As the light is beginning

to fade, I try to get back into the RON but set off one of my trip flares that I didn't see. I have to run over to it and kick it out. And now I have to reset that trip flare, which means I have to go back through the concertina wire and get another one off of 2-3.

By the time I get back with my replacement trip flare, it's almost dark, and it's hard to finish the set up. I'm in a hurry to get back inside the RON, and when I am going through the concertina wire, I stumble in the darkness. The next thing I know, I'm tangled in the concertina wire, and I mean boo coo tangled. I know better than to move or thrash around, which just makes it worse.

I call out to Fanelli and the loader for help.

"What have you gotten yourself into this time, FNG?" asks Fanelli, as they ascertain my dilemma.

"I don't know," I answer. "I tripped in the dark, and the next thing I know I'm boo coo tangled up. C'mon and get me out of this shit. Man, this stuff really fuckin' hurts."

They're laughing so hard, it takes both of them several minutes to extricate me from the concertina wire. At first, Fanelli wants to get his camera and take my picture, but he finally takes pity on me in my situation.

I have a new and healthy respect for the concertina wire's abilities, as well as a couple of bleeding pokes and cuts which are very unhealthy here during monsoon. (When does monsoon end, I think again? Soon I hope.) I have to set my tent up in the dark, but it's pretty easy. I get into the driver's compartment with our first aid kit and attend to my cuts. I read one of the letters from home and save the others for later, which is hard.

"Hey, FNG, maybe the concertina wire missed ya since ya spend so much time playin' with yer trip flares now. It just wanted to say, 'Hi!'" teases Fanelli.

I ignore his taunts. After a couple of hours of lounging in my driver's seat and enduring all of Fanelli's teasing about my encounter with the concertina wire, I decide to call it a night.

I have last shift on guard, and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has first shift. I say, "Just like old times," as I'm looking down into the turret through the loader's hatch at Fanelli. He smiles back.

I make my way to my tent and lay down on my stretcher, still having to use the down sleeping bag to give me a fighting chance against all the bugs. The day ends unpleasantly, as usual, with bugs swirling about my sweaty

face if I let any of it peek out of my sleeping bag. Maybe mosquito netting would be more appropriate, but of course this is the army. What am I thinking?

*May 25, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Command*

*Was woke up by hearing the melodious voice of our First Sergeant calling fall out. We all fell out. Each Company was deployed out on the picket line and waited for daylight or Indians, I hardly know which.*

*Daylight comes but no Sioux so we were all sent back and turned in for a sleep after which we had breakfast which consisted of three boiled potatoes, two pieces of fried bacon. A cup of coffee and six small hardtack. This we soon demolished.*

*Then we had the considerable job of doing nothing: which I done to a "T" and lasted all day. Detailed for guard tonight.*

*Very warm this evening although not so all day.*

*Sergeant Dayton and Sauls of the Company I belong to were discharged and sent back to Ft. Ellis the 23rd.*

*River raising rapidly.*

February 21, 1970
Saturday
Quang Tri Province

The outside temperature has been high lately, making me hope that monsoon will be over soon. Sleeping in a goose down sleeping bag isn't going to be possible much longer because of the heat. My hope is that when monsoon is over, the bugs might be more tolerable, but I don't know that. I'm just hoping. Although it's warm, it is still raining often, so it being warm is not really an improvement. It's just a change. It's number one not being cold and wet but being warm and wet is not much better.

As I finish guard duty, it's showing signs of light. There's a gray mist hanging in the low lying areas I can see from my perch on the turret of 2-3. The colors start coming back as it gets full light, or I should say color; as in green. Everything is some shade of green, and although we are not in jungle,

we are in an area of lush trees and short bushes. We are up on a hill of sorts, but we can't see Cam-lo from here. It's not far away and probably why we haven't had a Mad Minute since returning to the field in our new tanks.

I start to heat up some water for my morning coffee. Fanelli and the loader get up, as does the rest of the platoon. Fanelli prepares for his morning shave, and I give my chin a stroke. It's only a two day stubble, but it will cause Our Dear Platoon Sgt. to give me the evil eye for a couple of days until he resigns himself to the fact that I'm not going to shave, and he can't make me.

All the noise and activity has awakened our Dear Platoon Sgt. from his much needed beauty sleep (otherwise we wouldn't be able to look at him in the morning). As it is, he's extremely rough in the morning. First he smokes a couple of Luckys, then his morning bracer and a shave, and that's the high point of his day. It's downhill from there for him and us as well. Fanelli is in fair spirits, as he has had Ramen for breakfast and has good prospects of getting more. I'm finding I like the pecan roll for my breakfast, and that allows me to build up a barter reserve of several cans of pound cake, which is the gold standard for trade.

My tee tee pokes and cuts from my tangle with the concertina wire don't look too serious, so I feel number one about that. The platoon gets a slow start this morning. I climb into my driver's compartment to sit in the only comfortable place I have. More for something to do than anything else, I make a few entries in my journal.

The order finally comes over the horn to prepare to break camp. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares without incident, but I'm extra wary around the concertina wire until the loader takes it in. Fanelli gets the RPG screen down and tied to the side of 2-3. The tarp comes off, and I stow my tent and the stretcher rolled up in the tarp, which I tie to the side of 2-3.

Our ragtag caravan is ready to sky. We uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5, and we slowly make our way towards the redball. We mine sweep and proceed at a walking pace until we reach the redball. At the redball, we just cross over and start mine sweeping on the other side and continue until we reach the Cam-lo River. When we reach the Cam-lo River, we spread way out at 75-100 foot intervals with orders that the .50 Cal. be manned at all times.

It's not raining currently, so the transistor radios make their appearance. As usual, the volumes are set so high that some of the radios vibrate and move all over the place as if they are alive. After shooting off all the weapons at the

firing range, my hearing is still not completely back to normal. By how high the volumes are set on the radios, my hearing isn't the only one that's not completely back yet. We don't get time to listen to the radios everyday, and if we do it's only for a few hours at most. I don't know how many songs are on the Northern I Corps radio station playlist, but it can't be many. Every time we have the transistor radios on, they play our two favorite songs, “Midnight Rider” by the Allman Brothers, and a B.B. King song. Our hearing is so bad, we can't figure out the name or understand the lyrics of it. I think the name of the song is “My Grill is Gone”, and every time I hear it, I think, man does this guy love his barbecue!

I really love barbecue myself, and it is one of the things I miss most - besides bread and milk. A bag of potato chips would be number one also. If there happened to be a bag of chips here, you would have to inhale them as soon as you open the bag, as they would be limp in seconds.

Since it's not raining, some of the platoon members are visiting at the other tracks, and some are even brave or foolhardy enough to walk to or into the river. Foolhardy, I think, because Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is behind the .50 Cal. on 2-3 so as to stay close to his best friend Jack (as in Jack Daniels, his preferred juice).

When Fanelli and I make our way to the river’s edge, we do so in front of 2-4, as having Sgt. Green or Wack behind the .50 Cal. is tee tee more comforting, but not much. During my training, it was instilled in us to never be down range of the main gun or the .50 Cal. or any loaded weapons, for that matter. But here in the Nam, we walk in front of loaded weapons more often than not. Probably the only unloaded weapon in the whole platoon is my hated .45. I keep it unloaded mostly for my own personal safety.

Wack comes down to the river as Sgt. Green mans the .50 Cal. and asks me how I like the new Sheridan tank. I tell him I like the seat comfort, but I'm still boo coo nervous about sitting between all that main gun ammo. Wack points out that the P.C. crews walk around on two layers of .50 Cal. and M-60 ammo all day long. I hadn't thought about that. Xin loi, guys

Some of the locals show up and go from track to track offering to wash our clothes in the river. Since we have just recently returned from the rear, it's a tough sell, and no one in the platoon takes them up on it. After a tee tee while, they didi.

It's a gray overcast day, and it makes the river appear gray as well. It's shallow at the edge, and where we are it isn't more than 3 or 4 feet deep in the

middle. One of our river crossing points is right here, but so far we stay on the south side of the river. We got a late start this morning leaving camp, so it's already noon. Fanelli and I head back to 2-3 for lunch. Fanelli, of course, has Ramen, and I have c-rats, of which I am growing weary. We have been trying to score some LRPs but without any success. And that's even with pound cake to trade.

So far Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has ensconced himself up on the turret, so neither the loader, Fanelli, or myself have had to man the .50 Cal. yet. So we are all making and eating our lunch with our transistor radio blaring in the background. I'm smearing some c-rat cheese on the c-rat crackers, and it reminds of Fanelli's mamasan's bread. Of course Fanelli is focused on getting more Ramen, but he agrees with me that it would be number one to get some bread.

After an uneventful afternoon guarding this section of the Cam-lo River, we finally prepare to make our way to resupply. We are a short way from Cam-lo on the west side of it. We follow our trail from this morning back to the redball. Since we don't have to mine sweep, we move along at a fast pace. The LT on 2-5 is in the lead on the redball, and he pulls off the road before we actually get to Cam-lo at a large open area we resupply at often. Although I can't see it, I can definitely smell Cam-lo. That reminds me I need to score some more menthol oil from Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy. The Second platoon is the first to arrive, but soon the other two platoons show up, as does the resupply convoy. That, in turn, is followed by the locals, who must have seen the convoy go through Cam-lo.

I back 2-3 into place under the careful guidance of Our Dear Platoon Sgt., who disappears immediately as I shut the engine down. His bottle must be empty or near empty, which cannot be tolerated.

It's not long after the concertina wire is out that Fanelli's mamasan, Lon, and her brother show up. They, like us, are all smiles about being able to meet again at resupply. It's without a doubt the high point of our day, especially if we don't mention the hot chow. Lon has brought the empty sand bag, and she hands it to me. Fanelli's mamasan has five packages of Ramen for him, so he is happy. He chats with them while I take advantage of Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s absence and put some c-rats in the sand bag for Lon and her brother. He's still not back yet, so I am able to openly saunter back to the wire and hand the bag to Lon, and she thanks me as always. We're able to talk a tee tee bit more with them before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns.

He growls at us, "Hey, you guys quit fraternizing with the locals."

Fraternizing. Where did he ever learn that word, I wonder? We laugh him off as long as we can, but finally we have to break off and attend to our resupply duties.

Before they leave, Lon's brother asks me, "Why you let him yell at you?" referring to Our Dear Platoon Sgt.

I say back to him, "Because he's the platoon Sgt. He's in charge."

He shakes his head in disbelief and says to me, "If he in charge, how come he let you drive tank?"

Both Fanelli and I start laughing so hard, we're almost to the point of tears. Our laughing doesn't help, as Lon's brother still looks confused. I finally compose myself enough to answer.

I tell him, "The platoon Sgt. doesn't *let* me drive the tank, he *makes* me drive it." He still doesn't quite understand.

I say to Lon, "Explain to him that I'm sort of the platoon Sgt.'s chauffeur."

Lon says something to her brother in Vietnamese, and then he gets it. He nods his head indicating yes. It turns out that both Lon and her brother thought I was in charge, because I drive the tank. War is weird.

After our tee tee laugh, Lon and her brother didi for Cam-lo. Today Fanelli tries to make it through dinner without eating Ramen and comes with the loader and me to the hot chow line. The line is very short, as it's just Wack and the crew from 2-6. Steve, the TC on 2-6, has been in the Second platoon for 10 days now, but half of that time has been at base camp.

Steve is not yet fully aware of how horrible the hot chow always is. At least I assume that by the amount he has piled on his paper plate. Today it's rehydrated dehydrated potatoes, thinly sliced for our dining enjoyment. Also, something reminiscent of beef, once again being billed as water buffalo, which it is assuredly not. To round out our dinner offering today, we have canned peas so gray, soggy, and overcooked that they turn to paste as the KPs attempt to spoon them onto the plate of any unwary diner in line. We ask for ice and are told there is none as usual. I pass on the peas and stick with just the potatoes and the water buffalo.

This is the first time I can remember Fanelli eating the hot chow. We're hungry, so we try to eat it, but not only does it look bad, it tastes worse. None of us finish what is on our plates, especially Steve, who has had his thinking about the hot chow corrected. We chat for a short while, but as we'll be leaving here soon, we all sky to our tanks.

When we get back to 2-3, I open a can of c-rat pears and eat them, mostly to try to wipe the taste of the hot chow from my mouth. Fanelli seems to be going through Ramen withdrawal, as the hot chow was not a very satisfying last meal of the day. We still have some hard work ahead of us when we set up our RON tonight.

We finish packing our supplies away, and soon the LT comes on the horn and tells us to prepare to didi. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire as I get into the driver's compartment and start 2-3, thankful to not have to touch the concertina wire yet. There's a lot of commotion as the platoons start to leave, and the locals start rushing into our now abandoned resupply site. As we start to pull out and follow the LT, I spot Lon and her brother and Fanelli's mamasan. I wave to them, and they wave back, which I'm quite sure wouldn't be considered fraternizing.

The LT heads west on the redball, and we sky, sometimes going 20 mph. We drive for maybe a half an hour, so we are at least 10 or more kliks west of Cam-lo before the LT pulls off the redball. We start mine sweeping at a walking pace. We proceed for another half an hour until we reach an open space, and we drive around in circles until everything is flat. Then we dismount and very carefully go over every square inch until we are satisfied there are no tunnels. None being found, we attend to setting up the RON for tonight.

We spent a lot of time getting here, and it's going to be dark soon. Although I'm hustling to get my claymores in place and set my trip flares, I am being extra careful to give the concertina wire my full attention whenever I get near it. When I climb up on the turret of 2-3 to put the claymore detonators in place I can see Our Dear Platoon Sgt. was successful at his quest for juice. He still has almost half of his fifth left. I hate putting all the detonators for the claymores within easy reach for him, but I don't have any other choice.

While I'm up on the turret, I hear the LT inform Our Dear Platoon Sgt. over the horn that we will be having a Mad Minute tonight soon after dark. This will be the first Mad Minute since we have returned to the field in our new Sheridan tanks. It just means we will have to clean all the weapons tomorrow morning before we can break camp.

It's not long until dark, and then we all get ready for the mike-mike. I push down the RPG screen, get into the driver's compartment, and start the engine on 2-3. I then drop my seat down all the way and close my hatch cover

because Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is going to shoot off a couple of main gun rounds. It would be number ten for me if my hatch cover was open.

The LT gives the order to commence firing, and I grab onto the steering bar just as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. fires off the first main gun round. While the loader reloads the main gun, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. fires the .50 Cal. and Fanelli rakes the area with the coax machine gun. The main gun reloaded, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. fires off the second main gun round. When the loader asks him if he wants another round, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. Declines, as the Mad Minute is almost over.

That being the case, I open my hatch cover, point my hated .45 into the darkness, and fire off several rounds. I'm half surprised it works, but not really surprised when I attempt to put the safety on and realize it is already on "safe". I point it again into the darkness while it has the safety on and fire it again, just to be sure. I definitely won't be keeping this thing loaded, and I'm especially glad now that I haven't been keeping it loaded. The LT orders a cease-fire, and the Mad Minute comes to an end. I had my commo helmet on while I fired off my hated .45, and it protected my hearing a tee tee bit, but my ears are ringing again. If I'm not careful, I'll be deaf before I get out of this place, if I get out at all.

We have the red interior lights on inside 2-3, so I stay in my driver's seat for a while to finish getting my night vision back after the mike-mike. Also, my seat is the most comfortable place for me to sit. I read one of the letters from home that I saved. The Real World is still there, and it's a comforting thought from where I sit currently. I can't talk to Fanelli or the loader because I can't hear anything over the ringing in my ears, so I climb out of my driver's compartment and set the RPG screen back up. I climb onto 2-3 and stick my head into the turret at the loader's hatch. We need to decide on guard duty shifts. It makes everyone happy that I take the last shift. My tent is already set up behind 2-3, and my stretcher beckons, so I make my way to my tent and crawl in. It feels like it's been a long day, and I'm ready to sleep. Unfortunately, as always, the mosquitoes have other plans for me. I hate that.

*May 28, 1876*
*Sunday*
*Camp Command*

*Another boatload of provisions down from Bozeman, also brought mail.*

*Received a letter from Ft. Shaw. All is well. The wagons here go to meet the supply train.*

*A sergeant from C Company of Ft. Ellis was shot by a man of his own company by mistake of for our enemy.*

*Rain today and appearances of more tonight.*

*Had a swim this afternoon, then wrote letters to bros. Wilson and Madison.*

*Day pleasant.*

February 22, 1970
Sunday
Quang Tri Province

I'm up at 4 a.m. to start my stint at guard. My jungle fatigues are saturated from sleeping inside my goose down sleeping bag with the top folded over my head to keep the bugs off my face. When does monsoon end, I wonder? It's warm to hot during the day, but it gets down to about 65 degrees F at night. We open our thermo chest with our Cokes at night, and I close it just before sunrise while I'm on guard. 65 degrees doesn't sound cold or even cool, but when it hits 90 degrees with almost 100 % humidity during the day, a 65 degree Coke is somewhat refreshing. Especially if you drink it down in a couple of long chugs, which is what I do. I'm getting low on Cokes, and payday is still a week away, so I'm going to try to barter for some Cokes at resupply. I also need to get more menthol oil.

My shift at guard ends with no gun play, so the Mad Minute did its job. I heat up some water in my canteen cup for my morning java fix. It's not quite full light, but I can see around the RON as the other platoon members are moving around. Fanelli and the loader both get up knowing we have a busy morning ahead. We have to clean all the guns we fired last night during the mike-mike. Of course, to prepare himself for the day ahead, Fanelli has his morning shave, and I don't. We're all having breakfast before Our Dear Platoon Sgt arises. He fumbles around in his pocket for his Luckys and his lighter, and then makes his way up on the turret for his juice. He's pretty short, and he has a hard time climbing up on 2-3 most of the time, as there are no steps or ladders on tanks. It's supposed to be hard to get on a tank, and that's the way we want it once we're inside it. Xin loi, Sarge

Fanelli takes the tarp off the side of 2-3, and lays it on the ground to use as

a ground cover when we start cleaning the .50 Cal. and the coax. I have a new morning chore on the Sheridan, which is extremely important. The diesel fuel gets water in it from poor handling and from condensation that forms in the fuel tanks. Every morning before I start up 2-3, I have to drain the fuel filter of all the accumulated water. I'm always surprised at how much water is in the fuel, as I drain out a couple of cups every morning. We clean the coax first, so as to not disturb Our Dear Platoon Sgt. He prefers to have his morning bracer sitting behind the .50 Cal.

Although it's unlikely for us to get hit during daylight, we are still cautious. We don't take all the guns apart for cleaning at the same time. It takes us longer to clean all the guns this way, but it would be number ten to get attacked with all the guns taken apart for cleaning. Fanelli takes ammo inventory and makes a list to order for resupply today. We splash cleaning solvent and gun lubrication oil all over the tarp. Makes me glad I have my tent to sleep in, as the tarp will reek of solvent and oil for days. Our coax machine gun is operating number one which is an accomplishment, as the coax is known to be boo coo finicky. 2-6 has been having problems with their coax since it was on the old M-48s, and they still haven't been able to correct it. We don't call it the Little Bastard for nothin'.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is still unapproachable, so Fanelli and the loader clean the main gun before they dismantle the .50 Cal. for cleaning. The gun barrel on the M-48 is very long, and it was a major chore to clean. This is their first main gun cleaning in the field on the new tank, and it goes smoothly. The Sheridan's main gun shoots a blast of compressed air into the barrel immediately after a round is fired. This blows all the debris out, and the barrel stays much cleaner after having been fired. They both like the fact that the main gun barrel is really short compared with the M-48's main gun.

The .50 Cal. is a beast of a machine gun, and it can take two guys to get it down from the turret and back on after cleaning. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. finally has to answer to nature's call, so Fanelli and the loader take the .50 Cal. down off the turret to be cleaned. They hand the .50 Cal. down to me, and I hold it in place until they clamber down from the turret to take it from me. While Fanelli and the loader disassemble the .50 Cal., I get some 7.62 mm ammo from the bustle rack. I climb into the turret to top off the ammo box for the coax. Fanelli and I still aren't letting the loader actually fill the coax ammo box yet.

The loader and I are both FNGs, but I've been to Armor School, and the

loader hasn't. After I finish carefully re-filling the coax ammo box, I turn my attention to my hated .45. Since I fired it last night, I need to clean it, but I'm really uneasy about the fact that the safety doesn't work. Fanelli has a shoulder holster for his .45, and that's how he carries it when he wears it. I have a shoulder holster also, but being left handed, it makes it slow to get it out. Plus, it's really uncomfortable wearing a shoulder holster with a Colt .45 in it. I have a hip holster that I wear backwards on my right side so I can reach across with my left hand and grab it. Not the fastest way to get it. But we don't face off at high noon where the fastest and the straightest shooter wins. Although shooting fast and straight is a skill to be acquired if you want to survive here in the Nam, the machine guns can make up for any skills lacking by most. Even, I suppose, Our Dear Platoon Sgt.

The platoon finishes up with cleaning all the weapons sometime after 10 a.m., and soon the order comes to prepare to break camp. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader attend to the RPG screen and the concertina wire. Since I usually roll my tent and my stretcher up in the tarp, I know it won't only be the tarp that reeks of cleaning solvent and gun oil. I hear the LT over the horn inform two of the short-timers that their replacements will be coming out on resupply today, and that they should get their gear together today because they are going back to the rear on the resupply convoy. That's two boo coo happy guys in the Second platoon. There will be two very unhappy FNGs in the Second platoon tonight.

We uncircle the tracks and line up behind the LT, and we proceed at a walking pace, mine sweeping as we go, headed toward the redball. It takes about a half an hour to get back to the redball, and the LT turns east on the redball, and we follow. We only drive about a klik, and then we turn north on a small trail. At a walking pace, we proceed to the Cam-lo River.

Once we get there, the LT has the tracks spread out at about 50 foot intervals and orders the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times. Also, each P.C. is supposed to send one guy to the LT's track to prepare for a short patrol along the river bank to look for weapon and supply caches. Because none of the three tank crews have to send a man on patrol, it will further our reputation as dog robbers.

As Fanelli likes to say, "We're tankers, not ground pounders. Xin loi!"

It's almost noon, so the guys being sent on patrol are also pissed off because the rest of us are heating up c-rats for lunch. Except for Fanelli, that is, who is boiling water for his Ramen.

The river is much narrower here than it is closer to the village of Cam-lo. The river bank here is fairly steep to completely vertical in places. The water is moving boo coo fast, I think, and I am glad I'm not sent on patrol. The guys on patrol take off while the rest of us busy ourselves preparing our lunch. We are still distant from Cam-lo, and because of that, no locals show up offering to wash our clothes. It's already pretty hot, and I wash my c-rat lunch down with several gulps of Coke, which is still fairly cool even without any ice.

It hasn't rained today, though it's very gray and overcast and looks like it could rain at any moment. The transistor radios are out and set at full volume, but the tracks are so far apart, and my ears are still sort of ringing, so I can only hear Fanelli's radio sitting on the turret of 2-3. “Midnight Rider” gets played and soon after, my favorite song, the one by B.B. King, is also played. I still don't know the name of it.

After about an hour and a half, the patrol returns, having found nothing. They really returned because their radio battery died. Radio batteries here have a very short life, I think because of the extreme dampness. Instead of giving the patrol another battery and sending them back out, the LT lets them stay and have their lunch. That was probably a number one decision on the LT's part, because all the guys on the patrol are all in a very foul mood. Being sent back out without lunch wouldn't have improved their attitude. If the army was at all concerned about our attitudes, we wouldn't have to take Attitude Checks so often. I doubt a c-rat lunch will do much to improve their attitude though.

The platoon stays on the Cam-lo River for the rest of the afternoon, and then the LT orders the track crews to prepare to sky for resupply. It doesn't take long to get back to the redball, as we follow the trail we mine swept on the way to the river. Once at the redball, we head toward Cam-lo. After a while, I start to smell Cam-lo, and we reach the open area just east of the village where we resupply often.

We're the first platoon to arrive. Soon after, the resupply convoy shows up, and then in rapid succession the First and Third Platoons also arrive. The convoy parks in the center as all the tracks circle up into a huge circle covering an area of about two football fields side by side. It's going to be a long walk to the hot chow, and I know it won't be worth the walk.

When the resupply convoy pulled in, I could see the two FNGs in their brand new jungle fatigues, sitting on the back of one of the deuce and a half's. It was only a little more than a month ago that it was me and Faustino sitting

on the back of the resupply deuce and a half for our first night in the field. It seems like ages ago, and it's only been a month. This is going to be a boo coo long year, I think.

It's not long before the locals from Cam-lo show up. I see Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy and I make a mental note to remember to try to catch up with him during resupply. The locals know we get paid soon, and some are probably taking orders for Black Market stuff like beer.

The resupply site is so big, it takes a while for Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother to find us. We are all smiles, and once again we are happy to see each other. Fanelli's mamasan has five more Ramen for him, and she is excitedly chattering away in Vietnamese. Lon translates when Fanelli's mamasan pauses during the discourse.

Lon says, "We think we have a case of Ramen for you next Saturday."

Fanelli is in high spirits, and he says, "That's number one, mamasan." He directs his comment to his mamasan, even though Lon was speaking.

Lon brought their sandbag, and she hands it to me. I walk over to 2-3 while Fanelli continues to chat with them. Johnson hasn't been around for a while, so we have a lot of Ham and Egg c-rats, but I know better than to give any to Lon and her brother. We still have lots of extra c-rat meals and miscellaneous cans left over from open meal boxes of c-rats. I fill the bag, but only with what I think Lon and her brother can carry.

When I get back to the concertina wire, I hand the now almost full sandbag to Lon and ask her if she can get me some Cokes. Lon says she can get Cokes for MPC, but she's not sure if anyone will trade Cokes for pound cake. I don't think the Vietnamese appreciate the pound cake like we do, so it doesn't have much barter value. I tell her I have cigarettes, and she is quite sure Cokes can be had for smokes. I don't think Lon and her brother smoke cigarettes, so I'm not too apprehensive about trading cigarettes with them. Unlike Smitty's Tiger Beer boy, who openly smokes cigarettes at re-supply.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns to 2-3, and once again he growls at us.

"Hey! I told you guys to quit fraternizing with them locals. Git away from the wire. Now!" he says as he orders us away from the concertina wire. We were just about done chatting with Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother anyway, so we say our goodbyes.

I head to the hot chow line with the loader. Fanelli starts heating up water for his dinner of Ramen. When the loader and I get to the hot chow line, the crew of 2-6 is there along with Wack, who is talking to the two FNGs that

came out on resupply. One FNG has been assigned to Double Deuce, so we clue him in to watch himself, as he's going to be on the screw-up crew track.

I think it's maybe a better assignment than mine as Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s driver. The hot chow is horrid as usual, so it's number one to have some distraction, such as new platoon members. After playing with my "food" for awhile, I finally give up any notion of actually eating any of it. I sky back to 2-3 with the loader.

We have some ammo to store on 2-3, to replace what we fired off during the Mad Minute last night. It doesn't take very long to stow the replacement ammo and two cases of c-rats. The resupply convoy and the KPs that brought out the hot chow are looking nervous and want to head back to base camp well before it gets dark, which will be soon.

Orders comes from the LT to prepare to didi. I get in 2-3 and start the engine. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and there is a mad rush of locals into the resupply site. The dust clears a tee tee bit as we're pulling out, and I catch a glimpse of Lon as she and her brother sky back to Cam-lo. With all the tanks and P.C.s driving around, they probably can't tell which tank is ours, so I can't tell if they wave goodbye or not.

We head west from where we came, driving several kliks before the LT pulls off the redball on the south side of the road, onto a two track trail. We start to mine sweep at a walking pace through the brush for about a half an hour before we arrive at our intended RON. The tanks and P.C.s circle around and flatten everything standing. Then we dismount and scour the whole area for tunnels. We find none, and so we proceed to set up our RON for tonight. 2-3 is parked between Double Deuce and 2-4, so after I set up my trip flares and the claymores, I saunter over between 2-3 and 2-4 just as Wack finishes digging his foxhole. Excellent timing on my part, I think, as I didn't really want to help dig. Having been taunted myself while digging foxholes, I refrain from teasing the guys digging.

Wack, being finished with his RON set up chores, comes with me over to Double Deuce to chat with Charlie Brown and the FNG on Double Deuce. The FNG is really easy to tease right off, because he is wearing his helmet and flak jacket. The problem with the flak jacket is twofold. First off, it's hot most of the time now, so the flak jacket is unbearable, or I should say unwearable. But the most important reason to not wear your flak jacket is the only person who usually wears one is the LT. Snipers know this, and they prefer to shoot the LTs and any other officers they see parading around in

their flak jackets and helmets.

This FNG is a fast learner, and we hardly finish teasing him before the helmet and flak jacket are off. A number one move, Wack and I think. Our work being done here, we both head back to our respective tracks. It's soon to be dark and The Scary Time, so I grab my tent and my stretcher and set them up behind 2-3. Because the tent and stretcher got rolled up in the tarp after we used the tarp while cleaning the weapons, my tent reeks of cleaning solvent and gun oil. I hate that.

It's starting to get dark so I get into my driver's compartment and turn on the red lights to work on my night vision. Another long day and my driver's seat feels very comfy as I relax for the first time today. I'm starting to hear again, so I can chat with Fanelli and the loader, who are in the turret.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is once again ensconced on the turret behind the .50 Cal. and directly next to his bottle. My seat feels so comfy, and because I can hear Fanelli and the loader, we chat for several hours. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. left his position behind the .50 Cal. to answer nature's call, and Fanelli takes his place. When he doesn't return after about a half hour, Fanelli asks me to see what Our Dear Platoon Sgt. could be up to. It's dark, and I can't see much. I don't see him standing around anywhere near 2-3, but when I look under the tarp on the side of 2-3, I find him there passed out, or maybe only asleep. When I can't wake him, I decide that passed out is his probable condition.

This messes up our guard duty shifts, as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is supposed to take first shift. Fanelli volunteers to take the first shift, partly because he's already up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. We think we might be able to wake Our Dear Platoon Sgt. after he sleeps off his drunk a tee tee bit. We decide to let him sleep till the last guard shift at 4 a.m. that I usually do.

So Fanelli takes first shift, and the loader takes second shift, and I get third shift. This is number ten for me, because I have to wake Our Dear Platoon Sgt. to relieve me at guard. Since I've already tried to wake him up once, I'm not confident I'll be able to wake him at 4 a.m., but I don't really have a choice.

The night has started out badly, so I decide to call it a night and head for my tent. The tent has been set up for a couple of hours now, but it still smells like cleaning solvent and gun oil. Pretty much what the inside of the turret on 2-3 smells like most of the time, when the loader and I aren't farting. It's not hot tonight, but it's warm and humid. As always, the bugs (especially the mosquitoes) are out in force.

I have a hard time getting to sleep, and it feels like I just dozed off when the loader wakes me for my guard duty shift at 2 a.m. At least, I think, if I can get Our Dear Platoon Sgt. awake after my shift at guard, I can go back to sleep for a couple of hours. When I get up on the turret of 2-3, I call in to the Sgt. of the guard that I'm there and all seems quiet.

After several fifteen minute intervals of calling in my sitreps with everything still being quiet, several trip flares go off in front of Double Deuce. A split second after the first trip flare goes off, the .50 Cal. on Double Deuce starts firing. The trip flares light up the whole side of the RON. I can still see the muzzles flashes from the .50 Cal. on Double Deuce. Because I'm right next to Double Deuce, I can see guys running, and some flying backwards as they get hit by the .50 Cal. Even though the trip flares are lighting up the area, it's hard to tell what's really going on. Guys are running in all directions away from our RON. The .50 Cal. is so loud when it's fired, I can't hear what's going on either. There is no return fire, but the .50 Cal. on Double Deuce continues to shoot up the area in front of us. I grab the joystick and start swinging the turret of 2-3 over. As we always keep a canister round chambered in the main gun, I'm getting ready to fire it off when someone stands up in front of Double Deuce when the .50 Cal. stops firing for a few seconds.

The guy standing pleads, "Cease fire! Cease fire! We're the First Platoon! Don't shoot!"

They aren't very lucky, as several guys in the First Platoon are killed, and several more have serious wounds from the .50 Cal. But if I had fired the can round from the main gun at this distance, there would have been zero survivors, and all the bodies would have looked like they went through a meat grinder.

The guy who stood up and pleaded, "Cease Fire," turns out to be the LT of the First Platoon. They were on an Ambush Patrol, and their radio battery died. The First platoon LT decided to try to make it back to their RON in the dark. Big mistake. Of course the real mistake was going out on Ambush Patrol in the first place. The First Platoon's LT is one of the few guys to not get wounded. When he gets done explaining what happened out here to Higher, he will most likely wish he were wounded. Or even worse, dead.

I doubt the First platoon's LT will ever be in the field again. The field is an unhealthy place, especially for an idiot who has caused his fellow platoon members to be killed or wounded.

My worries about being able to awaken Our Dear Platoon Sgt. from his slumber were unfounded, as the .50 Cal. on Double Deuce got his attention and did the job for me. After all the excitement, I try to sleep. But there is no way I can. All I can see when I close my eyes is the guys in the First Platoon being blown apart by the .50 Cal. Even the fact that I didn't add to the misery by firing off the can round is of little consolation. So I just lay here in my tent, smelling solvent and gun oil, until it starts to get light. This night ends number ten for me and the FNG on Double Deuce. But it ends in death for some of the guys in the First Platoon. Xin loi, First platoon.

*May 20, 1876*
*Saturday*
*Camp Alarm*

*This morning the Indians that went across the river after ponies came back without ponies though. Reported the Sioux crossing at mouth of Rosebud River about 8 miles from here. Immediately orders were issued for everyman to have 3 days rations cooked and be ready to leave.*

*B Company was to be left back to guard camp, the rest were loaded into wagons and started to where the Indians were supposed to be crossing. They left us a Gatling gun and men to work it. The rest of the pieces they took along.*

*Although it was raining hard when they left I would much rather went along, but I hope they will catch them. After they were gone we had to form a corral from the remaining wagons which took us about one hour.*

*Then went and got dinner. Half the Company were then first on guard. If the Sioux take a tumble and come for us we are decidedly out of luck. Day rainy.*

February 23, 1970
Monday
Quang Tri Province

The dust off choppers come for the wounded of the First platoon at first light. Doc has been working on all the survivors as best he can, but getting wounded by the .50 Cal. is number ten. I would add that getting wounded by a canister round is number ten also, but in reality, if you only got *wounded* by

a can round, that would be number one compared to being turned into hamburger. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is over at the LT's track as they try to decide how to handle the situation. I have to fill Fanelli and the loader in on last night's episode.

"When the first trip flares went off, some of the guys started to run, but some just stood up, and the light from the trip flares made everyone look like gooks," I say. The light coming from the ground for some reason made their facial features appear as if they were Asian. That was number ten with an FNG behind the .50 Cal.

Fanelli concurs that if I had fired off the can round, there would have been no survivors. Almost as bad is the fact that it was the FNG on Double Deuce who was behind the .50 Cal. on his first guard duty, on his first night in the field. He won't sleep for a while, and neither will I.

Fanelli says, "Ya gotta think twice about shootin' if the dogs ain't barked yet. But the FNG on Double Deuce wouldn't have known that." I take this as sage advice, since I don't really want to kill anyone, least of all any of our guys.

The c-rats have absolutely no appeal to me, as I'm not in the least hungry. I can't think of anything else but last night, and it won't leave my head. What must be going through the FNG's mind has got to be worse. He probably needs to talk to someone, but that would be highly unlikely. If you went and talked to a chaplain or shrink every time someone blew someone away, there would be boo coo talking going on and tee tee war. Not a number ten thing, just something that's not going to happen here.

Here in the Nam, should anyone start to complain, there is a quick and immediate response from anyone within earshot. "That's sounds like a personal problem troop, you should go talk to the Chaplain." Right, like I said, not going to happen here in the Nam.

The events of last night continue to swirl around in my head. I have to stop thinking about this, but I can't. Fanelli tries to help. He points out that if it would have been Our Dear Platoon Sgt. behind the .50 Cal. instead of me (which he may have been if he hadn’t passed out), he would have surely fired the main gun at the First platoon. I hadn't thought of that. But it doesn't help much. When Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns to 2-3 after conferring with the LT most of the morning, he is visibly out of sorts. His whole morning routine has been turned on end. Although he's probably already smoked a pack of Luckys since getting up, he hasn't had his morning shave, or more

importantly, I think, his morning bracer. I must say, if I were a drinking man, I'd join him. But I'm not, so I don't.

The Ambush Patrols don't make any sense to me. In order to send a ten man patrol out from one platoon, one guy from every track has to be on the patrol. That makes every crew one man short if we get hit, and we are all one man short for guard duty that night. Worse yet, the guys on Ambush Patrol get no sleep at all (or almost none). And the next day is same-same in that you don't get the day off to sleep. Add that to the fact that we are only a couple of kliks from the Z. In the past, any contact with the NVA has been at company strength of 100 to 200 infantrymen. Ten guys on Ambush Patrol, even if they get the drop on the NVA, aren't going to have much of a chance of winning a firefight when outnumbered boo coo. In a situation such as this, it boils down to how much ammo you can carry. I can assure you that 100 guys can carry at least 10 times more ammo than ten guys. Xin loi, AP!

The way things are going, we may end up staying here all day and again tonight. Too creepy for me, but no one cares what I think. I can see Charlie Brown and the FNG on Double Deuce cleaning the .50 Cal. that killed and wounded the First platoon members. They must think or know that we're not going anywhere soon. We stay put, and around noon Fanelli makes some Ramen. Even though I'm still not hungry, I decide I better force myself to eat something before I pass out. After the platoon finishes lunch, the LT orders us to prepare to didi. I go out and bring in my claymores and the trip flares and have no further encounters with the concertina wire. My cuts from my earlier tangle with the concertina wire have all pretty much healed with no infections. Number one for me, and I consider myself lucky.

Since my tent already reeks of solvent, I just roll it up in our tarp as usual with my stretcher, and I tie it up on the side of 2-3 as we prepare to sky. We uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5, and we mine sweep our way to the redball.

It's a gray overcast day that seems to threaten rain at every moment. No sun today to maybe lift our spirits a little. When does monsoon end?! I am so weary of being wet or at least damp all the time. My own personal skin rash has been spreading no matter what I put on it. We cross the redball heading north until we get to the Cam-lo River. We spread out along the river about fifty feet apart with the front of the tracks facing the river. Our Dear Platoon Sgt appears to be happy manning the .50 Cal. Mostly, I'm sure, so he can work on his bottle unbothered.

Fanelli and I saunter over to 2-3 to chat with Zack, Big Al, and Steve. When we get there, Wack is also there. They all want to hear about last night, and I really want to forget about it as fast as I can. But they make me tell them all about it, and talking about it actually seems to have helped a tee tee bit. I've never seen anyone killed before, and the .50 Cal. does such a brutal job, I know I'll never forget it.

We're not more than 3 or 4 kliks from Cam-lo, but the river is narrower here. It's deeper and faster running compared to the river just before it gets to Cam-lo. Fanelli and Wack and I walk down to the river's edge to stick our faces in the cool water to get a little relief from the damp heat that is the norm now. The end of monsoon has got to be close, at least we hope so.

After an hour and a half we get orders to prepare to sky for re-supply. The LT on 2-5 starts back down the trail to the redball. Since it hasn't been too long since we drove down it, we forgo mine sweeping and get to the redball in a very short time. The LT heads east, and we all follow until I can see and then smell Cam-lo. Today we continue into Cam-lo and slowly drive through. As always, the old guy is by the side of the road flipping everyone the bird, except for us, of course. I have a couple of c-rat meal boxes in my driver's compartment, and I toss him one as we pass, and we exchange Peace Signs.

We continue through Cam-lo to the first open area east of Cam-lo by less than a klik. One of the other platoons is there, and it turns out to be the Third platoon. The First platoon went into base camp for a stand-down after last night's fiasco. The First platoon's LT will have boo coo explaining to do to Higher. With just two platoons at resupply, the circle we set up isn't as big as usual. Because we're close to Cam-lo, the locals show up soon after the concertina wire is all set up.

Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother find us rather quickly. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is at the LT's track talking to some officer from the rear, so we can have a nice uninterrupted chat with them. We're still laughing about them thinking I was in charge. I think Fanelli is a tee tee bit jealous because they didn't think he was in charge. Especially since he has known them for a boo coo long while. Xin loi, Fanelli.

Lon has their empty sandbag which she hands to me over the concertina wire.

Lon says, "We were worried about you because a rumor in Cam-lo said people were killed last night."

"Some people did get killed last night but we were the lucky ones," I tell

them. I can tell they are sincerely concerned about our welfare. Here we are, an occupying military force in their homeland, and they are worried about us. War is so weird.

I sky to 2-3 to put some c-rats in the sandbag, and I put a carton of Salems in as well. When I hand the bag back to Lon, I mention the cigarettes and ask her to try to get me a six pack of Coke, and she agrees. We have a nice long chat with them, but eventually we have to deal with our resupply duties. Fanelli's mamasan brought him five Ramen, so he's got enough for a couple of days.

We decide to check out mail call but hate the disappointment when we get nothing. We are the lucky ones again, as I get a package from a friend's mother and sisters and Fanelli got his Ramen. We decide not to press our luck by going to the hot chow line. Fanelli contents himself with Ramen, and I have some c-rats. After the loader returns from the hot chow, he confirms what we already knew - that the food was a disaster.

I decide to open my package before Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s return, and it turns out to be a box full of homemade cookies packed in loose popcorn. Most of the cookies survived the ordeal of being mailed to the Nam. We even eat some of the popcorn, even though it’s just supposed to be packing material. I save some of the cookies for later, and I stash them before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns.

We re-fuel 2-3 during resupply and are ready to sky when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns. It's not long when the order comes to break camp. Fanelli and the loader bring the concertina wire in and tie it to 2-3. The LT heads east on the redball, and we all follow. We drive down the redball a tee tee bit, and then we turn off and slowly mine sweep our way up one of the hills that overlooks Cam-lo. We've camped here before but not for a while, so we have to drive around and flatten everything that has grown since. We climb off the tracks and carefully search every square inch of ground for tunnels. The whole platoon is on edge after last night, so we look around with great scrutiny. Most of us await the coming night with boo coo trepidation. No tunnels being found, we all proceed with setting up the RON. I put out my trip flares first, and then I back them up with the claymores and lay my detonator wire to 2-3 and up to the turret just behind the .50 Cal.

My hope for tonight is Our Dear Platoon Sgt. stays awake long enough so I can have the last shift on guard duty. By his current condition, that seems doubtful. Once again, I'm nervous leaving the claymore detonators within his

reach. Fanelli and the loader get the tarp tied to the side of 2-3, having put out the concertina wire and set up the RPG screen already. My tent still has a fresh aroma of solvent and gun oil, but except for the farts, that's about how it smells inside and close by 2-3 anyway.

I set my tent up behind one of the tracks on 2-3 for tee tee more protection. The track blocks on the M-48 were wider, so I could lay behind it fully protected. But the Sheridan tank treads are much narrower. Better than nothing, I think. And that's what Fanelli and the loader have – nothing. All the other tank crews also sleep under a tarp tied to the side of their tanks. The P.C. crews mostly sleep behind their P.C.s in tents like Wack's. So far, I'm the only tank crewman using a tent. The P.C. TCs sleep in their P.C.s, as does the LT, even though it's against Regs.

It's getting near dark, so I get into the driver's compartment on 2-3 and settle into my seat, which is boo coo comfortable. I open my goodie box of cookies, and I hand the loader two cookies; one for him and one for Fanelli. I give him the high sign to not let Our Dear Platoon Sgt. know. He's so buzzed by now, my only real worry is that he will pass out on us again.

As I eat the one cookie I allot myself, I think about Hazel Ross and her two daughters, Marilyn and Marjorie, who baked the cookies. Then, by some miracle of mail delivery, the cookies made it all the way here to the Nam pretty much intact. They are number one, and I want to finish off the rest of them right now. Hazel is the mother of one of my best friends, Steve Ross. It makes me feel number one that the Real World, and the people I know, are still there. The longer I'm here, the more doubts I have that the Real World still exists. I'm able to resist the temptation, and I save the rest of the cookies for later.

I hardly slept at all last night, especially after the fiasco, but I'm still pumped up on High Alert now that it's The Scary Time. Physically, I am drained. I need to sleep, and I want to sleep, but I’m worried about what I will see when I close my eyes. The last time I tried, it was number ten. Even though my driver's seat is still feeling number one, I decide I can't put it off any longer, so I climb out of my driver's hatch and swing it almost all the way closed. Then I climb up on the turret to check on Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s condition. He must be on High Alert as well, and I think he may stay awake tonight. I decide to take a chance and tell Fanelli and the loader I'm off for my tent.

No rain at the moment, but I crawl into my sleeping bag with my boots on

but half unlaced. I leave the tent flap open with the end of the sleeping bag over my face. Every time I close my eyes, I see trip flares and guys running. This, I think, is going to be a long unpleasant night, no matter what. I lay there for what seems an eternity, but finally I fall asleep.

*May 19, 1876*
*Friday*
*Camp Alarm*

*No move today, very pleasant, finished my straw hat today. Tip top to keep the sun off.*
*Lieut. Bradly came in with party today, mail carrier with him. Letter from Bro. Madison.*
*Hunting party went from each company but did not get anything.*
*Supply train left Bozeman last Monday, expected to be here 10th of June.*
*No Sioux today. Beef steak for supper. Rain this morning.*

February 24, 1970
Tuesday
Quang Tri Province

Guard duty ends at 6 a.m., and although I got some sleep last night, I'm still physically exhausted. I wonder if the canteen cup of coffee I'm making will be enough to get me going. The Second platoon is slowly waking up, and that includes Fanelli and the loader. Fanelli heats up water in his canteen cup and then pours it into his helmet for his morning shave. My beard is coming along nicely, and with the other distractions, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is no longer giving me the evil eye about it. Using our helmets to shave and sometimes to sit on are about all we use them for. The LT usually wears his if he is walking around or riding on his P.C. Even Our Dear Platoon Sgt. sometimes wears his when he walks around the RON. He doesn't walk around much though. And so as to not be mistaken for an officer or an NCO, the rest of us walk around without our helmets.

I bring out my goodie box after I make a second canteen cup of c-rat coffee. As Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has awakened, I offer cookies all around and take one myself. I decide we should finish them off before they get moldy, or I get killed. It would be number ten to have your last thought while

dying be, "I should've eaten those cookies!" When dying, I would think there are more important things to think about.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. apparently likes the cookies, as he helps himself to a couple more without asking. Such poor manners, I think. It was good not to have offered him any yesterday, as he would have probably eaten them all then. I tell Fanelli and the loader to also help themselves to the rest of the cookies, as they will just get moldy if we don't eat them now. As we scoff down the remaining cookies, I tell Fanelli and the loader about my friend's mom, Hazel, and her two attractive daughters. Here in the Nam, all the guys want to hear about any women we know, attractive or not. Actually, Hazel has three beautiful daughters, but only two of them helped make the cookies. We all agree that two out of three is more than adequate. As we eat the last cookies, we marvel at the fact that they made it all the way here nearly intact. We eat all the broken pieces and even the rest of the popcorn the cookies came packed in. It's number one to have some visions in my head of beautiful and kind women and not of dead and dying platoon members. One minute someone dies, the next minute, "Would you like a cookie?" The cookies are definitely Miracle Cookies to us. War is weird.

From our RON position on the hill we can see Cam-lo. The smoke from their cooking fires blends almost seamlessly with the gray sky. It's already hot and humid, but so far no rain, which is always welcome. Orders come over the horn from the LT to prepare to break camp, so I bring in the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen. They roll it up and tie it to the side of 2-3. I have my tent rolled up, so along with my stretcher, I roll it all into the tarp, and we tie that to the side of 2-3 as well. The stretcher actually makes it easier to tie the tarp securely to the side of 2-3. But we still look like a bunch of ragtag refugees with all our gear tied to the exterior of 2-3.

We slowly uncircle and line up behind the LT on 2-5, and we proceed down from hillside position. As we reach the edge of our RON, we start to mine sweep the trail we drove on yesterday evening. We proceed at a walking pace, and by the time we arrive at the redball, 2-3 is leading the way with the loader mine sweeping. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. calls the LT over the horn to ask which way to go, and as we sit here waiting, three platoons of ARVNs drive by on the redball.

They're driving our old tanks, which is quickly noticed by Our Dear

Platoon Sgt. He nearly blows a gasket. He and some of the other Lifers rant and rave as they have a tee tee verbal tirade over the horn. The Lifers did not want to give up the M-48s for the Sheridans in the first place, but that the ARVNs have our old tanks is even more insulting to them.

I personally don't care one way or the other. Although I must admit I'm becoming attached to my new driver's seat. I'm still a tee tee bit leery about sitting between all this main gun ammo, which is where I am right now. After the ARVNs pass, the LT tells Our Dear Platoon Sgt. to cross the road and proceed to the Cam-lo River. We cross over the redball with 2-3 still in the lead, and the loader is out front mine sweeping. I can hear Our Dear Platoon Sgt. still complaining over the horn about the loss of his beloved M-48 as I listen on my commo helmet.

The river isn't far, so it doesn't take long to reach it. When we arrive, we are ordered to spread out at 50 to 75 foot intervals along the river bank with the front of the tracks facing the river. The river is pretty shallow here, about 1 to 2 feet deep and about 75 feet wide. The river bank here is fairly flat and sloping toward water’s edge, but it's boo coo rocky and an easy place to throw a track for any unwary driver.

The LT gives orders for the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times. Soon the air is filled with not only the sound of rushing water from the Cam-lo River, but also the sound of the Armed Forces radio station blasting away on all the transistor radios.

The LT comes over to 2-3 to chat with Our Dear Platoon Sgt., which is a rare occurrence. They don't appear to like each other and do most of their communication exclusively over the horn. The LT is about 6'2". He's a husky guy, who towers over Our Dear Platoon Sgt., who I guess to be about 5'6" with a slim build he maintains with his special liquid diet. Although the LT came over to have a private conversation with Our Dear Platoon Sgt., Fanelli and I hear most of it without trying.

The LT is going to Hawaii on R&R next week, and he is concerned that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. might screw up while he is gone. The LT isn't the only one concerned about Our Dear Platoon Sgt. screwing up in his absence. Fanelli and I, being in close proximity to him most of the day, are boo coo concerned often. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. admits to breaking Regs by drinking in the field but denies that he is ever drunk. I would dispute that if asked, to but I'm not, so I don't. When it becomes apparent to the LT that his conversation with Our Dear Platoon Sgt. isn't going anywhere, he didis.

Apparently the LT's tee tee chat with Our Dear Platoon Sgt. will be ignored, as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is confident that he can hold his liquor. If the LT, who will be in Hawaii, is concerned about Our Dear Platoon Sgt., then Fanelli and I are going to be in a state of high anxiety during the LT's absence. We hate that!

The loader is up on the turret behind the .50 Cal., so Fanelli and I saunter over to 2-6 to chat with Zack, Big Al, and Steve. Wack is there, and we can hear their laughter as we walk up. The merriment comes quickly to an end when I mention the LT's imminent departure. We all knew he was going on R&R soon, but we didn't know how soon and had not really reflected on the ramifications. The main one being Our Dear Platoon Sgt. being in charge. It's a scary thought, and I tease Wack that if he keeps hanging out with us tankers, he will surely be “volunteered” to go on the tank-only missions, such as when we went to search for the remains of the tank that was blown up. Wack says he really did volunteer to go on the last mission. He has definitely been here too long.

I'm on better terms with Zack and Big Al now that I don't have to suffer their expert advice on how to properly dig a foxhole. It remains surprising to me what good buddies Wack, Zack, and Big Al are, because Zack and Big Al never let up during the foxhole digging. I'm getting to know Steve, the TC on 2-6 pretty well now, and he seems to be on the same wave length as the rest of us with our body bag humor. Many of the other TCs on the P.C.s and tanks are Lifers. Since Steve isn't a Lifer, he hangs out with the guys like us, as we all have bad attitudes.

All I had for breakfast was cookies, so I'm getting hungry. So is Fanelli, so we sky back to 2-3 for lunch. Saturday is payday, and Fanelli has high hopes of scoring a case of Ramen. His Ramen stash is getting low, so he's nervous he might have to eat some c-rats. I don't hate c-rats, but I'm beginning to get bored with them, and I can't even think about eating them for ten more months.

For my lunch today, I heat up a c-rat labeled Chicken or Turkey slices. I can't tell by the taste which one it is. I carefully heat the can of c-rats over the burning C-4, adjusting the heat intensity by holding the can closer or further away from the flame. A knack for heating up c-rats quickly that once acquired is very useful. Today I am putting my chicken/turkey slices between two of the crackers that come in some of the c-rat meal boxes. Crackers are a miserable substitute for bread. Especially c-rat crackers. I'm trying not to get

bored with the canned peaches and the fruit cocktail, so for lunch I have the canned pears. They're pretty lame, but I eat them anyway. It's been over two weeks since Fanelli's mamasan had some bread for us to buy, and we are all hopeful that on payday (or the day after) she will have some bread to sell. Until then, it's crackers with peanut butter and jelly or the cheese spread that comes in tee tee cans in some of the c-rat meal boxes.

I relieve the loader and take my turn sitting up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. on 2-3. Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s bottle is nowhere to be seen, but I doubt he has given up drinking since his tee tee chat with the LT. I'm guessing he has it hidden somewhere. That would be fairly easy to do with all the compartments and containers we have all over the place.

I have a good view up and down the river from my perch on the turret of 2-3. It rained a tee tee bit off and on during our drive to the river but has not re-started since we have been here. It's pretty clear for monsoon, and I can easily see across the river and maybe a klik in each direction up and down the river. The sky is gray with some high overcast, so the river water looks gray today. The river here is wide and flat with a gently sloping river bank. The river bank is rocky on both sides and the vegetation is similar on both sides as well. Short green scrub at first and then small trees surrounded by more green scrub. It's fairly open because the trees and bushes aren't very close together. It's number one for once to not feel like sitting ducks, or being sitting ducks for no good or apparent reason, which is even worse.

I can see some chopper activity in the distance, which is typical most of time. Slicks and groups of Slicks ferrying troops to LZs is a common sight when the sky clears a tee tee bit. There's lots of chopper activity when the sky is not clear, but we can't see them, though we can still hear them. We have no worries about the chopper activity as there are no NVA choppers in our area, and the choppers don't worry about us as there are no NVA tanks or P.C.s here. We don't shoot at any of the choppers, and they don't shoot at us, so it works out pretty well all around.

After an uneventful afternoon on the Cam-lo River, orders come over the horn to prepare to didi for resupply. There are a couple of false starts as to which track is going to lead back to the redball. Charlie Brown on Double Deuce takes the lead, and we sky to the redball single file on the trail we came on. We don't bother to mine sweep, and we arrive at the redball asap. We are on the east side of Cam-lo and just before we get to Cam-lo from the east, we pull off the redball into the open area we had resupply at yesterday.

Still only two platoons at resupply since the First platoon is on a stand-down at base camp.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. takes off as soon as we park 2-3 and not long after, Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother are on the other side of the concertina wire in front of 2-3. I can tell by the way Lon is holding their sand bag that my six-pack of Coke is inside, and it is. Lon and her brother are so small that I might have to re-think this, as a six-pack of Coke is a heavy load for them to carry from Cam-lo. Although it's not as heavy as the c-rats they carry back. I ask Lon if the six-pack was too heavy, and she assures me it's not, and besides her brother helps. I'm not totally convinced.

Fanelli's mamasan comes through for him as he gets five more Ramen. Fanelli chats with them, and I take the sand bag with my six-pack to 2-3 and stash my Cokes. I put in a couple of c-rat meal boxes and several loose cans of c-rat fruit. I give it a heft to make sure it's not too heavy. At least we are not far from the village today, so I head back to the concertina wire. When I get there, I hand the re-filled sand bag to Lon's brother. We chat for a while longer, but we eventually have to load up our supplies, so we let them go on their way. Fanelli's mamasan has more Ramen she needs to sell anyway.

When we get back to 2-3, the loader has returned from the hot chow. From his description of today’s offering, I decide to have c-rats for dinner. That is until I flipped Fanelli and the loader each a warm can of Coke. In return, Fanelli flips me one of his precious Ramen, and that is dinner for us: Ramen and a warm Coke. Number one, as we say here.

We just finish eating and loading up our supplies when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns to 2-3. Good timing on his part, as I can't recall him ever assisting with our supplies. He must have a drinking buddy or more likely, *buddies*, as the army is a haven for juicers, and as usual he appears to be loaded.

I can't see Our Dear Platoon Sgt. when I'm driving, but Fanelli's description of him trying to hang on to the armor plate around the .50 Cal. and the TC hatch makes the loader and I laugh until we hurt. The TC position is at the top of the turret, and it gets whipped around as we drive in rough terrain. My position being low and out in front is the smoothest ride on the tank. Sitting half way in and half way out of the loader’s hatch is the second best place for a smooth ride, so that's where Fanelli rides when we are under way.

The loader usually sits on top of all the gear we have tied to the bustle rack

just behind Fanelli. When it's raining hard, the loader sometimes rides inside the turret. But Fanelli hates that because the loader farts all the time and even being halfway out of the turret with the wind in your face is not enough to counteract the wind being broken by the loader. Even though I add to some of the bad air, I always deny it so the loader gets all the blame. We can also gauge how loaded Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is by whether or not he notices the bad air.

We prepare to leave the resupply site, so Fanelli and the loader break open the concertina wire and coil it up as I start the engine on 2-3. As the dash of locals running into our resupply site clears, I can see Lon and her brother off in the distance carrying the c-rat filled bag together with each of them holding onto a corner. They have as much as they can carry back to Cam-lo, so we don't have to worry about them digging through the burning trash pits for more stuff.

We catch up to them as we drive out of the resupply site, and as we pass them they both wave to me. I don't see Fanelli's mamasan, but the resupply site is pretty big, and she could be on the other side. The LT on 2-5 is in the lead, and we turn towards the west and Cam-lo when we get on the redball. The sun is low in the sky as it breaks through the clouds and shines right into my eyes, so I have to put on my red sunglasses after a tee tee bit of fumbling around to find them. Unless you need to wear corrective glasses, the army doesn't feel it necessary to issue sunglasses to guys with 20-20 vision. War is weird.

We are so close to Cam-lo from our resupply point that I can smell it as soon as we get going on the redball. I finally see Cam-lo about a half a klik ahead. We are driving about 15 mph on the redball but slow down to about 10 mph as we drive through the actual village of Cam-lo. My old guy is by the side of the road and recognizes me before we get close - probably because of my sunglasses, I think. He flashes me the Peace Sign before I flash it back and toss him a box of c-rats. As we pass, I make sure not to hit him with the c-rats or run him over with 2-3, as the road is pretty narrow where he likes to stand.

After we pass through the village, we continue to head west on the redball following the LT's P.C. single file. It's lush and green on both sides of the road, and in places we can see the Cam-lo River to the north of us. We drive about 5 kliks on the redball before we pull off on a dirt trail that looks familiar to me. We start mine sweeping as we head south off of the redball

and continue about one klik until we get to an open area I recognize as a previous RON. Setting up on a previous RON always makes Fanelli nervous. When Fanelli's nervous, I'm nervous.

We drive around in circles and flatten all the vegetation, and then most of us dismount after parking the tracks to carefully inspect the RON for tunnels. We find no tunnels, but Fanelli and I are still a tee tee bit nervous. Word goes around that after dark we are having a Mad Minute. We haven't even set out our night defenses yet, and we already know we will have some work tomorrow morning cleaning all of the weapons. I set out my claymores and trip flares while Fanelli and the loader attend to the RPG screen and the concertina wire. They also get the tarp tied to the side of 2-3 while I set up my tent and put my stretcher and sleeping bag inside.

We drove pretty far after resupply, and it's close to dark, but since I've been wearing my red sunglasses I almost have my night vision already. I walk around the RON to watch the mortar crew finish digging their huge pit in which to place the mortar.

The medic track is in the center of the RON, and Doc is sitting on the lowered ramp on the back of the medic P.C. weaving a palm frond hat. I ask him if his hat is for the rain or the sun, and he laughs and says it's for the sun. He, like the rest of us, is hoping that monsoon will be over soon, but no one seems to know for sure.

As I watch Doc make his hat he says, "One of the villagers showed me how. I can show ya how if ya want."

"That's OK, Doc, you kin show me tomorrow," I say. As it is very close to dark now, I sky back to

2-3. Upon my return to 2-3, I just climb into my driver's compartment, lower my seat, and stretch out for a few minutes of relaxation. The loader has been busy in my absence and the inside of the turret smells like an outhouse from all the farting.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is behind the .50 Cal., and he appears like he might finish his stint at guard without passing out, so we plan our guard shifts. I volunteer for last shift. It's been dark about two and a half hours when the order comes over the horn to prepare for the Mad Minute. I climb out of the driver's compartment and push down the RPG screen then climb back in and close my hatch. I decide to put my commo helmet on, hoping to keep my ears from ringing from all the noise to come. Fanelli is in the gunner's seat and the loader is on his seat with the loader's hatch closed.

When the order comes to commence fire, I grab onto the steering bar and hang on as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. fires off the main gun and the whole front of the tank lifts off the ground a couple of feet. As the loader reloads the main gun, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. fires the .50 Cal. while Fanelli sweeps the area in front of us with the coax. When the main gun is reloaded, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. fires off a second round into the pitch dark night. If there was anyone or anything in front of us after the can rounds are fired, they or it no longer exists.

I decide against shooting my hated .45 as I continue to not trust the safety. I'll just have to hope I never need it. The Mad Minute ends, but the smell of burnt gunpowder lingers in the air a tee tee bit. I climb out of the driver's compartment and with Fanelli's help we reset the RPG screen in its place. I make my way to my tent behind 2-3. My tent still smells like gun oil and solvent, but compared to the smell inside the turret of 2-3, it's almost refreshing. Almost. It's too hot lately to get inside the down sleeping bag. I just lay on top of it now and put the flap over my face to keep the bugs at bay. Sort of. I can feel the bugs as they crawl all over me in the dark. Man I hate that!

*July 19,1876*
*Wednesday*
*Little Big Horn Valley*

*Early this morning Capt. Thompson of L Co. 2nd. Cavalry committed suicide by shooting himself through the heart with a revolver. Was a very hard drinking man and it is supposed he done it in a temporary fit of insanity. Scouts going across the river.*

*General fatigue today and detailed for guard tonight. Had a growl with the First sergeant and feel considerable better.*

*Orders against going to our Crow scouts camp after retreat.*

February 25, 1970
Wednesday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m. to relieve him at guard. He crawls under the tarp for a little more sleep, and I climb up on the turret and get behind the .50

Cal. at the TC position on 2-3. Since the Mad Minute it has been quiet tonight, that is until about 5 a.m. That's when I start to hear some noise out in front of 2-3 beyond the trip flares and concertina wire.

I call over to the LT's P.C. to inform the Sgt. of the Guard of the noise I'm hearing. The LT is on guard so he gives me permission to fire a couple of grenades with Thumper. I hate to do it, because there's only another hour for everyone to sleep, and I'm going to wake everyone up. But I fire two grenades at the noise I'm hearing. The noise continues, and after I report to the LT, he comes over to 2-3 with the platoon's only starlight scope.

The starlight scope costs boo coo bucks, a couple of hundred thousand bucks, we are told. The LT climbs up on the turret of 2-3, and we can both hear the noise. We both take turns looking in the direction of the noise with the starlight scope, but neither of us sees anything. The LT eventually goes back to his P.C., but he leaves me the starlight scope for the rest of my guard shift. I still don't see anything, but it will be light in an hour or so. Then maybe I can figure out what the noise is.

Just before it gets light, the noise stops and never starts up again. Normally I would be curious as to the source of the noise, but unless I'm ordered to investigate, I will stay curious.

It's 6 a.m. and guard duty ends, so I heat up some water in my canteen cup for my morning java. Soon Fanelli and the loader are up as well, and I can see and hear most of the rest of the platoon moving around and fixing their breakfasts. I can see the bright flame of burning C-4 all around the RON.

"Hey, I heard some noise out front of us. It started about five in the morning and stopped about six," I tell Fanelli.

"What'd it sound like?" he asks.

"Ah, it's hard to describe. Kind of a rustling sound of the bushes," I tell him.

Fanelli says, "Maybe we wounded some animal during our Mad Minute last night, and it finally died from its wounds."

That sounds plausible enough for me. Fanelli, like me, is not curious enough to go outside the RON to have a look-see.

Fanelli has his morning shave, and then he and the loader start making preparations for cleaning all the guns. While they untie the tarp and lay it on the ground, I climb up on 2-3 and open the engine compartment so I can drain the accumulated water out of the fuel filters. I have to do this every morning without fail because of all the condensation that takes place in the

fuel tanks. Water present in the diesel fuel is number ten for a diesel engine. If there's enough water in the diesel fuel, it can blow a hole in the pistons at the very least and could blow the heads off. Definitely number ten.

While I'm up on 2-3, I grab a couple of boxes of 7.62 mm ammo and drop into the turret through the loader's hatch. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. woke up when Fanelli and the loader took the tarp off the side of 2-3 and exposed him to the morning light. He's up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. working on his morning bracer to steady his hands enough so he can shave. I carefully top off the turret mounted ammo box for the coax since Fanelli and I still aren't letting the loader do it, even though technically it's his job.

Fanelli and the loader and I take turns checking out the starlight scope in the daylight. We can't figure out why it costs so much, but we decide it's probably the batteries, which look very special. The batteries for our portable radios are also boo coo expensive, so we usually have very few or no spares. As expensive as the radio batteries are, they don't work very well here in the tropics. Just about every patrol we send out comes back early because their radio battery dies, and they don't have a spare battery with them.

We finish looking over the starlight scope, and as Fanelli and the loader start cleaning the guns, I head over to the LT's P.C. to return the starlight scope. When I arrive at 2-5, the gunners are cleaning their M-60s after last night's Mad Minute, and the LT is sitting inside his P.C. cleaning his .45. He's in a boo coo good mood as he is excited about going to Hawaii on R&R. He tells me he just got a letter from his wife, who is already in Hawaii waiting for him. That's really number one for the LT. But for the rest of the platoon, with Our Dear Platoon Sgt. in charge during his absence, it's number ten. I leave the starlight scope with him and saunter back to 2-3 to help finish cleaning the guns and to get my fair share of abuse from Our Dear Platoon Sgt.

I just arrive back at 2-3 when we all hear a single gunshot. The sound of the shot was muffled. But it sounded like a .45 to us. Word quickly spreads around the RON that the LT accidentally shot himself, and he is dead. I am just about in shock. The First platoon gets shot up by friendly fire, and now the LT is dead by his own hand.

One of the side gunners on the LT's P.C. saw it happen. The LT finished cleaning his .45, put a loaded magazine in, charged it by chambering a round, put the safety on, and tossed it onto his bedroll. When the .45 landed on his bedroll, the barrel was pointing at him. And it went off, shooting the LT

through the heart, and killing him instantly.

I am completely blown away. I just talked to him, and now he's dead. That makes at least two .45s in the platoon that I know for certain don't have functioning safetys: mine and the LT's.

Fanelli and I and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. hustle over to 2-5, and several other platoon members are there, including Doc. Doc tells us he died instantly, and there is nothing he or any of us can do. I overhear the LT's TC as he calls base camp to inform Higher of the LT's death.

Because of the other night's fiasco with the First Platoon, this is not going down well with Higher. While the TC on 2-5 is talking with Higher, he hands the horn mike to Our Dear Platoon Sgt. Higher informs Our Dear Platoon Sgt. that he is now in charge. We were worried about Our Dear Platoon Sgt. being in charge for ten days during the LT's absence for R&R starting next week. But now it will be for boo coo longer than ten days, and that is number ten for the rest of us.

It's not long before the dust off chopper arrives to pick up the LT's body. What the rush was, we don't know. The whole platoon is numb with disbelief as we try to go about our duties, trying to keep our minds off the LT's death. But we can't. He was a decent enough guy for a First Lieutenant, and he no doubt will be missed by more people than just us. Once again, just when I think it cannot get worse, it gets worse.

We haven't been told to prepare to move out, but I see several of the other track drivers bringing in their claymores and trip flares. If we stay here for a while makes it boo coo easier for the rest of us to move about on the outside of the RON when we need to answer nature's call. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is behind the .50 Cal. up on the turret of 2-3, so I take a chance, and I bring in my claymores and trip flares. I roll up the detonator wires for the claymores and climb up on the turret of 2-3 to get the four detonators.

I see Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is mourning the loss of the LT just as I would have expected him to, by getting drunk. It's going to be number ten around here if this is how Our Dear Platoon Sgt. reacts to number ten situations, as there are boo coo situations here, the bulk of which are number ten.

The guns on all the tanks and P.C.s are finally clean, and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gives orders to bring in the concertina wire and prepare to didi. The tracks slowly uncircle and line up behind 2-3, and I slowly drive out of the RON with the rest of the platoon following me. We don't go far when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has the loader dismount to start mine sweeping. We

proceed at a walking pace, leading the Second platoon all the way to the redball.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me stay in the lead as we turn on to the redball and head east towards Cam-lo. We drive at about 15 mph for about 3 or 4 kliks. Before we can smell or see Cam-lo, we turn off at a dirt track heading north towards the Cam-lo River.

Fanelli dismounts and mine sweeps our way to the banks of the Cam-lo River. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. orders us to spread out at 50 to 75 feet intervals facing the river, with the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times.

It's just about noon, and it hasn't rained yet, and it's getting hot. Normally the transistor radios would be out, blaring music from our one radio station. But today everyone feels subdued by the LT's death. Most of the radios are silent today.

It's quiet except for the sound of running and rushing water from the river. Once again I realize there are no birds or sounds of birds. It's an eerie silence except for the sound of the river. I'm not really hungry yet, so I walk to the river's edge, get on my hands and knees, and splash my face with the cool, refreshing water. I'm really taking a chance, I realize, by getting in front of the .50 Cal. on 2-3 with our already drunk Dear Platoon Sgt. So I move over about 25 feet.

Now I'm between two tracks and not directly in front of any of the .50 Cals. The water feels boo coo good, so this time I plunge my whole face in for a few seconds. Feels number one on a hot and humid day like today. I can see some of the other platoon members at the river's edge as I look up and down and across the river. It's boo coo dangerous for all of us being out in front of all the .50 Cals like this, but we do it all the time.

Not wanting to push my luck any further, I retreat to 2-3 for some lunch. A c-rat lunch for me. Fanelli is finishing his Ramen lunch, confident he can get more. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. seems happily ensconced behind the .50 Cal. up on turret of 2-3, but more than likely, he is so loaded he would fall if he tried to climb down. I've never seen him eat breakfast or lunch, so unless his bottle is empty, he doesn't really have any reason to climb down, and so he remains at his position up on the turret.

After my c-rat lunch, it's really starting to heat up and still no rain. As I look downstream on the Cam-lo River, I see a couple of platoon members have stripped down to their birthday suits and are cavorting around in the middle of the river where's it's about 4 feet deep. I cannot resist, and soon I

am in the buff and frolicking in the river myself. It's very cold and refreshing, and I take in mouthful after mouthful of the cold river water and spit it out in long water spouts. It is number one, even if I am almost directly in front of the .50 Cal. on 2-3.

Eventually both Fanelli and the loader join me in the river. At least for a few minutes, I am able to forget about all the number ten things happening around here. But too soon I feel the need to get out of the river. It's fairly cold and quickly draws the energy right out of you. The water is fast flowing with a lot of loose rocks on the river bed that makes casually walking around in the water difficult. No rapids, but the river is quite noisy from all the rocks in the river bed and along the banks.

The heat of the day really becomes evident as I stand by the river's edge, drip drying before I put my jungle fatigues back on. Fanelli and the loader and I just stand around with big grins on our faces. We were so grubby and smelly and in need of baths, not to mention a tee tee bit stressed out, that this dip in the river was boo coo welcome.

After we get dressed and return to 2-3, Fanelli tries to assess Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s current condition. He asks him if we're going to have resupply today to pick up ammo since we shot up some of our base load during last night's Mad Minute. Not used to being in charge and definitely under the influence, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn to find out the status of resupply for today. We're fairly close to Cam-lo and soon word comes back that resupply is on for the west side of Cam-lo. After an afternoon guarding our section of the Cam-lo River, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gives orders to prepare to didi for resupply.

He has me turn around and start to head out, because he wants to lead the way. The rest of the platoon lines up behind 2-3, and we sky. We don't have far to go to the redball, and we just drove down this trail earlier today, so Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is feeling lucky, as we forgo mine sweeping. Easy for him since he's not driving. I try to follow our previous tracks like religion, but the different widths of the P.C.s and the tanks muddle much of the trail. So much of the time I just guess where to drive since I get no directions from Our Dear Platoon Sgt. unless I make a wrong turn. If I do make a wrong turn, I hear over the intercom, "Driver! Where the hell you goin'?" or sometimes worse.

I am usually able to find my way around, but sometimes, such as when we're driving around in elephant grass, I can't see anything except for a maze. Whereas Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is up high on the turret with a boo coo good

view around.

It doesn't take too long, and my luck holds as we hit no mines before we arrive at the redball. We head east towards Cam-lo, and soon I can smell it, especially since I am leading the platoon. The open area where we resupply has one platoon there already, so I pull in, and our platoon starts to fill out the circle for resupply. Soon the last platoon arrives, the circle is complete, and the concertina wire is connected together between the tracks.

We're boo coo close to Cam-lo and some of the locals have already started to arrive. As soon as I turned the engine on 2-3 off, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. disappears. For what, I can only guess. It's number one he's not around so we can have a nice chat with Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother. It's not long, and they all show up on the other side of the concertina wire. We have a number one time laughing and talking with them. Since they haven't heard about the LT, we don't bring it up, as we're trying to put it behind us for now.

Lon and her brother have their sandbag, and she hands it to me. Lon has her straw hat on today as it's hot, but usually she just lets it hang on her back by the chin string. Fanelli's mamasan always wears her straw hat, rain or shine. While Fanelli continues talking with them, and of course scoring his Ramen, I head over to 2-3 to put c-rats in the sandbag. We have lots of extra c-rats, so I put as much in as I can but try not to make it too heavy. I also stick a carton of Salems in the sandbag, as they are light.

When I get back to the concertina wire, Fanelli has his five Ramen, so he's set for now. I hand the sandbag to Lon and hope they are set for now also. I mention the carton of Salems and tell them another six-pack of Coke would be number one. Lon says the carton of Salems is worth boo coo more on the Black Market than a six-pack of Coke and asks if there anything else I want. I tell them I'm worried the six-pack is too heavy for them to carry. Lon and her brother laugh and say they both hold on to corners of the sandbag and carry the six-pack together, so it's okay. I tell them it's still hard work to carry the six-pack from Cam-lo, so they should consider the extra money they get for the Salems as their tip. They both smile and thank me and Fanelli.

We finally have to deal with our supplies, especially the ammo, before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns, so we say our goodbyes and let them go on their way. The loader returns from the hot chow to give us a sitrep that we expected. The food was, in his opinion, inedible. Fanelli had already planned on Ramen, and I plan on c-rats. It takes a while to unload, unpack, and load the ammo on 2-3. We also fill the fuel tank, and of course I get diesel fuel all

over my hands and fatigues. Tanker Aftershave, we call it around here.

Fanelli and I are finishing up our dinner when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns. He must have a drinking buddy in the platoon or one of the other platoons. He is blasted, and I don't think he even had any of the hot chow, which is the only food I ever see him eat. He's got a small bag with him. I can only guess what's in it. He somehow manages to climb up on the turret to his TC position without any mishaps. He's pretty nimble at times, for a drunk. He gets on the horn and orders the rest of the platoon to make ready to didi. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire as I start up 2-3. The loader starts a fire in our burn hole as Fanelli ties the concertina wire to the side of 2-3. We start to uncircle with 2-3 in the lead of the Second platoon. In all the hubbub of the departing tanks and P.C.s, I don't see Lon and her brother as we are leaving. We head west on the redball, and they would probably be going east, back to Cam-lo, so I'm not surprised we don't see them.

We lead the Second platoon west on the hardtop for about 2 or 3 kliks and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. orders me to pull off at a dirt trail. He has the loader get one of the metal detectors we use to mine sweep from Sgt. Green's track, and we proceed at a walking pace, with the loader leading the way. It's getting late, and we still have to set up our RON. So I'm hoping we don't have to deal with any mines, and we don't.

We come to a clearing big enough for the platoon, so we drive in circles and flatten everything in sight. We dismount and go over every square inch for tunnels, and we find none. We're finally ready to set-up for the night, and I am already exhausted. Although the bath and swim in the Cam-lo River was refreshing, the water was boo coo cold and drained all the energy out of me. I push myself to get the claymores and trip flares in place while being mindful of where the concertina wire is at all times.

I string my four detonator wires over to 2-3 and up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is up there behind the .50 Cal., as well. I'm once again nervous about putting the claymore detonators within easy reach of him in his current condition. The LT hasn't even been dead for a whole day and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. already has his bottle out in plain sight next to the .50 Cal.

While Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3, I set up my tent. I hardly care anymore what it smells like. I reek of diesel fuel, so what does it matter. I help the loader put up the RPG screen, and as it is almost dark, I

climb into the driver's compartment and turn on the red light to get my night vision. I lounge back and try to relax in my seat after a number ten day.

Fanelli is talking to me through the ammo pass-through between the turret and the driver's compartment, but my ears are still ringing from last night's Mad Minute.

I ask him, "Say again?"

He asks, "Will you take last guard shift?" and I accept. I'm actually getting to like it, as I get to watch it get light. And since no one wants it, I score brownie points, too.

I finally decide to call it a day and climb out of the driver's compartment. I spin my hatch cover to the almost closed position and head for my tent. Since the LT in the First platoon stumbled into our RON and got the First platoon shot up, they have been led by our company's captain. LTs are in short supply here in the Nam, so we don't expect the LT will be replaced anytime soon. So with Our Dear Platoon Sgt. in charge, it's going to be number ten for the Second platoon for a while.

I get into my tent and lay down on my sleeping bag. It's still pretty hot and humid. I have slathered myself with bug juice, but the bugs won't give up and swirl around on my face when any of it is exposed. They land all over me, but I hardly notice. It's on my face where it's number ten and makes it hard to fall asleep no matter how tired you are.

We camp and move around on patrol and set up to guard things with wide separation between the tracks. We have to walk pretty far to chat with our friends and other platoon members. Because of that, I have to say that even though I've been in the field in the Second platoon for about five weeks, I hardly knew the LT at all. The crews are separated most of the time, so we usually communicate over the horn. It's too bad I'm an FNG or the LT might have heeded my warning about the .45s being worn out and dangerous. Xin loi. Even so, he was a decent enough guy who never caused me any grief, if I don't count being assigned to drive for Our Dear Platoon Sgt. I'm still having trouble falling asleep, and while I have my hated .45 within easy reach , it is not loaded.

*May 22, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Command*

*Last night about- our Indians were exercising themselves by running races. Two of them stripped to their breech clouts. Their names were White man runner and Two whistle, White man runner beat the other at this sport.*

*About one o'clock three cavalrymen came tearing into camp saying they were shot at by Indians. They were out hunting and were going up a ravine when Indians fired on them from the bluffs. There was only three Indians in sight. Two Companies of mounted detachment went out but found no Indians, found a trail bit did not follow it.*

*Five of our Indians went across the river and killed a buffalo. Half rations from today. Hard times now until the train comes in. I Co. and train discharged to leave tomorrow. I Co. will come back with other train as soon as they meet it.*

*Plenty of wild onions here, gathered some and had a fry. Went good for a change. Day pleasant.*

February 26, 1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m. for my turn at guard. My sleep was fitful last night to say the least. If it wasn't number ten to light some C-4 in the dark to make coffee, that's what I'd do. I wait and stand my guard knowing that soon enough I can have my morning java. That is, of course, if nothing happens before it gets light. Probably one of the several reasons no one wants to have last shift at guard around here is that seems to be the typical time for Charlie to attack. Just before it gets light, they come and shoot up the place, and then just as it gets light they seem to melt into the bush and disappear. The morning so far is quiet, and there is no noise for me to report on my sitrep to the LT. Except the LT is dead, and even though there is no noise, I am still thinking about him. War is weird.

Finally it starts to get light, and I for one always sigh with relief as I make it through another night here in the Nam. I still have ten more months of this to survive, and I feel as if I will have to give up my entire life supply of luck to get out of this place. And even that may not be enough.

It's finally light enough to burn some C-4 to get some water boiling for my c-rat coffee. I need a caffeine jolt big time. Fanelli and the loader wake up and start their morning routines. When Fanelli is shaving, I almost always

give my current beard status a check. It definitely was on Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s radar, but he is tee tee bit busy these days being in charge of the Second platoon and closely monitoring the amount of whiskey left in his bottle. So my beard goes largely unnoticed.

At last Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is awake and smoking Luckys like a chimney. He's looking pretty rough this morning. His blue eyes are bright red and are a big contrast with his blond hair and pasty white skin. I can see his hands tremble as he lights each Lucky. He will need a tee tee morning bracer to steady his hands enough to shave, so he starts to climb up on the turret of 2-3 to get his bottle.

Fanelli is feeling pretty confident in his Ramen prospects and his current stash, so while I heat up water for a second canteen cup of coffee, Fanelli heats more water, this time for Ramen. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner if he has it, and he thinks I'm dinky dao. My being dinky dao reminds me that I have to catch up with Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy for some more menthol oil. I'm almost out (to the point that when I put it on I usually don't offer it around), not that Fanelli would try it. The second canteen cup of java does it for me, and I am now fully awake and cognizant of my surroundings, sort of. Two canteen cups is about 6 measuring cups, so it took boo coo coffee to get me awake.

It's overcast and misty and looks like we can expect rain sometime today. Maybe sometime soon, like right now. Glad I finished my breakfast, I climb into the driver's compartment and lower my seat so I can close my hatch almost all the way. To pass the time, I make some entries in my journal. Then I sit back in my seat and try to sort of relax and wait and see what Our Dear Platoon Sgt. wants to do today, besides emptying every bottle he has.

Fanelli and the loader climb into the turret to escape the rain and soon the entire inside of 2-3 smells like an outhouse from all the farting. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is at the TC hatch up on the turret halfway in and halfway out. Actually, by now he may be completely out, as far as his condition, from his morning bracer. He's already so loaded, I don't think he's going to shave today.

This is unheard of. If he's going to shave, he's going to have to do it in the rain. We still have the tarp tied to the side of 2-3, but this tank has a lower profile than Old 2-3. Even though Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is only about 5'6", he will have to get on his knees in order to shave under the tarp. I'm not completely sure his knees even bend, so I'm half interested in how this all shakes out.

I have to open my hatch for some fresh air and find the rain has subsided boo coo, but it hasn't completely stopped. Pretty much like it is most of the time during monsoon when it's not raining hard. When does monsoon end? The end must be close, because it is so hot most of the time the rain sort of feels good. Sort of. The problem is we are just flat out tired of being wet, hot or cold.

So then, the unheard of happens as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and orders the Second platoon to prepare to break camp. He is not going to shave today. I must be a bad influence on him. I'm am almost beside myself so that I don't quite know how to act. I climb out of my driver's compartment into the slight drizzle and mist of monsoon and start to roll up the detonator wire for the claymores. Everything is wet and slippery and even though it's not really raining, we are soon completely wet.

Fanelli and the loader tie the RPG screen and the concertina wire to the side of 2-3 while I get back inside my driver's compartment and start the engine on 2-3. Fanelli climbs up on the turret as the loader is lighting our burn hole. Everything is so wet he had to be boo coo liberal with the diesel fuel when he doused all the trash with it. Since our only need of a foxhole is to burn our trash, the tank crews don't have to dig one every night like the P.C. crews do. The two side gunners on the P.C.s have to dig a foxhole to set up their M-60s at when it's not raining hard. There is a certain amount of jealousy about that, but as a PFC, there is nothing I can do about it. And since I'm one of the ones that doesn't have to dig, I don't even think about it.

Once again Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is feeling lucky and wants to lead the way as the rest of the Second platoon uncircle and line up behind 2-3. Then we sky for the redball. When we reach the edge of our RON, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has the loader dismount and start to mine sweep. We slowly make our way to the redball at a walking pace. When we get to the redball, we drive across it and continue mine sweeping at a walking pace until we get to the rocky banks of the Cam-lo River.

The river is deeper and wider here, and there is less exposed river bank here. So when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gives the order to line up on the river bank spaced at 75 foot intervals, most of the tracks are very close to the water's edge. Could be number ten if the river comes up just a tee tee bit. It is still monsoon, and it has rained some of the time just about every day I can think of. The river is already higher than I've ever seen it, so a thinking person might consider our situation a tee tee bit perilous. Our Dear Platoon

Sgt. is not what I'd consider a thinking person, however. But he certainly is a drinking person, so any decisions made by him often make no sense. Here in the Nam, most decisions seem to make no sense.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and tells the rest of the TCs to send one crewman each to 2-3 prepared to go on a patrol up the river from our current position. He then tells the loader to get his gear together, as he is on the patrol. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. may be aware of the possible river peril. He tells the rest of the tracks to have all their drivers remain with the tracks in case we have to move out quickly should the river comes up anymore. I'm surprised he even noticed the river's water level, but I like being exempted from the patrol with the rest of the drivers.

It's hot already, and I'm out of Cokes, so I have to drink water. The water from our water buffalo is horrid. It tastes like plastic, and it's as warm as fresh roadkill. It's probably dicey to drink the river water without boiling it, but we have been drinking it and cooking with it anyway. Fanelli used it to make Ramen yesterday, and he's getting some now to make Ramen for lunch. He seems to be surviving, so I just take my canteen cup, dip it in the river, and chug it down. It is cold and refreshing and about as number one a thing that can be had 4 or 5 kliks south of the Z.

As long as Fanelli is having lunch, I decide to join him, and it's c-rats for me. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. sits up on the turret having his liquid lunch behind the .50 Cal. The river patrol went up stream to look for caches of weapons or supplies in the side of the river bank. I would think that should be done when the river is low, but of course this is the army. Nothing seems to make sense.

The rain has actually completely stopped now, and it is hot. I take off my t-shirt and roll up my pant legs and wade around in the river. I'm putting my face in the water and sometimes even my whole head. It feels number one. I'd wade around in my underwear except we don't wear any. I'd take my pants off, except I supposed to be ready to move 2-3 if the river comes up any more. I'm really not supposed to be messing around in the river anyway.

I'm half surprised Our Dear Platoon Sgt. hasn't said anything to me, but he is most likely so loaded he doesn't notice or care. I finish with my wading and sit on a big rock, putting my socks and jungle boots back on. I can see pretty far downriver, and there are some guys out in the river from the other tracks. Upstream the river curves, and I can only see about 200 to 300 feet in that direction. That's probably number ten, but I'm not even remotely in charge, so there's nothing I can do except worry.

2-3 is at one end of our track line-up along the river's edge. The river patrol had been giving Our Dear Platoon Sgt. sitreps over the horn about every 15 minutes for the first hour or so, but since then there has been radio silence. The patrol has not returned any of Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s calls over the horn. That is some reason for concern, usually. But most likely the horn battery for the River Patrol died. Happens all the time. Sometimes even if we have a spare battery it dies in short order as well. Batteries just don't seem to cut it here in the Nam. The damp conditions here seem to affect the operational life of everything, including us.

If there is any concern about the River Patrol, it would not be from Our Dear Platoon Sgt. He mulls over his options about what to do when we hear a shout. It is the River Patrol returning. The horn battery died as expected, but that is not the big news. Several members of the patrol rush past 2-3 and start shouting to the rest of the Second platoon members, who are still in the river, to get out.

Upon his return, the loader says, "Just after our last sitrep, the horn battery died. We was still goin' upstream when we came to some dense brush along shore. A good place to hide a cache, because it was goin' to be boo coo hard to check out. When we got closer, we could smell something' number ten, and then when we got really close, we could see a corpse tangled in the brush. We thought that smell was familiar. It must have been there a while. Man, it looked awful. We got close enough to identify that it was NVA."

The loader said the corpse was so bloated and ghastly looking, the patrol couldn't get out of the water fast enough. Definitely NVA by the uniform, and it looked like it had been there several days.

Yuck! That means that yesterday and today as we drank, cooked with, and played in the river, it was being contaminated by the corpse. I can see all the guys getting out of the river, and they're moving out in a lively manner, I can tell you. Although the loader missed lunch to go on patrol, he says he's not hungry and is never going to eat again after the scene he just witnessed. His aversion to food will not be helped by the hot chow we usually get for dinner and certainly not by the c-rats we subsist on. I'm glad I've already had lunch, because the description of the corpse keeps getting more graphic. More than I want to hear.

The rest of the River Patrol make it back to their respective tracks, and although they all missed lunch, it doesn't look like many of them are interested in food. I can say this because from my position at one end of our

line of tracks, I can look down the line, and I see no bright flame of C-4 being lit to heat up some c-rats which is even visible in the daylight it burns so bright.

The loader isn't the only one to lose his appetite for food for a while. I'm personally more grossed out than Fanelli, because I have been drinking the water right out of the river. I didn't even put any iodine drops in it. Fanelli at least boiled his water for Ramen, so he is probably OK. As for myself, I'm not sure. I don't feel ill yet, just grossed out, and I didn't even see the corpse. And even though Fanelli boiled his water, he, just like us, is grossed out. Since I just drank the water, I'll just have to wait and see. I'm half tempted to ask Our Dear Platoon Sgt. for a couple of slugs from his bottle, but I don't.

Once again, Fanelli has to remind Our Dear Platoon Sgt. about resupply. He's boo coo blasted already, and he's not used to being in charge, but he gets on the horn and confirms resupply and its location for today, about half a klik west of Cam-lo.

Fanelli approves of the location, because his mamasan will probably be there with his Ramen. Saturday is payday, and he has high hopes of scoring a case of Ramen. I'm just hoping Lon and her brother are able to carry another six-pack of Coke to resupply today for me. I've been out of Coke for a while now, and if I had some right now, I would chug one down warm or even hot just to clear my palate of corpse water.

We hang out by the river for another hour, mostly to give the River Patrol guys a chance to eat something, but it still looks like no one is interested in eating.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. eventually gives orders to the platoon to prepare to sky for resupply. He has me back around and stop at the trail leading to the redball as we wait for the rest of the Second platoon to line up behind us. When all the tracks are ready, we didi mau with 2-3 in the lead. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is feeling lucky today, as we forgo mine sweeping on our procession to the redball. I follow what I think are my tracks like religion, but after ten track vehicles have gone down a trail the tracks get all muddled up, and I can't tell one from another. I don't like to depend on luck, because if I was lucky I wouldn't be here now. Someone's luck holds- mine or our dear platoon Sgt.'s, I don't know which, but probably mine because if we hit a mine, I'm in the worst place.

When we get to the redball, I give out a boo coo big sigh of relief and head east towards our resupply point just west of Cam-lo. It doesn't take us long to

get there, and one of the other platoons has just arrived and is starting to set out the concertina wire. Our platoon pulls in, and we start to fill in the empty spots in the big circle when the last platoon arrives as well. All the tracks of three platoons are here, and as the perimeter is complete, the crews finish putting out the concertina wire and tying it altogether. Some of the locals start to arrive and the platoon Sgts from the First and Third platoons come over to 2-3 to talk to Our Dear Platoon Sgt. about the corpse.

Fanelli and I hang out by the concertina wire to wait for his mamasan and Lon and her brother, as we have heard enough about the corpse and want to forget about it as fast as we can. It's not long before we can see them making their way towards us. We're really close to Cam-lo, and I can already see that Lon and her brother each are holding one corner of the sand bag, and it's got something big and heavy in it. My six-pack of Coke, I hope! Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother make their way to us, walking together slowly in the stifling heat. Smiles all around, and we squeeze each other's hands over the concertina wire that separates us at all times. Fanelli's mamasan starts speaking in Vietnamese, and when she finishes Lon translates for us. Fanelli's mamasan said that she has five Ramen for him today, and she's as sure as she can be that she will have a case of Ramen for him on Saturday, which is payday. (We hope.) Her main concern is our resupply location on Saturday and whether or not she can get there.

Lon's brother hoists up the sand bag and hands it to me over the concertina wire. I take it from him and thank them both for hauling it from Cam-lo for me. I hang out for a while to chat with them, hoping Our Dear Platoon Sgt. and the other platoon Sgts will leave and head over to the hot chow. After a while, I don't see them anymore, so I head over to 2-3 to drop off my six-pack of Coke and to put some c-rat meal boxes in the sand bag for Lon and her brother. I'm wrong, and all three platoon Sgts are standing out of sight behind 2-3 when I show up. They immediately think they have caught me with some contraband and demand to see what's in the sand bag. Knowing I'm cool about this, I try to act a tee tee bit guilty, like *you caught me*. I can tell they are disappointed when I reveal the contents and the sand bag only contains a six-pack of Coke. They're doubly disappointed it wasn't a six-pack of beer, which they certainly would have confiscated only to drink it themselves.

Ha! Ha! Joke's on them.

I decide to wait for them to leave before I fill the sand bag, so I climb up

on the turret and walk back to the bustle rack where we have the thermo chests mounted. I put my six-pack in the one we keep our drinks in. Now that it's hot most days, we are really hoping to get some ice on resupply sometime soon. Fanelli always cautions me about counting on that, so I don't. Eventually Our Dear Platoon Sgt. and the other two platoon Sgts sky for the hot chow, so I attend to putting some c-rat meal boxes in the sand bag, making sure no Ham and Eggs go in. Then I climb down from 2-3 and casually saunter back to the concertina wire where Fanelli is still chatting away with his mamasan and Lon and her brother. They're laughing about something when I get back, and I keep the merriment going as I relate to them what had just happened to me with the platoon Sgts thinking they had caught me with some contraband. I'm okay all the way around on this. Even if they tried to get me for buying stuff from the locals with MPC, they couldn't, because I traded cigarettes for the Cokes. War is so weird.

I need to catch up with Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy so I can get some more menthol oil, and Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother want to sell the rest of their Ramen, so we say our goodbyes. I walk around the inside of the concertina wire towards Double Deuce. As expected, I see Smitty talking to his Tiger Beer Boy, so I go over. I tell Smitty that if he is still taking orders for Tiger beer that on payday I'll take one. I don't really drink, but I'm curious about the Tiger beer, and I'm sure not going to get drunk on one bottle, although it is a boo coo big bottle. I don't even intend to drink it until we get some ice, which may be never. I tell Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy that I want five bottles of menthol oil on payday, and he says it's no problem. So I'm okay for now, I guess.

I'm feeling a tee tee bit hungry when I don't let myself think about the bloated corpse in the Cam-lo River that I didn't even see. Of course the hot chow itself can usually tame any appetite one might have. I could probably trade a Coke to Fanelli for a Ramen since he is confident of getting a case on payday, but I decide to check out the hot chow. Not much of a line, so I don't have to put my well versed skill at line standing to a test.

Wack and Big Al are at the head of the line giving the rest of us a running commentary as to the wondrous food delights that await us when it’s our turn to be served.

Wack starts off, "For your dining pleasure today, we have tender chunks of dog, marinated and then grilled to perfection. This is complimented by boiled baby potato slices, slathered in diesel fuel and topped with minced sleeve of

fatigue."

He finishes his commentary with, "The side vegetable today is of a color that it is certain to bring tears to your eyes, especially if you are dinky dao enough to eat any of it."

Zack and Steve show up and get behind me. I have never seen anyone take cuts in the hot chow line, as there is no reason. (Who wants to get poisoned sooner?) After listening to what Wack and Big Al had to say about the hot chow, I am almost ready to get out of line and forgo the hot chow, but I have to admit I am tiring of my c-rat diet. So I stay in line. Boo coo big mistake. Where do they get this stuff, and why do they even bring it out to us as food. I carry what they give me back to 2-3 and join Fanelli, who is having his Ramen dinner. The Ramen smells boo coo good compared to my dinner. The loader is still off food for now and busies himself unpacking our order from resupply and stowing it away on 2-3. I didn't see any of the three platoon Sgts at the hot chow line, so I can only guess what three juicers would be doing. While the loader deals with the supplies, I go through our treasure chest and get some c-rat crackers and c-rat cheese and have something that remotely resembles food. After pushing the stuff on my paper plate for a while, I finally just throw it in the burn hole next to 2-3.

It's not long before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns. By his staggered gait, I can tell he has been doing what I expected a juicer to be doing, drinking. His eyes are bloodshot, which is made more noticeable by his blue eyes, and his breath reeks of whiskey. I hope he doesn't pass out before his turn at guard duty, because the last time he did, it was number ten. He somehow manages to clamber aboard 2-3, which given his condition is quite remarkable. He yells down to us from the turret to get ready to sky, and then gets on the horn to inform the rest of the Second platoon.

Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire while I climb into the driver's compartment and start the engine on 2-3. They finish tying the concertina wire to the side of 2-3 amidst the mad dash of locals swarming into the resupply site to dig in our burning trash pits. Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother are close on the outside of the resupply site. I wave to them, and they all way back as we didi. I'm glad they don't have to dig around in the burning trash pits anymore, at least I hope they don't.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me pull out and lead the rest of the platoon. When we reach the redball, he has me head west, away from Cam-lo. We drive through the nearly empty countryside, verdant and green from the

monsoon rains and despite the impact of the war. Palm trees of several different kinds. Some are tall and spindly while other are short and squat. Most of them have some visible fruit of some kind on them. Small bushes and vines everywhere. I think when no one is around to keep them in check, the vines just take over in the tropics.

We drive about 3 kliks before he has me turn off at a dirt trail heading south away from the

Cam-lo River. We stop long enough for Fanelli to dismount and start mine sweeping in front of us as we proceed single file with 2-3 still in the lead. We arrive at a fork in the trail, and Fanelli walks back to 2-3 to ask Our Dear Platoon Sgt. which way to go. He is so out of it by now that he isn't sure, and that is number ten at this time of day. We need to be at our RON soon, or we will be setting up in the dark. After several lucky guesses on the part of Our Dear Platoon Sgt., we arrive at our RON, we hope! It's boo coo important that we're really at the coordinates that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. calls in over the horn to Higher so that mistakes like when the First platoon stumbled into our RON and got shot up aren't repeated.

We have been told over and over again to never call in the army artillery unless you want some incoming dropped on your position. Everyone's advice has been the same: if you need artillery support, call for the Navy. The Navy has ships stationed just off shore just for such purposes, and they have a reputation for extreme accuracy. It seems to me it would be number one for us that Higher know our exact location, but Fanelli and I have doubts that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. (n his present condition) can even read a map, let alone figure out exactly where we are. That makes Fanelli nervous, and when he's nervous, I'm nervous. I have to hustle after we finish driving around in circles to flatten everything and scour the area for tunnels in order to get my claymores and trip flares set out before it gets dark.

After Fanelli and the loader have the concertina wire out and connected to the other tracks' wire, I like to make a shallow cut in the ground to bury a wire to a trip flare that I have set with a hair trigger. It's such a hair trigger that it sometimes gets set off if a platoon member just touches the concertina wire nearby. Fanelli and the loader set up the RPG screen while I string all the detonator wire for the claymores over to 2-3 and up on the turret.

As I am connecting all the detonators to the claymores, I try to ascertain Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s condition and conclude it will be a miracle if he doesn't pass out before his turn at guard. It will be an even bigger miracle if

he doesn't accidentally set off a claymore as he reaches for his bottle.

Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3 while I set up my tent behind 2-3. It's just about dark, so we made good time setting out our night defenses, despite our late start due to Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s uncertainty as to where we were going.

Our biggest hope is that we are where he thinks we are and the coordinates given to Higher are correct. We hope. Since we are as ready as we're going to be, I climb into the driver's compartment and turn on my red interior light. Fanelli and the loader are inside the turret with the red lights on as well, as we work on acquiring our night vision asap. It feels number one to sit back in my driver's seat and relax. Physically, my body is starting to unwind due to the comfort of my seat, however, my mind is not about to relax, and there's nothing I can do about it.

I'd sky for my tent, but we're not sure about our guard duty shifts. We have to wait until we can tell if Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is going to make it to his shift on guard or pass out on us again. I really don't want to stay up, but I'm not sure I'm going to be able to fall asleep with ease. Even when I'm totally exhausted physically and think I will fall asleep, as soon as I lay down I sometimes find my mind has other plans. That, along with the mosquitoes and other bugs that constantly swirl about, makes a good night’s sleep near impossible. I make it till 10 p.m., and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is still awake, and so we all decide to call it a night.

I sky for my tent and crawl in and lay down on my stretcher that is softened somewhat by my sleeping bag. I try to close my eyes to sleep and especially to keep the bugs out, but as soon as I close my eyes I see the faces of the River Patrol as they returned from their patrol with news of their ghastly discovery. Eyes open: the bugs win. Eyes closed: number ten thoughts win. I hate that.

*June 16, 1876*
*Friday*
*Camp Reno*

*Today very pleasant. Had a swim. Honsenal, one of our Indians came near drowning today swimming the river. Snags were pulled out of the river to get them out of the way of the steamer.*

February 27, 1970
Friday
Quang Tri Province

I am asleep when the loader wakes me, so I know I slept some last night, but not much. Coffee, I want coffee. But I know I have to wait until light. I never ever in my life drank coffee, but here in the Nam it's a necessity. I still like milk and would like some right now, and as long as I'm dreaming, how about some bread. Bread. Fanelli's mamasan might have bread soon. I smile, bread would be number one, even more than milk. Milk we have at base camp, but nowhere is there bread except from Fanelli's mamasan. Because of the long term colonization by the French, the Nam is one of the few Asian countries where the general population eats bread.

I am sitting up on the turret of 2-3 behind the .50 Cal. It's still pitch black out, and I am just staring into nothing but blackness. If you have ever tried to do that, stare for hours into total blackness when you are tired, you can see a lot of things that aren't there. Scary things. Imagined, yes, but scary none the less. I have four claymore mine detonators all in a row hanging over the bullet shield for the .50 Cal., and then there's the .50 Cal. itself ready at the push of the trigger. Sometimes it's hard to not want to shoot into the darkness just to be sure it's your imagination.

I call in my sitrep as if everything is normal, and it probably is. I can hear the rest of the guards call in over the horn that everything is number one. Number one, we hope. No one, except whoever has the starlight scope, can see any better than me into the pitch black, so we have count on our hearing. That's number ten because most of us can't hear well most of the time. Often our ears, at least mine, are ringing for days after shooting off the .50 Cal. You can see people’s lips moving, but you can't hear them. Very eerie. My hearing has been pretty good for the last few days, but every time we have a Mad Minute, my hearing is bad for days.

It begins to show signs of light, so I move from my spot behind the .50 Cal. to the rear of the turret. I close the thermo chest with our soda pop. It's about 65 degrees now, but when it hits 90 degrees or so later on, my Cokes will feel cool at least. I have to wait a tee tee bit longer before I can start heating up some water for my coffee. So far no rain, but it's boo coo humid and damp. Like most of the guys, I have a rash on my side and both of my feet, so it would be number one if monsoon would end and be a tee tee bit

dryer. Maybe my rashes might go away. Maybe.

I can see at least two other platoon members with some lit C-4. That's good enough for me, so I climb down from the turret of 2-3 with a chunk of C-4 and my c-rat coffee. We have a water can on 2-3, but I don't know where it got filled, so I walk to the center of the RON to our water buffalo to fill my canteen cup. Wondering where the water cans got filled must have been on more minds than mine, as there is a short line of guys with their canteen cups at the water buffalo. This is unheard of. Standing in line for water from the water buffalo. The water that tastes like plastic. War is weird. I almost can't believe it. As we joke around about the water, it turns out while I don't know where my water can got filled, several guys here know where theirs got filled. At the Cam-lo river downstream from the corpse. Yuck!

I saunter back to 2-3 and proceed to heat my water. The burning C-4 makes so much noise, both Fanelli and the loader get up and start their morning routine. Fanelli, of course, starts heating water for his shave. He is strack. Tailored and tight fitting jungle fatigues, clean shaven, zippers on his jungle boots. He is the epitome of a strack troop, as we say here. The loader and I both are FNGs, with new looking fatigues and almost new looking boots. We try for a more slovenly look, so at least we don't look like FNGs. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. arises from his slumber and joins us next to 2-3. Fanelli is shaving, while I'm drinking coffee and trying to decide on pound cake or pecan roll for my breakfast.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. didn't shave yesterday, and I can hardly tell. He must shave for the fun of it. Not me! As he lights his first Lucky of the day, I can tell by his D.T.s that he won't be shaving until he has his morning bracer. I must be reading his mind, as he climbs aboard 2-3 and slowly makes his way to the TC position behind the .50 Cal.

"Just like old times," I say to Fanelli, who almost cuts himself from laughing while he shaves.

Tomorrow is payday, and we are all boo coo pumped up. When you only get paid once a month, it's a boo coo big deal. Smitty comes around to see if anyone wants to order some Tiger beer. I stick with my current order for one bottle, and both Fanelli and the loader pass on the Tiger beer altogether.

None of us on 2-3 smoke except for Our Dear Platoon Sgt., and he takes up our slack by smoking Luckys like a chimney. He almost always has a Lucky dangling from his lips, and he often leaves it in his mouth when he speaks so the end of it is flicking dangerously all over the place. Considering

the type of main gun ammo we carry now, a dropped cigarette or even just a dropped lit end of a cigarette in the wrong place in the turret would be number ten.

After his morning bracer, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. climbs down from the turret and prepares for his morning shave. I see now it is just a ritual, as he could go several days without needing to shave. Smitty skies when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. hits the ground and continues on his mission of taking Tiger beer orders. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. must be done mourning the loss of the LT, as he is already blasted. Back to his normal heavy drinking self. Like I said earlier- just like old times.

It's boo coo hot already, and I'm thinking a dip in the river might be number one if we get far enough upstream. I don't know if we're going to the river today, but all three of the platoon Sgts are discussing the corpse the River Patrol found, thinking it's possible it's being used to keep us from looking there because it's so gross. I think it's possible, but I don't want to personally investigate the area.

It's another slow starting morning, as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is still getting used to being in charge, but he eventually gives orders to break camp. I wind up the claymore detonator wire and bring in my trip flares. I end up setting off a couple of trip flares, because I have them set with hair triggers. When they go off, I have to run over and kick them hard to knock all the phosphorus out. They quit burning pretty quickly after that. It's a good thing everything is either wet or damp, because I'm sure under dry conditions the phosphorus would start a fire quite rapidly.

Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen as they both razz me about setting off the trip flares. The tarp was already off, rolled along with my tent and tied to the side of 2-3. Fanelli and the loader tie the RPG screen and the concertina wire to the opposite side of 2-3. 2-3 would win no beauty contests for tanks, if there were such a thing. Tanks aren't really designed to have their crews live in and on them, so we have to make do as best we can with storing our gear.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me drive to the edge of the RON and stop. The rest of the platoon uncircle and line up behind 2-3. The loader dismounts and starts mine sweeping the trail we used to get here last night. I don't like to lead the platoon when we're mine sweeping, so I let the loader get boo coo far in front of me before I start to follow. Unlike when I follow Wack or Fanelli, whom I trust implicitly when mine sweeping, the loader, like me, is an FNG,

and not yet to be trusted. I haven't mine swept myself since becoming Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s driver. In the Second platoon, most guys would rather mine sweep while repeatedly sticking a sharp stick in their eye than drive for Our Dear Platoon Sgt. War is weird. The only upside of this for me is I don't have to mine sweep, and for me that is number one.

Surprisingly, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. remembers the way back to the redball correctly. Another miracle I am witness to, given his condition yesterday. At the redball, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me head east for about a klik before he has me turn off at a trail heading north toward the Cam-lo River. He has one of the P.C.s take the lead and the duty of mine sweeping as we proceed to the Cam-lo River at a walking pace.

It's not far to the river, and when we finally arrive, it's quite different than further downstream. It's not rocky at all here, and in places there is vegetation at the river's edge but not everywhere. The trees and bushes on the other side of the river are boo coo dense, and if we sit here most of the day, we will once again be sitting ducks. On our side of the river, it is very open with short bushes and small trees spaced well apart. It almost seems like a park. Seems like, but isn't. This is the Nam, after all. We get to the river and meet up with the Third platoon, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. confers with the Sgt. of the Third platoon about today’s activities.

The plan is for another River Patrol to see if the corpse discovered yesterday might have been a ploy to camouflage a cache of supplies. Also, they reason if the NVA were looking for their cache, the corpse would be boo coo easy to find. Just follow your nose towards the horrible smell. Ten guys, five from each platoon, are sent on patrol, this time downstream to the corpse.

I am so glad as I luck out and am not sent on this patrol either. The loader is sweating for a few minutes, because they want to send someone who went yesterday to verify the location. He, like me, lucks out and gets a break today. He thinks he might be able to eat lunch today, so another encounter with the corpse would have been number ten for his appetite. It's getting near lunch time, and they really should have let the patrol have lunch before they left, but this is the army and the patrol will just have to suck it up, as we say here. They will have no appetite for food when they get back. That is, if they get back.

We listen to the River Patrol sitreps over the horn on 2-3. They aren't gone long before reporting something smelling boo coo awful nearby. It is the

corpse, of course. I have just heated up some c-rats, so I'm glad that the radioman on the River Patrol doesn't go into detail about the smell. The patrol untangles the corpse and lets it float downstream. Xin loi, Cam-lo. Although there was concern about the corpse being booby trapped, it smelled so awful, all they could think about was to get it gone, so someone cut it loose. No matter how dicey a situation is here in the Nam, there is always someone who will volunteer to do it, no matter how number ten it is.

The River Patrol gives the river bank area, now corpse-free, a thorough looking over. They find nothing. They didn't go very far downstream to find the corpse, so they are told to search the river bank from where they are back to our location. They had a mission on the way and didn't look much at the river bank, so now on the way back, they will look more carefully. No more talk of the corpse, so I am able to finish my c-rat lunch without further disruption.

Because the River Patrol hasn't been gone too long, their horn battery doesn't die as usual, and they are in contact with us. The River Patrol is almost back when the radioman tells us one of the patrol members must have stepped in a hole and went under water. They are all weighed down with weapons and ammo, and even if you can swim you can easily drown. As they search, someone manages to get a hand on the guy under water, and they pull him to the surface.

The River Patrol is very close to the rest of the platoons, and in less than a minute they show up carrying the guy who went under. Two platoon Sgts and several other NCOs as well as the LT of the Third platoon all rush over to the drowning victim. Fanelli and I at first watch the proceedings from atop the turret of 2-3.

After some quick discussion among the rescuers, we hear someone shout, "He's full of water." From our vantage point, we watch as three guys pick up the drowning victim by his feet and hold him upside down. To let the water out, I guess.

I have never seen this “life saving” method before, and so Fanelli and I rush over to be educated. Besides being an FNG, I am the lowest ranking person standing around watching this spectacle. Two platoon Sgts, an LT, and several other NCOs, including some Hard Fives. So I am out ranked by everyone here. I watch for a while. No water comes out that I can see, and he's starting to turn blue. I can't stand it anymore, so I get down on my hands and knees and put my face close to his. He looks like he is still alive, despite

the current life saving attempt. I motion for them to put him down. I had instructions on performing mouth to mouth resuscitation for Life Guard training in high school and again in basic training. I guess it's just been so long since the Lifers have been in basic training that they don't remember how. Either that, or they are panicking.

I've never really done it. That is, given mouth to mouth to someone, but I've watched simulations. So I get down on my knees, open his mouth and pinch his nose closed, and put my mouth over his and blow. It's pretty easy so far, with the exception that the victim is a cigarette smoker, and so it's a tee tee bit like kissing an ashtray full of cigarette butts. Boo coo gross!

I continue working on him for about two or three minutes, and he starts coming around, coughing and spitting up water, and finally breathing on his own. How about that, I think, it really works. I'm probably more amazed than anyone else here. Although the mouth to mouth part was boo coo gross, I feel really good about saving a fellow platoon member's life instead of taking it.

I feel even better when, as Fanelli and I are walking back to 2-3, he punches me on the arm, not hard, and says to me, "Hey, FNG. Man, that was fuckin' number one!"

That's the last time he calls me FNG, even when joking around.

It only takes the dust off chopper about 15 minutes to get to our location on the river. Although the near drowning victim is breathing on his own, he was under water for a while and not breathing for a couple of minutes, so he's messed up some. We don't expect to see him back. I'm not sure whether that's good luck or bad luck for him. After all the excitement, the rest of the afternoon passes without any further incidents. 2-3 is parked the closest to the head of the trail we followed here, so Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and orders the Second platoon to prepare to sky to resupply.

Fanelli and the loader jump up on 2-3 while I climb into the driver's compartment and start the engine. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me start down the trail with the rest of the platoon following our lead. We don't mine sweep, as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is either feeling lucky or feeling no pain, I don't know which. Because we forgo mine sweeping, we get to the redball in short order and turn east towards Cam-lo. We resupply in the same place as yesterday, and it's a mad house of tanks and P.C.s, as all three platoons arrive about the same time. Fanelli and the loader dismount and start putting out the concertina wire and connecting up to the other tracks' concertina wire. I reposition 2-3 to Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s satisfaction after a few failed

attempts, due mainly to his misdirections.

When I am finally able to climb out of 2-3, I can see Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother have arrived. Fanelli is always relieved knowing he has Ramen today, and tomorrow, which is payday, a case of Ramen maybe. Fanelli buys five Ramen, and Lon's brother hands me the empty sand bag. We have a nice time chatting with them, but mostly to Lon who translates for Fanelli's mamasan a lot and for her brother a tee tee bit. Fanelli's mamasan is still pretty sure she will have a case of Ramen tomorrow for him.

I notice that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has left 2-3, and the loader is behind the .50 Cal., so I walk back to 2-3 to get some c-rat meal boxes for Lon and her brother. We have a lot of extra c-rats due to Fanelli's and Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s special diets. Of the two, I'm sure Fanelli's is the healthiest, but not by much. Even the loader doesn't eat much of the c-rats. He wants to go to check out the hot chow, so I tell to just let me take the bag of c-rats to Lon and her brother, and then I'll relieve him from behind the .50 Cal. I walk back to the concertina wire, hand the sand bag to Lon's brother, and chat with them for a couple minutes. But eventually, I say goodbye, telling them I have to take the loader's place on guard. They thank me before I leave. I let the loader sky for the hot chow, making him promise to tell me if it's something good. I certainly don't expect to hear anything good, especially on the day before payday, which is notorious for being the worst meal of the month, while payday is sometimes the best. Fanelli comes back to 2-3 and starts to get his water heated up for his Ramen. His mamasan had to go sell the rest of her Ramen, and Lon and her brother went with her.

Once Fanelli has his Ramen ready, I'm going over to mail call. I don't expect any mail, and I hate going to mail call and waiting as all the names of guys who have mail are called out, only to get no mail myself. If you don't make it to mail call, and you have some mail, usually our mail clerk will track us down and give it to us. I'm in luck, and I get a letter from one of my best friends back in the Real World. I decide to save it for later and read it after we set up our RON tonight.

Feeling lucky, I head over to the hot chow. So much for luck. Tradition wins out, as it is a sure contender for worst meal of the month. The loader and I have a good laugh about how boo coo bad the hot chow is, and we walk back to 2-3 together and join Fanelli. I need to eat something, so I quickly heat up some c-rats before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns and we have to didi. The C-4 heats it up boo coo fast, so you have to be careful. We take on some

diesel fuel to top off 2-3's tank. Depending on the terrain we drive around in we use about 5 gallons to drive one mile, so I like to top off 2-3's tank whenever I can.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns in a hammered condition. But he is able to mount 2-3 and climb up to the TC position on the turret without assistance. He gives orders over the horn for the Second platoon to prepare to didi, and Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire as I start the engine on 2-3. When everyone is ready, I pull out of the circle and head to the redball with the rest of the platoon following. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me head west on the redball. I didn't see Lon and her brother or Fanelli's mamasan as we left, and in going west now, we won't see them until tomorrow. We hope. Especially Fanelli.

We drive about 5 kliks before we pull off the redball to find our RON, that is if Our Dear Platoon Sgt. can still read the map correctly. The important part being *correctly*, because you really want to be where you say you are around here in the Nam. To be otherwise is to *be otherwise*, as in dead. I hate having to rely and depend on Our Dear Platoon Sgt. for important matters relating to our survival. But he is in charge.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has the loader mine sweep our way about a half a klik into the bush, which is boo coo dense in places. This is a dangerous place, mines or no mines. We find no mines today, and we arrive at our intended RON, so we drive around in circles flattening everything. Most of us dismount, and we carefully go over every square inch of ground looking for tunnels like it's our religion. We find none and feel number one about that.

I attend to putting out my claymores and trip flares before it gets dark while Fanelli and the loader finish with the concertina wire and set up the RPG screen. We're making good time and should be done well before dark. They tie the tarp to the side of 2-3 while I get my tent and set it up behind one of the tracks on 2-3. I get my stretcher and put it inside, and I'm as ready for the night as I'm going to be. It's The Scary Time here in the Nam at night, and you can see it in everybody's face. Just as you can see the look of relief when it gets light again in 12 hours, which feels like an boo coo long time.

I climb into my driver's compartment and stretch out a tee tee bit on my driver's seat. I turn on my red light and open the letter from my friend Jerry. In it, he regales me with tales of his 21st birthday celebration at a local bar I know of back in the Real World. It's always number one to know the Real

World is still there and places you like also still exist. Combined with the bar, there is also a small restaurant called the Snug, which has excellent food. I don't want to think about that now. He apparently had a number one time drinking legally for the first time in his life at the Traffic Jam bar where he has been drinking illegally for some time.

I realize that if I survive about five more weeks, I will turn 21 in the Nam. A birthday I'm sure to remember. The way things look here, I will not be having my first legal drink at the Traffic Jam or anywhere else on my 21st birthday.

I add a few entries in my journal. Why? I don't know. To pass the time, I guess. I know I'm not worried about forgetting about the Nam, that's for sure.

We work out our guard duty, and I take last shift as usual. It's been dark for a while, and I really hope I can sleep tonight, despite the bugs. I climb out of the driver's compartment and just about crawl to my tent and hopefully to sleep. The bugs never ever give up, and after I fall asleep they have a field day on me. Damn! When does monsoon end?

*May 30, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp Command*

*Had a very nice guard last night, saw nothing suspicious. Several wolves came very close to my post during the night.*

*Forenoon pleasant, rain this afternoon, expect more tonight.*

*Gen. Gibbon takes a walk around camp to see that everything is alright. No Sioux saw or heard of today.*

*River very high. Some fellow yelled, "Steamboat." Immediately heads were out of tents in every direction. Even the Colonel came out of his tent, looked up and down the river, went back disgusted.*

*Another straw hat has made its appearance in camp on the head of the genius who constructed it.*

February 28, 1970
Saturday
Quang Tri Province

I know I slept some last night because Fanelli had to wake me from a dead

sleep to take my turn at guard. I also have about a million bug bites that itch and sting all at once. I climb onto 2-3 and get in the TC turret hatch. I stand on the TC's seat so I am sticking out of the turret waist high and well positioned to operate the .50 Cal. or the main gun should need be. I'm really still half asleep, and I don't realize it's payday for a while. I know that doesn't sound like much, but in the Nam payday is like Christmas. But without the presents and the tree. In place of the presents, there will be goodies and treats. For the juicers there will be Tiger beer and probably whiskey too. For the heads, there will be pot, or as the locals call it, dinky dao tobacco. There's dinky dao tobacco and beer and whiskey available when it's not payday, but we only get paid once a month. Almost everyone runs out of money before the next payday, and therefore have no money to pay for any of their vices. I ran short of money last month. But I'm happy, because I was able to increase my actual cash payment by reducing the amount of my pay that goes into an automatic savings account.

There really isn't anything for me to buy except Cokes. I would buy bread and milk if there were some for sale, but there isn't. Fanelli's mamasan is supposed to have a case of Ramen for him today and with that money she hopes to buy some flour so she can bake bread for tomorrow. That would be number one, but I try not to get my hopes up. Now that I'm awake, I can't wait for it to get light. Less danger, guard is over, and most importantly, I can heat some water up to make some instant coffee. There is not usually any casual horn chatter during guard, but I heard someone verify with the Sgt. of the Guard during our sitreps that we get paid today. Number one.

Guard duty ends with no incidents. It's just getting light, and I am ready for some coffee, so I climb down off 2-3 with a chunk of C-4 and my canteen cup. We forgot to do anything with the water in our water can, and as I'm sure it's from the river, I walk to the center of the RON to our water buffalo to get my water. Gauging by the guys lining up at the water buffalo, we're not the only crew that didn't clean out their drinking water can. The water is horrible from the water buffalo, but it makes satisfactory coffee.

I head back to 2-3, and Fanelli and the loader are already up. They probably had visions of sugar plum fairies in their dreams because of the Christmas-like atmosphere of payday. Fanelli most likely had visions of cases of Ramen in his dream. I get my water heated in my canteen cup, put my three packets of instant coffee in, and blow on it to cool it off. I also blow all the bugs who land in it to the far side of my cup. It's near boiling, so it's

instant death for any bugs that land in my coffee. I hardly even think about them being there except being careful not to drink one or more. Fanelli is shaving, and he is definitely in as good a mood as one can be when 3 or 4 kliks south of the Z. The loader doesn't like the pound cake or the pecan roll, so he eats a c-rat meal instead. I'm sure the Ham and Eggs are intended as a breakfast meal choice, but except for Johnson, no one will eat them unless forced to.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. arises from his slumber, and he too appears to be happy that it's payday. I'm sure he'll be scoring a bottle of something, and it won't be Tiger beer. Fanelli is the one who orders all the food, ammo, and supplies we need over the horn almost every day, and I'm already feeling "pay day rich" even though I haven't even been paid yet. So I ask Fanelli to order a case of Coke for me. I hate making Lon and her brother lug six-packs of Coke for me from Cam-lo. I know it doesn't sound like much but Lon an her brother are boo coo small, and it's hot and humid now most of the time, so it's a hard task for them.

Maybe, I think, there will be ice today. Of all days, payday is a highly probable day for us to get ice. Ice has not been available lately. Fanelli says that when it wasn't against Regs to have beer and whiskey in the field, they had ice all the time. They *had* to keep the beer cold, and some juicers like their whiskey on the rocks. But now no one has beer in large quantities unless you call the large bottles of Tiger Beer a "large quantity". Fanelli says they had cases of beer on all the tracks, hardly anyone bought Coke. I better stop thinking about ice before I jinx it.

It's cloudy and overcast. So far no rain, but that could change any moment around here. If we're going to move, and we know we are, as it is payday, it would be number one to bring in all our night defense stuff while it is not raining. But since Our Dear Platoon Sgt. doesn't do anything relating to that, he is unaware. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gets called on the horn by one of the other platoons we're working with today, and they decide on a meeting point. Back to the Cam-lo River but further up stream. We just have to get to the redball and cross over it, as the river is close. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. orders the platoon to prepare to break camp, so I bring in the claymores and my trip flares. No trip flare mishaps today. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire, take down the RPG screen, roll them both up, and tie them to the side of 2-3. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is amazingly lucid so far today. He's probably trying to pace himself for a big finish after we get paid. I know I

am.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has 2-6 take the lead as we uncircle and leave the RON. Big Al has to mine sweep for Zack and Steve as they lead the platoon down the trail to the redball. We just cross the redball and proceed to the river on another trail. Big Al is still mine sweeping with 2-6 in the lead. At the river, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. orders the tracks to spread out at 50 foot intervals with the .50 Cal to be manned at all times as we wait for the Third Platoon to meet us.

It wasn't enough for someone to almost drown yesterday, and so today another River Patrol is supposed to go further upstream in search of hidden caches. Boo coo dangerous, as any caches would almost certainly be booby trapped. Messing with them will be number ten for the River Patrol.

The Third platoon arrives, but from where 2-3 is positioned on the Cam-lo River, I can't see them. But I can hear the horn chatter between Our Dear Platoon Sgt. and the LT of the Third platoon. The Third platoon members for the River Patrol are coming to our location to meet up with the guys in the Second platoon that have to go on the River Patrol. The loader already went on one River Patrol, so he feels pretty safe. Both Fanelli and I are nervous about being tapped for patrol. In the end, we both luck out and are not ordered on patrol. The patrol heads upstream, but this time they are staying on the riverbank and not walking in the river.

While the patrol is gone, I decide to finally do something about our water container. I tell Fanelli I'm going to pour the water out, fill it about half way with water buffalo water and boo coo drops of iodine, and every so often give it a good shaking before pouring it all out. What I want to know is, what then? Fill it with river water or water buffalo water? We both hate water buffalo water, but the river water has us both cringing.

Fanelli says, "Why don't we wait for the River Patrol to return and hear what they find?"

I say, "If they don't want to find anything, they are going about it properly by staying on the riverbank."

Even if they did search the shore from the river, they have to stop somewhere. So anywhere they stop, there could be something just out of their sight. The river water tastes so number one compared to the water buffalo water, but it's too dicey. It's water buffalo water that we finally decide on.

It's about lunch time, so I'm trying to decide which of the c-rat meals I hate the least. The meal I decide on has a can of fruit cocktail inside. I've been

eating fruit cocktail almost every morning for part of my breakfast, and I am getting tired of it. I decide to round out my lunch with a can of peaches. They still taste number one to me, but so did the fruit cocktail for a while. Fanelli has Ramen and is still expecting to score a case of Ramen at resupply today. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. appears to still be pacing himself for some sort of payday celebration and seems fairly lucid.

After lunch, Fanelli and I saunter down to where 2-6 is parked to chat with Steve, Big Al, and Zack. Mostly we want to get away from Our Dear Platoon Sgt. The loader is taking his turn behind the .50 Cal. and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. was wheeling around 2-3 with some newfound energy, most likely due to not drinking as heavily as he usually does.

Payday has most of the platoon members excited. Why? I don't know. For the most part there is not much to buy out here in the field.

Our River Patrol mission is a joint effort by the Second and Third platoons. We haven't done any joint missions with the First platoon since one of our FNGs shot them up. We don't know if there are any hard feelings about it, because although we have resupplied with all the platoons, there is so much going on during resupply we don't have any time for social chats. Besides that, I don't even know anyone in the First platoon to talk to. I'm pretty sure Fanelli has some friends in the First platoon, but like I said, we don't have much time for social chatting at resupply. The time we do have we spend chatting with Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother.

It hasn't rained this afternoon, but it's gray and overcast and could rain at any moment. It's boo coo hot. I'd guess the temperature to be in the eighties, and the humidity must be 100%. Steve seems to have fit right in with the crew on 2-6, and they joke around and tease each other all the time. It would be nice for Fanelli and I to have a TC that we like, but we are stuck with Our Dear Platoon Sgt. for now. After a while, Wack stops by 2-6 while Fanelli and I are still there, and he is also looking forward to resupply and getting paid. We guard the river for a couple of hours, listening to the River Patrol’s sitreps every fifteen minutes until the patrol’s radio battery dies. I'm pretty sure we have extra batteries for the portable radio we carry on patrols. But I think the issue is: do you want to carry an extra battery or do you want to carry as much ammo as you can? Everyone here opts for the ammo.

After the River Patrol sitreps stop, and we can't raise them on the horn, we assume they will start back. How long it takes them to return depends on how far they went before their radio battery died. Unless, of course, they have

been attacked. We don't expect that, as we're sure we would have heard some gun fire. Even if they are pretty far away, it's amazing how far sound can travel up and down a river.

All of us are still at 2-6 socializing when we can see the River Patrol returning from further up the river bank. The gunner on 2-6 is one of the River Patrol members, so we wait at 2-6 to hear what he has to say. As the River Patrol members disburse to their various tracks, 2-6's gunner returns. He doesn't have any exciting news, as the patrol encountered nothing and found nothing. We don't mind the lack of any exciting news, especially if the news is about corpses in the river. Fanelli and I have already decided to use water buffalo water for our drinking and cooking water anyway. Getting paid takes some extra time at resupply, so we head back to 2-3 expecting and hoping to be heading for resupply soon.

We are correct in our thinking, and when we arrive back at 2-3, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is already up in the TC position radioing the rest of the Second platoon to prepare to didi for resupply. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. must once again be feeling lucky, as he decides to dispense with mine sweeping on the trail back to the redball. My main concern is that we are leading the way on the trail for the Second platoon, and the person most in jeopardy from the land mines is me. I hate that.

We get to the redball without incident, and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me head east towards Cam-lo. We're at least 5 kliks from our resupply spot on the west side of Cam-lo, so I drive about 20 mph which is probably top speed for the P.C.s, given all the ammo they carry. My accelerator pedal is not floored, so I know I can go faster. But we want to stay together on the redball, so I don't. It takes about fifteen minutes to get to the resupply point, and I know we are almost there when I can smell Cam-lo.

The Third platoon somehow beats us here, and while we're getting into position the First Platoon arrives and starts positioning themselves as well. We're earlier than usual because of it being payday. Word goes around that First Platoon will be paid first, followed by us, and lastly the Third platoon. Fanelli and the loader are finishing with the concertina wire, but none of the locals have showed up yet, probably because we arrived a tee tee bit earlier than usual. We can't get in line to be paid yet, so I attend to re-fueling 2-3 while Fanelli and the loader take care of our resupply order. Fanelli gives me the high sign, indicating that my case of Coke was with our supplies. So far, so good.

From my vantage point on the back of 2-3, I can see the locals coming down the road toward us. The horn crackles with the news that the Second platoon can get into the paymaster line, so Fanelli and the loader and I head over to get paid. We don't have to stand in line much in the field, so we are sort of out of practice. There is a lot of shoving and jostling. Most of it in fun, because we're all excited about getting paid. The paymaster sits at a small table with a list of the platoon members and how much each is to be paid. On one side he has a stack of MPC, and on his right side he has his .45 lying on the table. I hope it's unloaded, because there is no safe direction for it to point. If it's unloaded, then what's the point? War is weird.

Soon it's my turn, and I get my allotment of MPC and head back to 2-3 with Fanelli to meet up with his mamasan and Lon and her brother, who are standing on the other side of the concertina wire when we return. They wave at us excitedly, and I can see Fanelli's mamasan came through for him. Lon and her brother are each carrying a case of Ramen for her. There's almost a carnival-like atmosphere on both sides of the concertina wire. Lots of the locals that don't normally come to our resupply are here today. They are aware, I'm sure, that it's our payday.

Fanelli gets his case of Ramen, and I buy five from the second case of Ramen they are selling singly. Everyone is happy and smiling and Fanelli's mamasan keeps Lon busy translating for us. Lon's brother has the empty sandbag, and he hands it to me over the concertina wire. I walk back to 2-3 to put some c-rat meals in it for them. When I return to the concertina wire, we can only talk tee tee more before they have to try to finish selling the rest of their Ramen. I say my goodbyes and try to find Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy, figuring Smitty will be with him, and I want to see them both.

I can see Double Deuce two tracks over, and I try there first. My lucky day, as Smitty is at the concertina wire, and I can see his Tiger Beer boy also. He has what looks like a box of Tiger Beer. Smitty apparently has no qualms about having these little kids haul big heavy boxes of stuff for him all the way from Cam-lo. I should talk, as one of the bottles of Tiger Beer is mine, at least I hope it's mine. I walk over and join their conversation. Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy speaks English almost as well as Lon. Definitely better than Lon's brother, who hangs out with Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy sometimes when Lon is not around. Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy is smoking a Salem as he deals with Smitty. I know I could trade cigarettes to him for the menthol oil, but since I have money, or what passes for money here, I feel better buying than trading

cigarettes for it. Especially when he's smoking, which is most of the time I see him.

For a young kid, Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy is an astute businessman. When finished with Smitty, he turns immediately to me and holds up his hand with his fingers and thumb spread and asks "Five?" That's pretty good because there's about 150 guys here all walking around in O.D. and camo, but he remembers me and my order.

"Five," I say. I give him five dollars in MPC, and he hands me my five vials of menthol oil.

Smitty asks, "You use that stuff?"

"Roger on that," I say.

He laughs and, like Fanelli, says, "Man, you're dinky dao." He hands me my Tiger Beer.

While we are chatting, one of the other guys on Double Deuce runs up to us and says, "They have ice at the hot chow line!"

Smitty and I both scramble. No time for any goodbyes to Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy. I run back to 2-3 to tell Fanelli and the loader about the ice. We're already excited, as it is payday. But ice! This is the first ice for me since I've been here in the Nam. I have some Cokes and one beer, so it would number one to drink them cold. And I mean boo coo number one! Fanelli and the loader and I run over to the hot chow line with our helmets. I think this is the first time I've used my helmet for anything other than to sit on. Lately I've been practicing sitting like the Vietnamese do whenever they stop to sit. Almost as soon as they arrive at their destination, they squat down, balancing on a very flat footed squat. It looks easy, but when I try it, I eventually fall over backwards on my butt, so the helmet has been useful for a stool.

All three of us arrive at the hot chow line, and there is almost a melee going on. Some of the KPs are up on the back of one of the deuce and a halfs with several thermo chests filled with ice. The helmets we have all brought won't fit in the thermo chests to scoop out some ice. No one thought about any scoops, as they figured we would be happy enough with the ice. And we will be happy if we can just get some. A lot of the ice gets wasted as the KPs try to dump the ice into the upheld helmets. There’s a lot of cussing and swearing, and ice is flying through the air from the thermo chests to the helmets. It sparkles like diamonds, and today it's probably worth more than diamonds. There is a lot of shoving, and a lot of the platoon's etiquette seems to have been lost in the quest for some ice. I'm half surprised there is no gun

play in the end. Many of us are armed with automatic and semi-automatic weapons as we go through the chow line. Now we're in line for some ice, which is far better than the food. Fanelli and the loader and I all get a helmet full of ice, and we head back to 2-3. We move at double time, as it's hot and the ice is melting rapidly.

What a lucky day for me, as I have a beer and a case of coke and ice. We quickly put all the ice in our thermo chest, and I shove my bottle of Tiger Beer in all the way to the bottom. Then I put as many Cokes in that will fit. I tell both Fanelli and the loader to help themselves to the Cokes as soon as they're cold. All of us keep opening the thermo chest and spinning the cans of Coke in the ice to get them chilled faster. I was so intent on getting ice, I didn't even notice what the hot chow was. It's in the realm of possibility that because today is payday, the hot chow would be something special. It's a three platoon resupply site, so it's huge. Hot chow is about 100 yards away and more than likely it will be disgusting. I decide to join Fanelli and have one of the Ramen I just bought for dinner. Fanelli flips the loader one of his Ramen packages, and we all have it for our dinner. It is number one, and we all finish it off with an almost ice cold Coke.

My first boo coo cold Coke since I've been in the Nam, and it is number one. It has been so hot lately, and with no cold river water to drink, we just can't get our thirst quenched. So the cold Cokes are highly appreciated, and I can't remember one tasting better than these. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns, and it is quite evident that he has been celebrating payday. We offer him a cold Coke, and to our surprise he readily accepts. Juicers apparently get thirsty too. We all have a round of Cokes, and they are now ice cold. Number one. We finish our Cokes and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn, ordering the rest of the Second platoon to prepare to sky for our RON. I start up 2-3, and then I help Fanelli and the loader take in the concertina wire, even though the concertina wire and I don't get along.

We look around for Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother, but we don't see them anywhere. It's such a big site today, if they're on the other side, we won't see them.

I get into the driver's compartment, and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me head west on the redball. We drive probably 4 kliks, because we turn off sooner than we did yesterday. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has Double Deuce lead the way on the dirt trail as we mine sweep at a walking pace to our RON. I'm pretty sure I can see Smitty doing the mine sweeping for Charlie Brown on

Double Deuce. This is really dicey, as Smitty is known as the biggest screw-up in the Second platoon. Not who I would want mine sweeping for me. Getting some Tiger Beer, yes. Mine sweeping, no. Fortunately, we don't go far, and Smitty has no mishaps. We arrive, we hope, at our designated RON. We drive in circles and flatten any and everything, and then we dismount and look for tunnels like recent and devoted converts to the religion of Tunnel Search. For the Second platoon, today our luck holds, and we find no tunnels.

Fanelli and the loader put up the RPG screen and set out the concertina wire while I put out the claymores and the trip flares. It's still pretty hot and humid, and we still have some light left to finish our set up. I string my detonator wire for the claymores over to 2-3 and climb up to the turret to connect the detonators and put them next to the .50 Cal. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has his bottle out in plain sight again, next to the ammo box for the .50 Cal. Just like old times, I think to myself. He looks like he might make it to the end of his shift at guard, so maybe my luck will hold. Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3 while I set my tent up. I put my stretcher and one of the sleeping bags inside.

I am done with all my set up tasks, so before I climb into my driver's compartment, I climb up on 2-3 and fish my bottle of Tiger Beer out from the bottom of our thermo chest. The Tiger Beer is ice cold, and the outside temperature right now is about 90 degrees with 100% humidity. I take the ice cold bottle of Tiger Beer and roll it over my forehead and temples. It is number one already, and I haven't even opened the bottle yet. It's a big bottle of beer. I guess about 24 ounces. I take my bottle of Tiger Beer, climb into my driver's compartment, and stretch out in my seat. I open my ammo box and get out my bottle opener to open the bottle of Tiger Beer. I take a big chug of the ice cold Tiger Beer. It is number one. I can't imagine my friend Jerry could have had a better or colder beer at the Traffic Jam on his 21st birthday than I'm having right now. Well, I sort of can't imagine.

I take one more long, thirst quenching chug, and then I drink the rest in small sips to savor it. It is one of the best bottles of beer I have ever had in my life and always will be. It's a good thing I only bought one bottle of Tiger Beer, because if we get ice, I could really get used to drinking a few bottles of it for nutritional purposes. I'm chatting with Fanelli and the loader as I slowly drink my Tiger Beer, trying to make it last. We agree on the guard shifts, and I again take the last shift. I finish my Tiger Beer, and then I make my way to my tent.

It's been a lucky day so far, but the bugs are about to change all that now that I want to sleep. I can definitely feel the Tiger Beer and hope it helps me fall asleep fast. The Tiger Beer does its job, and I am soon asleep, though all the bugs do their best to change that.

*March 1970*

*May 31, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Camp Command*

*A very pleasant day, some rain this evening. Cavalry company came back from down the river, they report no Sioux.*

*I was lucky enough to get 70 pounds of potatoes and a bottle of pickles. Company on half rations again.*

*Had a swim. River still raising. Commenced writing a letter to friend Cliff.*

*I just happened to think yesterday was Decoration Day and how I enjoyed myself one year ago, but events will happen to the best.*

March 1, 1970
Sunday
Quang Tri Province

I look like I have measles from all the bug bites I endured while trying to sleep last night. The loader wakes me at 4 a.m., and it's almost a relief to get up and defend myself against the continuous onslaught of insects. I take my place behind the .50 Cal. and stare out into the pitch black. I have to keep slapping myself in the face to keep from falling asleep. It's a real eye strain looking into nothingness for two hours straight. Kind of like trying not to blink for two hours but a tee tee bit worse. Calling in my sitreps every 15 minutes helps somewhat as a mental distraction from the constant staring.

Day break in the northern latitudes, which I'm used to, is more protracted. Here in the tropics, day break is quickly followed by complete light compared to the slower dawning elsewhere. Consequently, at dusk it gets dark boo coo fast every night by 6:30 p.m.

It stayed warm all night, and because we have ice, we kept the thermo chest closed all night. As soon as I'm awake enough to remember, I crawl to the rear of the turret to the bustle rack and get myself an ice cold Coke. There is still some ice left, so I get a tee tee bit in my hand and pop it into my

mouth. Probably shouldn't, because who knows where the water for the ice was from. Not to mention I didn't rinse my helmet out before putting the ice in it and neither did Fanelli or the loader. We live dangerously here in the Nam, so I take some more ice and rub it around on my face. It feels number one. After the ice, I take my unopened ice cold can of Coke and roll it around on my forehead and temples. It almost gives me an ice cream brain freeze when I put it on my temples. But it feels so good. I pop open the can of Coke and take a big chug. It is also number one, and it's waking me up fast. I take one more big chug, and then I make my way back to the TC hatch and get into position behind the .50 Cal. I savor the rest of my Coke in small sips.

It would be just like the army to give us ice for a few days to remind us how number one cold drinks are when it's really hot, and then stop. Fanelli says to not count on ice even tomorrow, so I don't. It's Sunday and the first day of March, but here in the Nam it's just a same-same day. Especially after all the pseudo-celebration of payday yesterday, it will make today feel like the day after Christmas when you're a kid.

The Coke really wakes me up, so I'm not so anxious about getting my cup of java for the day. Soon it is 6 a.m., and I get to preparing my coffee. I can hear the sound of burning C-4 all over the RON. It never cooled off last night, and now that the sun is up, it is already hot and humid. Both Fanelli and the loader get up and Fanelli starts to heat water to shave. The loader climbs up on the turret to check out the ice situation and is as pleased as I was with the amount left. He takes a few pieces and pops them into his mouth and rubs the rest on his face. I tell the loader to help himself to the Cokes while they are still cold, as I agree with Fanelli in that we can't be sure to get ice again anytime soon. He takes out a Coke for himself, and then holds one up for Fanelli, who nods his head indicating yes. The loader tosses him one. I'm still drinking my coffee and eating a pecan roll, so I hold off on the Cokes for now.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is sleeping in a tee tee bit after his celebration yesterday, but soon he is up from his beauty sleep. What a sight he is, as he stumbles and fumbles around. He fishes around in his shirt pocket for one of his Luckys. He lights one and after a couple of puffs, he is energized enough to attempt climbing up on the turret of 2-3. He's fairly short and tanks don't really have any built-in means to climb on. So it's difficult for some of the guys of short stature to get on the tanks.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has his canteen cup, but instead of heating up water

to shave, he opens the thermo chest and puts some ice in his canteen cup and then makes his way to the TC position where he keeps his bottle. A little whiskey on the rocks for breakfast today, and this might be only the second time I have seen him forgo his morning shave.

When he finally gets down from the turret, it's quite apparent to me that he is unable to shave. We haven't been back in the field for two weeks yet, but my beard is looking number one to everyone (except Our Dear Platoon Sgt). I climb up on the turret on 2-3 and grab another Coke out of the thermo chest. I offer one to Our Dear Platoon Sgt., but he declines and instead gets more ice in his canteen cup before moving back to the TC position behind the .50 Cal. for another drink. After he finishes his drink, he tells us to get ready to sky. He gets on the horn and orders the rest of the Second platoon to prepare to break camp. I finish the rest of my Coke and manage to bring in the claymores and the trip flares again without incident and therefore endure no teasing from Fanelli and the loader.

So far no rain today, but it is so humid that when we finish bringing in our night defenses, we are soaking wet from all the wet vegetation and sweat. We tie all our gear to the side of 2-3, and again we look like some sort of gypsy caravan. If we ever run into some NVA in broad daylight, they would probably die laughing. We wouldn't even have to fire a shot. We uncircle with 2-3 in the lead, and when we reach the edge of the RON Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has Fanelli dismount and start to mine sweep. We proceed at a walking pace, but we aren't headed back to the redball from the direction we are currently going.

I don't think I've been in this area before. It's boo coo dense foliage that comes right to the edge of the trail. A really number ten place to get ambushed, so all the tracks are trying to stay close together and in sight of one another. It's difficult to do because this trail winds around and is not straight anywhere. Being really close together is more number ten than number one. If we get ambushed, it's really easy to shoot up the rest of the platoon in all the excitement. When you're in a number ten place, there is just no improving the situation. We hate that.

We continue following the trail for about an hour until we get to an open area. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has us form up into a small circle with the tracks and has the medic track and the mortar track set up in the center. He orders the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times and for each track to send one crewman over to 2-3 prepared to go on a patrol. It's not noon yet, but close, so I know

all the guys on the patrol are going to be pissed off about missing lunch.

I know this because after Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gets off the horn he turns to me and says, "Wolf, get yer gear. Yer on patrol."

The first time he calls me by name and not "Driver", it's to order me on patrol. I hate that.

I try to decline his offer to go on patrol due to the fact that I only have my hated .45 for a weapon, hardly adequate to patrol down the Ho Chi Minh trail. He tells me to trade my hated .45 with someone in the platoon. No one will take me up on my offer to trade my hated .45 for their M-16, so Our Dear Platoon Sgt. orders Wack to trade me. Wack has an M-60, so even though he gives me his M-16, he declines my hated .45. He knows of its deficiencies all too well.

So in the end, I am one of the most heavily armed members of the patrol with my hated .45 and Wack's M-16. There's the start of a small ravine next to where we are parked. It has all the appearances of a well used trail and is purported to be part of the Ho Chi Minh trail. There are no road signs, so we don't know for sure. But it's a comforting thought for a 10 man patrol about 2 or 3 kliks south of the Z. If it's really part of the Ho Chi Minh trail, it's very likely to be mined and booby trapped. Since I went to armor school, I have had zero training in dealing with mines and booby traps other than blowing up found mines with C-4. To us it seems boo coo dumb to get out of our tanks and P.C.s with all of our superior fire power and walk around in the bush lightly armed and completely untrained in jungle warfare. That, it seems, would be exactly what Charlie would want us to do.

There are ten of us, and it's no surprise that everyone starts complaining as soon as the patrol is out of earshot of the rest of the platoon. And I mean everyone, myself included. We are given no map or compass and no one is clearly in charge. If someone was put in charge, they are not letting on. We have Thumper with us loaded with a shotgun type shell, and we take turns being point man. OJT on jungle warfare. We hate that. The point man with Thumper is closely followed by someone with an M-16 since Thumper is a single shot weapon. Because we want to carry as much ammo as possible, we didn't bring a spare radio battery with us. It's a fairly well-defined trail running close to the center of a water eroded ravine. Being a tropical area, the ravine is lush and overgrown with vines and every tropical plant imaginable. A perfect place for booby traps, or worse, an ambush. Not to mention poisonous snakes, scorpions (boo coo big ones), and other biting and stinging

insects. Did I leave anything out? We're not looking for anything specific, except trouble. Some of the guys on patrol turn out to be infantry and have been trained for this, so they have actually dealt with some booby traps. This is comforting, sort of.

It's hot and humid, and we're all sweaty and exhausted. Not to mention hungry, because we missed lunch. We take a break in place and call in a sitrep to Our Dear Platoon Sgt. Nothing being found, he encourages us to continue on our quest for nothing specific, other than trouble. We continue our break in place, and with no one admitting to being in charge still, it seems pointless to continue any further. There is an E-5 and several Spec 4s on this patrol, so as a PFC, I know *I'm* not in charge. We think we are a couple of kliks from the Z, and if we do encounter Charlie, there will assuredly be more than 10. There would likely be 100 to 200 NVA. We are already boo coo far into a place the rest of the platoon can't reach with the tanks and P.C.s, so we are essentially on our own. That being the case, we decide to stay in place and send back sitreps every 15 minutes until our battery dies. Then we slowly make our way back to the rest of the platoon, no trouble being found.

It's an uphill climb back through some boo coo dense bush with tangled vines, and we are all dripping with sweat and tired when we arrive back at the Second platoon's location. The first thing I do is get a cold Coke and just about chug it down in one gulp. I'm really hungry, but I'm so hot and exhausted, I'm not sure I can eat. Because we were out of communication on our return, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. asks me for a sitrep. Why he is asking me, I don't know, as I was not in charge. Admittedly, we cut our patrol short, but we went boo coo far enough for anyone with thoughts of making it back. I tell him we found nothing, not even any booby traps, which for us is number one.

He finally backs off so I can have some lunch. Today I decide to have spaghetti and meatballs, even though we don't have that in our c-rat meal choices. I open a can of c-rat spaghetti and a can of c-rat beans and meatballs, and I heat up both with some C-4 until they're hot. Then I fish the meatballs out of the beans and plop them on top of my spaghetti. Voila! Spaghetti and meatballs. I just throw the rest of the beans away. Boo coo wasteful, I know, but war is nothing but wasteful, so I'm just joining.

I just finish my modest repast when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. announces to the rest of the platoon that we are going to didi for resupply. Usually I'm sort of excited about going to resupply, but I'm so exhausted I just want to take a

nap. No naps today, so I climb into the driver's compartment on 2-3, start the engine, and wait for Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s orders. It took about an hour to get here from the redball, so we need to get going unless we plan on not mine sweeping. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. finally orders me to turn around and head back down the trail, no need to mine sweep, he thinks. I hate when he feels lucky with my life in jeopardy.

I don't feel lucky so far today, but because we don't mine sweep, it only takes us about a half an hour to get back to the redball. The terrain is rough, and the trail is poor, so even without mine sweeping, we can't go very fast. The whole trail is a number ten place, being so vulnerable to ambush. We head east on the redball towards Cam-lo and drive to the open area on the west side of Cam-lo where we resupply often. We're the first of the platoons to arrive, although the resupply convoy is here already. We start to set up our circle, and in quick succession both the First and Third platoon's arrive, so it is a boo coo big circle of tanks and P.C.s.

Fanelli and the loader are getting the concertina wire in place while I adjust 2-3's position to suit Our Dear Platoon Sgt. In all the excitement today, I totally forgot that Fanelli's mamasan might have some bread. That would be number one. As I climb out of the driver's compartment, I can see Lon and her brother followed by Fanelli's mamasan coming to the concertina wire in front of 2-3. Fanelli's mamasan has a bag of something, so we are hopeful. When we get close enough, she starts speaking in Vietnamese, and when she finishes Lon translates. She says that Fanelli's mamasan has no bread today, because even though she has money, there is no flour to buy in Cam-lo and therefore no bread.

We are disappointed to say the least. She does have Ramen, and so it's not a total loss. Fanelli buys five even though he just bought a case. He has to plan ahead for times when we may not resupply near Cam-lo. We still have a good time talking to Lon and her brother. They brought their sand bag, and Lon hands it to me. I saunter back to 2-3 to put some c-rat meals in the sand bag about the time the loader returns from the hot chow. No ice today, he sadly informs me. Fanelli has been saying all day that there would be no ice at resupply. We have a tee tee bit left in our thermo chest, so it will be gone soon. I walk back to the concertina wire before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns and hand the now full sand bag to Lon. Both she and her brother thank us. They seem so happy all the time, and it's hard to understand why. They live in an isolated village during a time of war. I think the local civilians pay the

highest price for war. They can be doing everything right and nothing wrong and still get killed. Xin loi, civilians!

The fuel truck arrives at 2-3, so I say my goodbyes and head over to top off the fuel tank. I'm up on the hull at the rear of 2-3, and I can see Fanelli and his mamasan and Lon and her brother still talking and laughing. Fanelli has been here boo coo longer than me, and so he has known them a long time. I only met them about three weeks ago, and during that time I haven't seen them every day. Until you get really short, most guys consider it a jinx to talk about how long you have been in the Nam or how long you have left. I don't know how long Fanelli has been here, but I know he went on R&R already, so that means more than six months.

When Fanelli takes his leave to make his Ramen for dinner, they all wave to me, and I wave back. The loader said the hot chow was to be avoided at all costs, so I decide to have Ramen too.

Usually Fanelli is a purist with his Ramen and doesn't add anything from our c-rat cache. I like to crumble some of the c-rat crackers into my Ramen, as it's number one. Best use of the c-rat crackers I have found yet. We still have some almost cold Cokes left, and Fanelli and the loader and I all have one. Soon Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns with a paper plate of the day's offering at hot chow. I have never actually seen Our Dear Platoon Sgt. eat solid food, except the cookies I got a while back, so I watch with some interest. I think the loader was right about avoiding the hot chow, but Our Dear Platoon Sgt. finishes the plate off with gusto and would have probably eaten more if it were not for the fact that he would have to walk 100 yards there and 100 yards back. He climbs up on the turret of 2-3 with his canteen cup, opens our thermo chest, and takes out a few of our last and precious pieces of ice for his sundowner. If we don't get going boo coo soon, we will be setting up after sundown, which is number ten around here.

The other two platoons are making ready to sky, and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gets the hint. Over the horn, he informs the rest of the Second platoon to prepare to didi. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me head east toward Cam-lo. As we haven't driven through Cam-lo for a while, I wonder if my old guy will be there.

Cam-lo is so close, I smell it immediately, and soon it's in sight. It's a small village, and as usual the old guy is by the side of the road flipping everyone the bird, except me. He gives me the Peace Sign now before I flash it most of the time. As we pass, I toss him a box of c-rats, being extra careful

not to run him over with 2-3.

We still have no LT and not much confidence in Our Dear Platoon Sgt.'s map reading capabilities, so every night our RON location makes Fanelli nervous, and that makes me nervous. We drive east all the way through Cam-lo and about 3 kliks east of Cam-lo, we pull off the redball at a trail on the south side. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has 2-6 take the lead, so Big Al is out in front mine sweeping.

We make our way slowly up a sort of hill from what I can see, and then we drive in circles flattening everything. It's not very level, so I already know it's going to be boo coo fun putting out the claymores and the trip flares. But first we dismount and go over the entire area looking for tunnels or anything unusual. Nothing being found, we start putting out our night defenses. I can hear the P.C. side gunners digging their foxholes and the mortar crew digging the pit for the mortar. I am boo coo glad I don't have to dig a foxhole, and although putting out the claymores and the trip flares is a lot of work, I wouldn't trade. The only thing we use the entrenching tool on 2-3 for is to bury our crap, when we have the time or the inclination to bury it.

No real rain today. Just real misty and humid, so we were still able to maintain the wet-to-damp condition we are all so accustomed to. Also, some almost cold Cokes are left, so I have one while I put my tent up and put my stretcher inside. I don't know how the rest of the guys sleep right on the ground. Here in the Nam, the ground, even in time of war, is crawling with all sorts of number ten creepy and crawly things best not messed with. Scorpions, snakes, and spiders (all poisonous) only to name a few.

Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3 while Our Dear Platoon Sgt. takes care of another sundowner, now that it is sundown and soon to be dark. I take my Coke, climb into my driver's compartment, and stretch out in my driver's seat. It's been a long hard day, and it feels number one to relax in my seat and sip my almost cold Coke. I've got my red light on, as do Fanelli and the loader in the turret, so it feels and looks eerie and is definitely not the Real World. When the red lights are on, there are no colors, just shades of red. Everything is boo coo spooky looking, and it takes a while to get used to it. Fanelli and the loader are deciding on the second and third shift, and Fanelli asks me if I'll still take last shift. I say yes. I don't know why everyone hates the last shift of guard duty. I hate all shifts of guard duty equally, so last shift for me is no different. Because I am totally exhausted, I climb out of my driver's compartment at about 9 p.m., hoping to get maybe seven straight

uninterrupted hours of sleep, if the bugs will leave me alone. Not much chance of that.

*June 6, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp Wood Glen*

*This morning broke camp and worked all forenoon to get the teams and wagons up a very steep hill. So steep in fact that we had to hitch ropes to the wagons which we all took hold of and helped the teams to pull them up. Took us until one o'clock p.m. to get up.*

*We then followed the trail over hills and through deep ravines until we at last made camp on the river bank and glad we were to get there as we had a very hard time day of it and all were very tired.*

*Appearance of rain.*

*10 miles today. Some of the boys came very near being bitten by a rattlesnake, but was seen in time so that he was killed before he had time to bite.*

March 2, 1970
Monday
Quang Tri Province

I'm up at 4 a.m. when Fanelli wakes me for my turn on guard duty. When I climb up on 2-3, I go right to the thermo chest and grab one of the last almost cold Cokes. I have more Cokes left, they're just warm. I take my place sitting behind the .50 Cal. up on the turret at the TC position. I'm standing on the TC's seat, so I'm about halfway outside the turret, leaning back and sipping my Coke. The caffeine helps wake me up as I stare off into the complete black of night. Still The Scary Time for us, but I can hear the rest of the platoon calling in their sitreps every 15 minutes. All is quiet, which is number one here in the Nam. I call in my sitrep with nothing to report as well.

The whole RON is on the side of a hill of sorts, and there is higher ground on one side. It would be number ten to get hit from the higher ground, because Charlie would be able to shoot all the way across the RON. We only have armor around the .50 Cal. on the front and both sides. The back is partially open. A real Achilles Heel in every way.

It finally starts to get light, so I know it's 6 a.m. which means I can turn my thoughts to making my cup of coffee. I climb down off of 2-3 with a chunk of C-4 and my canteen cup. I fill my cup from our water container. It still smells a lot like iodine even though I rinsed the container out several times since my attempt to sanitize it. The C-4 has my water boiling asap, so I dump the instant c-rat coffee and the creamer in and wait for the bugs to land in it. I don't have to wait long. Fanelli and the loader are up now, and Fanelli is heating water for his shave, while the loader heats up some c-rats for breakfast.

Both the loader and I have been sent on patrols in the last few days, so Fanelli knows it's his turn next. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. probably sent me on patrol as punishment for not shaving, so Fanelli is maintaining a strack appearance. Speaking of the devil, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. finally wakes up and has his first of many Luckys. Then it's up on the turret for his morning bracer. Will he shave today, that is the question?

Fanelli and the loader both have Cokes with their breakfast, and when I finish my breakfast I join them by having a Coke myself. Not ice cold, but certainly not warm. Fanelli regales us with tales of ice every day when they could have beer and liquor in the field. Every resupply, there were cases of beer and chests filled with ice to keep the beer cold. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. joins us on the ground, and he appears to be pacing himself today for some reason. He heats up some water for his shave. After sending me on a dangerous and pointless patrol, I now have a reason to dislike him like most everyone else already does.

His tonsorial duties complete, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn to order the Second platoon to prepare to didi. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares again without incident, while Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen. I roll my tent and stretcher up in the tarp and tie it to the side of 2-3 while Fanelli and the loader tie the concertina wire and the RPG screen to the other side. I take our trash to one of the foxholes next to us, pour some diesel fuel on it, and light it. By the time we finally uncircle and leave, our RON is a smoking and stinking mess. I climb into the driver's compartment and put on my commo helmet, start 2-3, and wait for my orders.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has the crew on the LT's track, 2-5, lead the way back to the redball. We still have no LT, but 2-5 has a full 4-man crew, just no LT. I don't know any of the crew on 2-5. But one of the side gunners is

mine sweeping as we make our way back to the redball at a walking pace. Number one thing, as they find and clear a mine with some C-4. As we continue, they find several more.

That they are finding them is number one, but that they are there is number ten. They weren't there last night when we drove in, so someone put them there last night. We have been watched, and we hate that.

When we get to the redball, we just cross over and start mine sweeping on the trail that leads to the Cam-lo River. We find no mines on this side of the redball, and when we arrive at the Cam-lo River, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has us space out at 50 to 75 foot intervals facing the river, with the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times.

The river is wide, flat, and shallow here, with a flat but sloping bank that is about 50 feet wide on each side. The river bank is rocky and sandy and an easy place to throw a track if a driver is not careful. It's not raining, but it's hot and humid.

The transistor radios make their appearance on most tracks. We're spaced out so far, I can't hear the other radios, but Fanelli has his out. They're playing one of my favorite songs, “Midnight Rider” by the Allman Bros. No one would want to be a midnight rider here in the Nam, but we still like the song. Midnight is in the middle of The Scary Time.

The river looks cool and inviting on a hot and humid day both for swimming and drinking. Fanelli and I must not be the only guys who are off the river water for now, as I don't see anyone wading in the river or filling any water containers.

I hope clearing the mines was enough excitement for Our Dear Platoon Sgt., and Fanelli hopes even more since he is next in line to go on patrol. We amuse ourselves listening to both the transistor radio and the horn chatter from the rest of the platoon, getting in on the conversation ourselves at times. Mostly guys teasing the screw-ups, so that usually means Charlie Brown and the crew on Double Deuce. Someone is talking to Charlie Brown, and they’re teasing him about eating Snoopy, his dog, for lunch. The guys in the platoon who have dogs hate it when anyone talks about eating dogs. I don't joke about it myself, because I often wondered the few times I have eaten the hot chow what the meat was. They always joke about the meat, so I'm always skeptical myself.

All this talk about eating dog has made us hungry. It's close to lunch time, so in case one of us gets sent on patrol, we decide to have lunch. I join Fanelli

in having Ramen, and it is number one with the addition of the crumbled c-rat crackers. I round out my lunch with one of the last cool Cokes. We drink the Cokes so fast when they're cold that if we had ice everyday, I'd have to buy a case every other day so as to not run out. No such worry, as our ice is now gone with no prospect of getting more. When I go through our c-rat treasure chest, I notice that we have five Ham and Eggs. Johnson, for some reason, has not been stopping by 2-3 to beg for our extra Ham and Eggs. I make a mental note to throw them away at resupply today to make room for stuff we'll eat. I have several cartons of cigarettes from the sundry pack they send us on resupply sometimes, so I'm going to try and trade for some Cokes I think.

As lunch time passes and we remain on the river, it becomes apparent there will be no patrol today. Fanelli can finally relax. It's hot and humid, yet no one is willing to go in the river to cool off. It looks very appealing. After a few uneventful hours, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and orders the Second platoon to prepare to didi for resupply. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has 2-6 lead back to the redball. Steve, the TC on 2-6, has Big Al mine sweep our way back to the redball. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. probably wouldn't have us mine sweep on a trail so recently traveled, but we found boo coo mines today, so it's number one Steve is being cautious. We make it to the redball without finding or hitting any mines, and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. instructs me to take the lead and head west towards Cam-lo.

We drive until we arrive at a large open area about a half a klik east of Cam-lo. It's not too far for the locals to travel, although that's not supposed to be a consideration, as we aren't supposed to trade or fraternize with the locals. Just more Regs that we break everyday. When we arrive, the First and the Third platoons are still positioning themselves and have planned on our arrival.

Another huge RON, so it's more work to deal with hauling our supplies to 2-3 from the deuce and a halfs. It's a long walk over to the hot chow, but we have to go in case there is ice. Since there is no ice, we walk back to 2-3 and some of the locals have started to arrive, including Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother. They seem happy to see us, and we're always happy to talk to them. Still no bread, his mamasan apologizes, but there is no flour in Cam-lo. She does have Ramen, and Fanelli buys 5 to add to his stash.

Lon hands me the empty sand bag, and I walk to 2-3 to put some c-rats in it. I put two c-rat meal boxes and a carton of cigarettes into the sand bag and

quickly walk back to the concertina wire before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns. I hand the bag to Lon and tell her the carton of cigarettes is for another six-pack of Coke, if they can get it. I also tell her to only bring it if we are at one of the resupply sites on each side of Cam-lo. If we're at one of the places that is boo coo far from Cam-lo, it's OK to wait until we resupply nearby, like here. We're always surprised when we resupply at a couple of places that are 5 kliks from Cam-lo because if we're there long enough, some of the locals eventually show up sometimes just as we are leaving. 5 kliks is about 3 miles each way, so it’s a 6 mile walk. There have been several times when Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother showed up at resupply after a boo coo long hot walk, carrying stuff to sell, and you can't help but admire them.

We here in the Nam are always dreaming of making it back to the Real World. This is the Real World for Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother.

We have to deal with the stuff we ordered for resupply, and they have to sell the rest of the Ramen they have left. We say our goodbyes, and then sky over to the convoy of deuce and a halfs to pick up our supplies. On the walk over, I ask Fanelli about trying to order some flour on resupply. It amazes us the stuff we can order and get on resupply. Especially the ammo. Lots of guys, mostly the Lifers and the officers, have their own personal weapons with them, and we can get ammo for virtually anything that shoots.

Fanelli doubts we can get any flour, but he thinks it's worth a try. When we arrive at the deuce and a halfs to get our supplies, we can see the guy in our platoon who almost drowned a couple of days ago has been sent back to the field today with the resupply convoy. He was messed up pretty bad, we thought. We are all surprised to see him back so soon. It makes me wonder just how messed up do you have to be to get sent back to the Real World?

We grab our two cases of c-rats and some other gear and head back to 2-3. I decide to join Fanelli and have Ramen for dinner, as the hot chow looked and smelled horrid as usual. Using the water buffalo water to make our Ramen has a big drawback: a strong vinyl aftertaste that can barely be washed away by chugging a warm Coke. We're back to drinking the Cokes warm, and that makes us miss the ice even more than usual.

The loader, Fanelli, and I are just finishing our dinner when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. returns. He once again has a paper plate with the hot chow on it. How anyone can eat that stuff, I sure don't know. Maybe, like the mess hall

coffee that is several days to a week old, it's some sort of a badge of honor to drink it. And likewise a badge of courage to eat the hot chow. Watching Our Dear Platoon Sgt. eat the hot chow confirms that he does actually eat solid food, occasionally. And I would add - *very occasionally* - as his diet is mostly liquid, and I don't mean water.

I head over to mail call for everyone on 2-3, and it is disappointing as not one of us gets any mail today. I've written and sent off several letters myself, so I'm hoping to get some replies soon. I sky back to 2-3, and as I arrive, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is announcing over the horn for the Second platoon to prepare to didi for our RON.

I hop in the driver's compartment and start up the engine on 2-3 while Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire. We slowly uncircle and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me lead to the redball. We head east towards base camp at Dong ha and away from Cam-lo. We only go about 2 kliks before we turn off at a dirt trail heading south into the bush, and there's high ground near here so I guess that's our destination. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has the crew on the LT's track, 2-5, mine sweep our way to the RON. I've never seen the crew of 2-5 mine sweep before today, but they must know how, as they found several this morning. It doesn't take more than 30 minutes to make our way to the high ground.

We have camped here before, and we can see Cam-lo from our vantage point. Because we have camped here previously, we give the RON extra scrutiny as we look for tunnels and booby traps. The mortar crew is fairly happy, as their pit only needs to have a bunch of debris removed, so they don't really have to dig the mortar pit tonight. No such luck for the side gunners on the P.C.s. The way we have parked the tanks and P.C.s isn't the same, so none of the foxholes are in the right place. They will have to dig new ones. We shouldn't camp at previous RONs, so it makes many guys in the Second platoon nervous. That would include both Fanelli and myself. Especially after finding all the land mines today, which means we are being watched. We hate that! The problem is we need a large area to set up our RON, and there are only so many suitable sites. After the RON is given the all clear, I attend to putting out the claymores and the trip flares. I string the detonator wire for the claymores over to 2-3 and up to the turret and hang the detonators on the bullet shield for the .50 Cal.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is having his sundowner or more likely, sundowners. The hot chow must have made him thirsty. Fanelli and the

loader have put out the concertina wire and just finished setting the RPG screen in place. We're pretty confident there won't be a Mad Minute tonight, as we can see Cam-lo from here. As I recall, we haven't had a Mad Minute since the LT killed himself. For us it's just a lot of extra work in the morning, cleaning all the weapons and then humping and loading up all the ammo at resupply to replace what we shot off.

I set up my tent while Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3. I get my sleeping bag and my stretcher and put them in my tent. I'm done with my assigned tasks, and it was so refreshing last night to have a cold Coke to reward myself. No cold Cokes tonight, just warm ones. So I grab one and climb into the driver's compartment. It's not completely dark yet but will be soon. I turn on my red interior light and stretch out in my driver's seat and try to relax. No one hurt or killed today, but finding all those mines on the trail today is not comforting in the least. My seat is so comfortable, I could actually nap except that Fanelli and the loader are talking and laughing too loud in the turret for me to sleep. It takes me a while to finish my warm Coke which makes me burp a lot. At least they're Ramen burps and not hot chow burps. Hot chow burps can be deadly, and I won't even mention the farts.

Speaking of which, it is number one to have several vials of menthol oil to put on my upper lip and mustache, because the loader and I keep it fairly foul smelling inside of 2-3 when we are not under way and catching a breeze. The loader and Fanelli are trying to work out who gets second guard shift. I didn't think it mattered much, as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. takes the first shift, and I usually take the last shift. They take second and third most times. However, it turns out they both prefer the second guard shift, because (and I didn't know this) Our Dear Platoon Sgt. sometimes falls asleep on guard and doesn't wake up the second shift guard until 2:15 or 2:30 a.m. So the second shift guard only has to be on guard for one and a half hours instead of two full hours. The part I don't like is Our Dear Platoon Sgt. sleeping when he's supposed to be guarding. I hate that.

I finish my Coke, and as we have our guard shifts figured out, I climb out of the driver's compartment and close the hatch almost all the way before making my way to my tent.

It didn't rain today but it is still hot and humid now, and I hope it cools off tonight, if only so we can cool off the Cokes I have left. Maybe monsoon will be over soon. But if it just stops raining and is real hot everyday instead, it will be only a change of conditions. One number ten condition changed for

another number ten condition. I hate being wet and damp all the time. But if the heat we have endured the last week or two is what's to be expected when monsoon is over, then we will really suffer. We can occasionally get out of the rain, but when it's hot, it's hot everywhere.

I lay on my sleeping bag which is on top of my stretcher. The bugs just swirl around my face since I am completely slathered in bug juice. I can feel the air move from their wing beats. If they could just coordinate it so they all flapped their wings together, it might cool me off. Sort of, but not likely.

*June 1, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Command*

*This morning found it raining when I came out of my tent and about 10 o'clock began to snow and blow and continued all day. Did not go outside except when I was forced to.*

*The cold makes the boys all feel lively. Everyone that leaves their tent do it on a full run. I froze the guard tonight. Last night it was bad but tonight beats everything.*

*Very lonesome today as had to go to bed or freeze out.*

*No Sioux. Full rations again. Today expect bread which is very scarce and liable to stay so until train comes in.*

March 3, 1970
Tuesday
Quang Tri Province

It's hard to gauge whether the bug attacks while we try to sleep are decreasing at all. What is evident is that while not clear and sunny, it has not really rained hard of late. The mud situation on the trail has improved noticeably.

The loader wakes me at 4 a.m. for my shift at guard. I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and check the Coke situation. It hardly cooled off last night, so I grab a warm Coke and close the lid, since it will only get hotter from now on. I make my way to the TC position behind the .50 Cal. The constant heat is, we hope, a sign that monsoon is over or almost over. I sip my warm Coke, and I slowly wake up staring out at the black void. Nothing to report on my

first sitrep, and it continues to be nothing to report every 15 minutes until 6 a.m.

Guard being over, I jump down to the ground with some C-4 and my canteen cup. I light the C-4, boil some water, and add my instant c-rat coffee and some creamer. No one is up yet despite the noise of the burning C-4, so I climb back up on 2-3 and sit on the bustle rack, looking down at Cam-lo. There is a mist, and it clears in places. I can see Cam-lo most of the time and the mist blends with the cook fire smoke, as Cam-lo wakes up as well. The sun keeps peeking out, and it would be number one to see it, even though it will be boo coo hot if the sun stays out. Fanelli and the loader finally get up, mostly due to the noise of the rest of the platoon moving around and making breakfast. Fanelli is heating up his water to shave, and I remind him to try to order flour on our resupply order this morning. He is very doubtful about the flour, but he wants bread as much as me.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. finally wakes and joins us as we stand in the first rays of sunshine we have seen in a while. It feels number one even if I am standing next to Our Dear Platoon Sgt. as he lights his first of many Luckys for the day. After a few deep drags on his cigarette, he is ready for his first attempt of the day of mounting 2-3 for his morning bracer. For some reason, I sense he's in the best mood I've ever witnessed, and I think I saw him smile between drags on his cigarette. Fanelli heats up more water for his Ramen breakfast. I have a c-rat pecan roll and a can of c-rat peaches with my coffee. We're not yet finished when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. climbs down off of 2-3 and starts heating up water for his morning shave. He is definitely pacing himself, as he doesn't look loaded yet. We revel in the morning sun while Our Dear Platoon Sgt. Shaves, and we finish our breakfast. I take down my tent and roll up my stretcher and sleeping bag. Fanelli and the loader take the tarp off of 2-3 and roll it up, and we tie it all to the side of 2-3. We are now waiting for Our Dear Platoon Sgt. to give orders to prepare to didi, but he seems busy with something, so we hang loose, both ways, and stand in the morning sun chatting. The loader and I are facing away from 2-3 while Fanelli is looking directly at it. I can tell Fanelli is watching something, and he nudges me to turn around and look. The loader and I both turn around to have a look-see. What is Our Dear Platoon Sgt. up to now, we all wonder? He has opened two ammo boxes and has draped the ammo belts all over the bullet shield for the .50 Cal. He then gets into the turret and emerges with his .45 and its holster, which he also hangs on the .50 Cal. bullet shield. He then

climbs off of 2-3 and stands back to have a look. Apparently something is amiss, as he climbs back up on the turret to adjust the ammo belts more to his liking. He climbs back down again and has a second look, and then walks over to 2-3, climbs onto the bustle rack, and opens his thermo chest. He pulls out a Kodak Instamatic camera.

He climbs down, walks over to me, and for only the second time addressing me by name (the first being when he sent me on patrol), says, "Wolf, take ma pitcha after I git back on the turret."

Now I don't know what history there is between Fanelli and Our Dear Platoon Sgt., but there must be something or he would have asked Fanelli to take his picture instead of me. As it is, it's a number ten choice, because I am boo coo peeved at him for sending me on a pointless yet dangerous patrol. When I take his picture - from 3 different angles, at his direction - I make sure that none of them come out by putting my finger over the lens each time before pushing the shutter button. Xin loi, Sarge!

I will say I never knew he could smile like that. He must be up to something, but I don't know what.

He re-packs the ammo in the boxes and puts his .45 back inside the turret, and then tells the rest of the platoon to prepare to break camp. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares. I set off two trip flares when trying to bring them in. Initially I set off one, and in kicking it over to extinguish it, I set off a second trip flare, as I have all the trip wires for the trip flares over lapping each other. Once I set one trip flare off, it can become a chain reaction. Fanelli and the loader are already laughing as the first trip flare goes off, as we are always ready to have a laugh at someone else's expense here in the Nam. Not much else to laugh about, except when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. wants his picture taken. I coil up the claymore detonator wire, collect all the detonators up on the turret, and put everything in one of the storage lockers. Fanelli and the loader roll up the concertina wire, take down the RPG screen, and tie it all to the side of 2-3. I will say that if I were shooting an RPG at one of our tanks, with all the gear we have tied and strapped to them, I wouldn't know where to aim. There's a tank in there somewhere, but where? Our Dear Platoon Sgt. orders the platoon to uncircle and follow Double Deuce back down the trail we used to get here yesterday.

Double Deuce! Double Deuce is the screw up track crew, and I can see from where I am that Smitty is going out front to mine sweep. This is the number ten of number ten ways to start our day. The Second platoon's biggest

screw-up mine sweeping for the screw-up track. Xin loi, Charlie Brown!

It's really not his fault he gets all the screw-ups. Maybe the thinking is to keep all the screw-ups together to minimize their negative impact. As a fellow juicer, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. knows quite well that Smitty has been availing himself of the Tiger beer he got on payday. Smitty would be the last guy in the platoon I would have mine sweeping. If it were up to me, Wack would be mine sweeping. Xin loi, Wack! Wack is our best mine sweeper, and he does more than his share.

We're not far from the redball, and when we get there we just cross over, and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has 2-4 take the lead. Sgt. Green has Wack go out front and mine sweep. I feel better already. We make our way to the banks of the Cam-lo River, and Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has us line up on the river bank at about 50 foot intervals facing the river with the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times.

The sun is out now, so instead of rigging the poncho over the .50 Cal. to keep dry, we rig it for some shade when taking our turn sitting behind the .50 Cal. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. quickly volunteers to try out the poncho's adequacy for shade. It's hot, so the loader and Fanelli and I practice the method the Vietnamese use to hunker down. We squat native-style next to the side of 2-3 that is currently in the shade.

Fanelli has his transistor radio out, and since we haven't had any Mad Minutes lately, I can actually hear the radio without the volume being set at full blast. We hardly have a chance to listen to the Armed Forces station, but we always hear the same songs. It's not a problem, because we like them all. Fanelli knows he is next in line for patrol, and although it is not raining, it is hot and will be a number ten day for a patrol. The river is starting to appeal to me again, especially as we are about 4 or 5 kliks downstream of the bloated corpse. If we stay here today and I don't have to go on patrol, I'm probably going to have a bath in the river. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. declares our poncho a success and toasts our resourcefulness. It’s just the same thing we did for rain, but any excuse for another morning bracer is not to be passed up by him.

It's close enough to lunch that Fanelli hopes he can at least have his Ramen before being sent on patrol. I have some Ramen as well, but I'm still not using river water to drink or make Ramen. Neither is Fanelli. We have our lunch and still no call for patrol. Fanelli is not going to ask Our Dear Platoon Sgt. if there is going to be a patrol, and neither am I, but I decide to ask him if we are staying here a while. I'm still thinking about having a bath in the river.

Our Dear Platoon Sgt. says that due to the high temperature today, we're going to guard the river and acclimate ourselves to the heat. He didn't say I could take a bath, but he didn't say I couldn't.

It's hot, and I can't take it any longer. Just looking at and smelling the cool, clear water, I just have to go in. I saunter over to the water's edge. There are no locals around us today, just the Second platoon. I take off my boots, jungle fatigue pants, and t-shirt, and I run into the water. The loader soon follows, as do several more members of the platoon before long. I do not drink any of the water, but it is number one to swim and bathe in. The sun is out, and it's about 90 degrees air temperature. The water is boo coo cold, so when you get too cold, you just stand up until you're too hot and do it all over again.

Essentially I've been camping out in the rain for almost two months. Almost forgot how number one the sun is, even if it's 90 degrees and the humidity is sort of like the bugs here, omnipresent. Anyone not able to lounge in the Cam-lo River would probably disagree about whether the sun is number one or not. But I am able to lounge, and so for me it is. We're careful not to get directly in front of 2-3 with Our Dear Platoon Sgt. sitting behind the .50 Cal. Fanelli eventually joins in the river romp, and we are all extra careful not to drink the water. As I look down the river, I can see Wack is in the water. Since he pretty much walked here, I'm sure he was hot. Zack, Big Al, and Steve are out in front of 2-6 while the gunner stands guard on the .50 Cal. He's not ready to get in the river yet despite the heat. It's Tuesday, but because we're all slacking today, it feels like a Sunday back in the Real World.

Could it be that monsoon is over? We don't want to jinx it by asking anyone who would know. Lon would know, so I consider asking her at resupply today but maybe not. Don't want to jinx it. I want to know, but I want monsoon to be over boo coo more.

The slack afternoon comes to an end all too soon it feels, as Our Dear Platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to prepare to sky to resupply. He has the LT's P.C., 2-5, lead the way back to the redball. We don't mine sweep as someone feels lucky. Our luck holds, and we make it back to the redball without incident. Once on the redball, Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has me take the lead in 2-3. We turn west and head for the large open area just east of Cam-lo where we resupply often. It's a boo coo big area, so all three platoons can resupply in the same place. It's also boo coo close to Cam-lo, so if Lon and her brother bring my Cokes, they won't have to carry them too far. When we

arrive at our resupply site, we're the first of the platoons to arrive, although the resupply convoy is already there being guarded by a tank from the First platoon. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. orders me and the rest of the Second platoon to space out so there's room for the other two platoons. Another huge resupply site, so we will have to hustle to get everything done. So ends the slacking part of our day.

The side gunners on the P.C.s are already digging shallow foxholes to be used as burn holes and as emergency foxholes should we get hit during resupply. Always a concern and a possibility during resupply when we let the locals get right up close to us. If someone with a suicide belt and a satchel charge mingles with the locals at the concertina wire it would be number ten for boo coo people.

The First and Third platoons arrive in quick succession, and soon the huge resupply circle is complete. We're just set in place with the concertina wire connected in front of 2-3 when the locals start to arrive, and that includes Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother. Fanelli and I saunter out to meet and greet them. They always come to 2-3 first, so we get first crack at whatever they have for sale today. Still no bread, because there is no flour in Cam-lo, but Fanelli's mamasan has Ramen. Fanelli buys 5 to add to his stash. Lon hands me the sand bag they had to lug from Cam-lo with my six-pack of Coke. When I turn to walk back to 2-3 to fill up the bag, I see Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is still on 2-3. He is stuffing things from his thermo chest into a waterproof bag. So I turn back and continue to chat with Lon and her brother.

I tell them, "I'm waiting for the platoon Sgt. to leave."

Lon's brother, who is clear now that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is the one in charge, asks me, "The platoon Sgt., he number ten?"

I laugh and say, "The platoon Sgt., he's number eleven!"

Lon laughs at my joke as do I, but her brother has a questioning look on his face. It turns out he only knows the number one and the number ten. Lon explains to him in Vietnamese that number eleven is even worse than number ten, and then he laughs too. While Fanelli and I are still chatting with his mamasan and Lon and her brother, the loader comes up and hands Fanelli a note from the resupply convoy. The note reads: *We don't have any flowers. Who died?*

We all get a good laugh, but it means no flour, and that means no bread. We hate that.

I can see Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has left 2-3, so I can go fill the sand bag

with some c-rat meal boxes. I'm still wondering why Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has been acting weird all day, starting with his request to have his picture taken. When he gets the pictures developed, I'm sure to feel some retribution. That is if he remembers who took the pictures. We're close to Cam-lo, so besides the two meal boxes, I put a couple of cans of pound cake in the bag for Lon and her brother. I've been eating the pecan rolls lately, and we have been accumulating a lot of the pound cakes. They are the gold standard for barter here in the Nam. I better give some to Lon and her brother before Fanelli or the loader trade them away for something. I walk back to the concertina wire and hand the now full sand bag to Lon's brother. It's boo coo heavy, but they don't seem to care. The heavier it is, the more food there is. The loader claims the hot chow smells the best ever, and he and I both want to go to mail call, so I say goodbye. Fanelli didis as well so he can make his Ramen dinner.

We go to mail call first, and Fanelli gets mail, which we collect for him. Then we sky for the hot chow. I'm dubious, but it does smell better than in the past, so we get in the rather short line. Soon Wack shows up, as does Big Al, Zack, and Steve. Steve wants to know what's up, because the TC on 2-5 just called him over the horn to tell Steve that the TC on 2-5 is now the acting platoon Sgt. I tell them I know nothing, except that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has been acting weird all day.

The hot chow is unremarkable. Smell isn't everything. If they could just get the hot chow to sort of taste like it smelled today, it could be worth eating.

The loader and I saunter back to 2-3 and give Fanelli his mail. Fanelli is visibly not happy even though he gets some mail. Here in the Nam, you don't go around asking anyone why they don't look happy, so I don't ask. We load up and stow our supplies, and I can see the first and third platoons are getting ready to sky. Fanelli confirms that Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is gone again.

"No big deal, except we have to cover his two hours at guard until he comes back," I say.

"He's not coming back," says Fanelli.

"What!?" I say.

Fanelli says, "He said goodbye to me, and that he wasn't coming back."

I still won't miss him, guard duty or no guard duty. Higher has been getting progressively harder and harder about the enforcement of the new Regs regarding no alcohol in the field. I guess Our Dear Platoon Sgt. pulled

some Lifer strings to get himself a REMF job where he can drink all day in the relative comfort and security of the rear where it's not even against Regs.

I climb into the driver's compartment and start up 2-3 while Fanelli is at the TC position. Fanelli is now technically 2-3 Tango Charlie instead of 2-3 Golf. The loader is halfway in, halfway out of the loader's hatch as we await our orders. 2-5 Tango Charlie, our acting platoon Sgt., has the driver on 2-5 lead out of the resupply site. We head east on the redball away from Cam-lo and toward Dong ha. We drive about a klik before we turn off the redball onto a dirt trail. We start to mine sweep and proceed at a walking pace for about half an hour, and we arrive at an open area that looks familiar. It's number ten to camp at old RONs, but there are only so many places that can accommodate the whole platoon without being in the bush. We dismount and go over the entire RON looking for tunnels. Here in the Nam, no matter what your chosen religion, most everyone has converted to the religion of mine sweeping and tunnel locating. No tunnels found, and that is number one for more reasons than one. It has been an interesting day, to say the least, and dealing with any tunnels would be number ten.

We are now out in the field probably 4 or 5 kliks south of the Z. We have no LT, and we have no platoon Sgt. We're feeling like a bunch of orphans. My big worry is being treated like dog robbers again. The last time Our Dear Platoon Sgt. went missing, we were promptly assigned to a dangerous mission trying to recover the remains of a tank crew that had been blown to bits by an unexploded bomb rigged as a land mine. Retribution details and missions like that are number ten and to be avoided if you want to survive this place.

Since there are no tunnels, we start putting out our night defenses. The mortar crew is already digging away at the awesome hole they have to dig every night. I start putting out the trip flares, and then behind them I put the claymores. Then I string the detonator wire to the bullet shield around the .50 Cal. on 2-3's turret. No platoon Sgt. up here, so I don't have to worry about him setting off any of the claymores inadvertently when reaching for his bottle. I replace Fanelli behind the .50 Cal. so he can help the loader put up the RPG screen and tie the tarp to the side of 2-3. No rain again today, but it was and still is hot and humid. When they finish, the loader relieves me from behind the .50 Cal. so I can set up my tent. It's not completely dark yet but will be soon, so I hustle to get my tent up and put my stretcher and sleeping bag inside.

No platoon Sgt., so I climb up on the turret of 2-3 until it's full dark. Then Fanelli and I drop into the turret with the red lights on while the loader stands on the TC seat so that he's half way out of the turret just behind the .50 Cal. We've had to deal with the two hours of guard duty when Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has gone missing before, so we agree to stay up until midnight. Then Fanelli and the loader take turns being first and second guard shift while I take the last as always.

Because I have last shift, sometimes I can go to bed early, which doesn't necessarily mean I get to sleep early. I forgot to ask Lon if monsoon is over yet. It appears that if it is over, it has not had any beneficial effect on the bug situation, which is as bad as ever. Since we are all trying to stay awake until midnight tonight, I caution Fanelli about telling any more scary stories. He has a good laugh, and then proceeds to tell us about his R&R to Australia.

All Fanelli can say over and over again is, "Round eyed women everywhere. And they all love GIs."

Stories like that are almost as number ten as the scary stories. I make it to midnight, and I leave and let Fanelli and the loader to fight over first and second guard shift. My eyes are totally accustomed to the dark, but because it has gotten overcast and there are no lights whatsoever where we are, I have to feel my way along the side of 2-3 to my tent. The lack of light is no problem for the bugs, and I am greeted by and surrounded by them as I crawl into my tent. Just like old times.

*June 5, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Bear*

*This morning broke camp and moved down the river. Have made a beautiful camp on the river bank. High bluffs on each side of river. Cottonwoods around us, bad place for Indians to jump us.*

*Some of the boys think we will lay here for some time. I don't. Made camp about 3 o'clock pm. Road good, Stanley trail of few years ago, very near obliterated but still plain enough to travel by.*

*General Gibbon shot and killed a bear soon after we got to camp.*

*No Indians saw today. Ten miles today.*

*Have a terrible toothache. Day warm.*

March 4, 1970
Wednesday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m., and I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and settle in behind the .50 Cal. I only got 4 hours of sleep last night. I'm trying to decide if I want a warm Coke to wake myself up. It must still be overcast, because I can't see a thing in the pitch blackness. It's been a while since the LT killed himself, and he still has not been replaced yet. So I assume it will also be a while before Our Dear Platoon Sgt. is replaced. He will most assuredly be replaced by another Lifer, which will be number ten. Zack and Big Al lucked out that their replacement TC, Steve, is not a Lifer. We on 2-3 will not be so lucky.

It finally starts to get light, and I give my last sitrep of guard duty and climb down from the turret to heat up some water for my coffee. Fanelli and the loader are still asleep, and I consider crawling back into my tent for some additional shut eye. The rest of the Second platoon is starting to get up and making noise, so it will be hard to sleep. Hard, but not impossible. Also, when it first gets light, no matter how tired I am, I get a burst of energy from making it through another night in the Nam. It will be 12 hours before it's dark and The Scary Time again.

The noise of the rest of the platoon finally wakes Fanelli and the loader, and they both start their morning rituals. Fanelli, of course, is heating water to shave, and the loader is picking out the c-rat meal he hates the least for his breakfast. Once again I have a pecan roll with my morning c-rat coffee, followed by a can of c-rat peaches. It's really the only meal of the day that is number one. Although the Ramen and crackers are number one, I only eat that once in a while.

Our RON is between the redball and the Cam-lo River. The Cam-lo River trail that runs along the river bank is fairly close by. Not unexpectedly, we get a call over the horn that our crew is to pack up our night defenses and head for today's resupply point to guard the resupply convoy until the rest of the platoons get there. It takes about an hour to bring in and store all of our night defenses. It's well after 8 a.m. before we get under way. Fanelli is pissed off, because he didn't have time for breakfast. It's going to take us about 3 hours to get to the resupply point, because we have to mine sweep all the way there. Fanelli is also pissed because we are a 3-man crew, and we are

being sent alone.

2-5 Tango Charlie informs Fanelli that Wack is coming with us to help with the mine sweeping. That is number one news, as most of us consider Wack the best mine sweeper. He must have volunteered, as the acting platoon Sgt. would want to keep him. Wack shows up as we are getting ready to sky. He’s one of our few friends from the P.C. crews, as we tank crews are considered dog robbers.

It turns out Wack didn't volunteer, nor was he assigned or ordered to go with us. Wack, it seems, has a boo coo bad toothache, and he is in pain. He is going to ride back to base camp with the resupply convoy to see a dentist. At least he hopes there is a dentist there. Wack is not laughing and joking around this morning, so we didi mau for the resupply point.

We are closest to the river trail, which is the shortest distance to our destination, and we have been ordered to follow it. If all goes well, and we don't have to clear many mines, we should arrive at the resupply point about noon. We start mine sweeping soon after we didi from the RON. Even though Wack has a toothache, he starts off mine sweeping along the river trail for us. The river bank is flat, and it slopes slightly towards the river bed. It's mostly sand, but it's boo coo rocky in places, so it would be easy to throw a track. Proceeding at a walking pace, we are in no danger of that. Thankfully, the weather has cleared, and the sky is blue with a few clouds. It is already hot, my guess would be at least 85 degrees, with very humid conditions. We are all hot and sweaty since I have to drive slowly behind Wack as he sweeps for mines. We all want to go and jump in the river which looks boo coo cool and inviting. But we can't and don't.

After about an hour, the loader relieves Wack, and he starts mine sweeping our way along the river trail. It's mostly rocky on the trail now, so it's number one we're going slow. After another 30 minutes or so, 2-5 Tango Charlie, the acting platoon Sgt., calls Fanelli on the horn for a sitrep on our progress towards the resupply point. Fanelli estimates we are still at least another hour away at our current pace. 2-5 Tango Charlie says the resupply convoy is already at the resupply point and currently unguarded. He orders us to forgo the mine sweeping and to proceed to the resupply point ASAP.

Fanelli tries to correct the thinking of 2-5 Tango Charlie, our acting platoon Sgt., but he outranks Fanelli and once again orders us to stop mine sweeping and sky up to the resupply point ASAP.

The loader comes back and climbs aboard 2-3. He and Wack are sitting on

top of the turret, and Fanelli is half in and half out at the TC position.

We are not happy about our orders. This is a number ten place to drive fast, as it is boo coo rocky. But if we can't mine sweep, I have to drive fast. If we hit a land mine, our best chance for surviving with the least amount of damage is to be going fast. I can't let myself think about it now. It's too scary.

The trail rolls up and down a tee tee bit, and there are some sharp curves, so Fanelli tells the loader and Wack to hold on tight. I pretty much floor the accelerator on 2-3, and we are skying down the river trail with rocks and sand being thrown all over the place. I'm going about 20 mph, and I'm pretty sure if I keep this speed up, 2-3 is going to throw a track.

I just finish that thought when simultaneously there is a loud explosion, and my driver's seat drops to the lowest position as my hatch cover slams shut. My hatch closed, but not before I get a blast of sand and debris in my face and eyes. I have so much crud in my eyes that I can't open or close them without pain. I need to rinse them out, I think, as I start to come to my senses. What happened?

I'm still trying to collect my thoughts when I hear Fanelli ask me over the intercom, "Hey, Wolf, you OK?"

"I think so. What was that?" I ask Fanelli, as I am still half dazed.

"We hit a mine," says Fanelli.

I get my hated .45 and put a loaded magazine in it and put on my holster. I can finally see well enough to open my hatch and climb out of the driver's compartment. I climb up on the turret and get a cup of water and try to rinse my eyes out. I have so much blast debris in my eyes that even after I rinse them both out, it bothers me every time I blink. My eyeball lenses must be all scratched up. I hate that!

I'm finally able to look around and check out the damage to 2-3. The mine blew off two of

2-3's road wheels on one side, blasting them about 200 feet away. It also blew about 20 track blocks off.

This is a number ten place to put a track back on, but it would be possible.

When Fanelli sees me, he says, "Wolf! Quit fuckin' walkin' around until the loader mine sweeps all around us!

He's also worried we might get attacked.

2-3's engine still works, and the turret and all our weapons are still functional. We are, however, sitting ducks, all alone and out in the open.

Fanelli calls 2-5 Tango Charlie to appraise him of our situation. Then he

calls the motor pool at base camp in Dong ha for the VTR to come and tow us to base camp. Fanelli also tells them to bring two road wheel assemblies and about 25 track blocks. We think if we have enough time before dark, we might be able to repair 2-3 here in the field. It's about 11 a.m. It's a nice clear day, but it's hot, and we're right out in the open. Fanelli and I rig the poncho for some shade over the .50 Cal. while Wack and the loader mine sweep around 2-3. They sweep in progressively bigger circles until we can safely walk all around, and we have an area cleared of mines for the VTR to maneuver around us.

We might be the first Sheridan tank to hit a land mine. 2-3 is only two weeks in the field and already has sustained some major damage. The mine shield under the driver's compartment did its job of protecting me from the brunt of the blast.

Fanelli finally has time to heat up some water to have a very late Ramen breakfast. Wack and the loader and I are sharing the shade from the poncho while Fanelli makes his Ramen. We are between Cam-lo and Dong ha. Dong ha is probably closer, and I think we are about 4 or 5 kliks (about 3 miles) east of Cam-lo on the river trail.

I'm looking west, as we are all keeping an eye open for Charlie, when I think I see someone coming towards us along the river trail. We've been here about an hour now, so it must be about noon. We can see pretty far in each direction up and down the river, and I can make out it's really two people walking on the trail towards us.

I get the binoculars out and have a look-see. To my great surprise, I can see that it's Lon and her brother. They are half running, half walking towards us. It’s about 15-20 minutes from when I first see them until they arrive. When they finally get to us, they are quite out of breath, and I can tell Lon's been crying. They are both hot and thirsty, but before we can give them anything to drink, they both throw their arms around me and give me big hugs. We have always been separated in the past by the concertina wire, and it is so touching to see their concern for my welfare.

Lon finally catches her breath and says, "A rumor went through Cam-lo this morning that Hot Rats hit a mine east of Cam-lo on the river trail and was blown up." So she and her brother ran almost all the way here. That was boo coo dangerous as there are, obviously, land mines all over the place.

It's so hot that we've already filled our water jug from the river, and we've been drinking it. We give some to both Lon and her brother. They are both so

small, and now that they are at my side and not on the other side of the concertina wire, I can pick them both up, one in each arm. I walk around with them as we laugh and joke around. All the way here they were worried that we had been hurt. Now their concern has turned to joy that we weren't.

We decide to have a tee tee c-rat feast. It's just past noon, so I get a whole case of c-rats down from 2-3 and tear it open. I let them pick out their personal favorite, and then I heat up everything, and we eat. It's really like having a picnic, except we have to take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. in case we get hit.

We're probably breaking 50 Regs by not only fraternizing with Lon and her brother, but by having a tee tee picnic. At least a couple, anyway. Xin loi, army!

Earlier I put some Cokes in the river, and I go and retrieve them now. They are nice and cold. Cokes all around for everyone. I wonder if it's Lon and her brother's first cold Coke. I don't ask.

Despite his toothache, Wack is in high spirits. Of the four of us, Wack and Fanelli have been here in the Nam the longest, so surviving a land mine blast is number one.

We spend most of the afternoon moving with the shade at the side of 2-3, sitting in a tee tee circle, laughing and joking. Probably breaking another couple of Regs doing that.

About 3 p.m. in afternoon, the rest of the Second platoon shows up at our current location. Fanelli and the loader and I have been talking about being in the rear for a couple days, if we can't repair 2-3 here in the field. Sleeping in a bed and drinking a couple of gallons of cold milk sounds number one, even if the rear sucks.

2-5 Tango Charlie pulls alongside 2-3 and tells us the VTR is on the way. Then he tells the loader to grab his gear and get on 2-4 to take Wack's place as a side gunner until we get 2-3 repaired. That pisses the loader off, but he does what he is ordered to. We're half surprised that 2-5 Tango Charlie, the acting platoon Sgt., doesn't chastise us for fraternizing with the locals. I guess surviving a land mine gets you a tee tee bit of temporary consideration. But once again, one of the crew on 2-3 gets treated like a dog robber. Xin loi, loader!

The rest of the Second platoon slowly pass us by, and soon it's just Fanelli, Wack, and me on the semi-blown up 2-3 in the middle of nowhere. Lon and her brother are still here, and it's number one for us to get to talk to them boo

coo. But what's not number one is at some point they have to walk about 4 or 5 kliks back to Cam-lo on the river trail that we all know is strewn with land mines. Lon and her brother have no mine sweeping equipment. Even if we gave them ours, they couldn't use it, as it's boo coo big and heavy, and they are tee tee small.

When the VTR gets here, they are going to tow us east to base camp at Dong ha if we can't fix 2-3 here well before dark. The VTR needs enough daylight to get back to the rear, as it's pretty much unarmed. Lon and her brother have to go west back to Cam-lo. Even if we were going in the same direction, it's against Regs to let the locals ride around on the tanks and P.C.s, but we would break Regs and give them a ride anyway. Unfortunately, we are going in opposite directions.

We continue moving with the side shade from 2-3 and Fanelli, Wack, and I take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. Sitting behind the .50 Cal. is actually the coolest position we have in this heat, because there is a tee tee breeze up there occasionally. The down side is it's harder to talk to Lon and her brother.

Both Fanelli and I voice concern to them about their walk back to Cam-lo. They are totally non-plussed about it and laugh at our concerns. Just like the kids they are. No worries. When you live in the middle of a war, you are either a survivor or you are dead. Easy as that, I guess. They have to walk back to Cam-lo, and there are no other options.

It's about 4:30 p.m. before we hear the VTR coming. They think (incorrectly) that they are driving on a mine swept trail, so they are soon here. Fanelli knows the VTR driver, who immediately starts teasing us about our mishap. Because we're so happy to have survived, we ignore the ribbing. We think we can repair 2-3 here in the field. They have two mechanics on the VTR, and they brought two new road wheel assemblies and 50 track blocks, just to be on the safe side.

There is already some concern about being able to finish in time for the VTR to make it back to base camp before dark. It's going to be some work whether we fix 2-3 here or tow it to the rear. Either way, we have to deal with the tank tread that's missing 20 track blocks. The lead mechanic has a closer look at the road wheel damage, and he notices that the hull has a crack in it.

"This tank can't be repaired," he says. "It's totaled."

Fanelli and I both have a look. Sure enough, there is a long hairline crack in the hull that, in all the excitement of not being blown to tee tee bits, we hadn't noticed.

Well, we wanted a couple of nights in the rear anyway. Even though, as Fanelli always says, "The rear sucks!"

The broken track is too big of a hassle to do anything with other than pull it the rest of the way off with the VTR and just leave it here on the river trail. The VTR is like a two story tank without a main gun. Instead, off the back there is a large boom to pick up and tow disabled vehicles. Boo coo big disabled vehicles. This thing can easily tow an M-48 that weighs 50 tons, so the mere 15 tons that 2-3 weighs is small potatoes.

It takes longer to deal with the damaged track than it does to get 2-3 hooked to the boom and ready to sky. Lon and her brother hang around to watch, but they have to didi soon. I have some spare cartons of cigarettes, so I give them each a carton as they are light and easily carried back to Cam-lo where they are worth boo coo bucks. They both thank me and give me a goodbye hug, and then they start on their walk back to Cam-lo.

The top deck of the VTR is about 15 feet or more above the ground, so we get a good view up here. It's a tee tee bit after 5 p.m., and the sun is low in the sky. It's still smokin' hot.

Fanelli is sitting on the front edge of the VTR so he can chat with his buddy the VTR driver. Wack and I are up on the top deck of the VTR enjoying the breeze and the view. I can see Lon and her brother, and they have turned and waved to us a couple of times, and we wave back. It's going to be a number one sunset. One of the best I've seen since being in the Nam. I can still see Lon and her brother, and I can tell which is Lon, because I can see her conical straw hat hanging down her back by the chin strap. I watch them until it looks like just one person walking, and then they are out of sight. I don't know if they make it back to Cam-lo. I sure hope they do.

We continue on the river trail heading east towards Dong ha. It must be the end of monsoon, and of course the person who would know, Lon, I forgot to ask. It's hot and sunny, so after all the monsoon rain, the Nam is just bursting in every shade of green you can imagine.

We finally get to the redball, and I think Fanelli's friend, the VTR driver, is showing off as we are going boo coo fast considering we are towing a disabled tank. Now that we are going 25 mph, the breeze up here is number one. Wack and I hold on and enjoy the ride. Because we are going so fast, we get to the motor pool at Dong ha about 5:30 p.m. A full hour before full dark. We all feel number one about that.

Wack didn't really bring anything but his M-16, so he waits for Fanelli and

me to get our gear off of 2-3 to take to our hootch. But first we all have to go over to the armory to turn in our weapons. Drug use is a problem in most of the rear areas, so they don't let any of the REMFs have any weapons or ammo, because they would be killing each other even more than they already do.

Fanelli has had his day turned on end, as he did not get his Ramen for breakfast until late. His whole meal routine has been disrupted by our land mine encounter. He is out of sorts and trying to collect himself. I can see why Fanelli shaves every day, because he has an incredible 5 o'clock shadow. He could grow a beard that would make mine look pitiful. My beard is outstanding, if I do say so myself. Fanelli points out that we are about to pass the post barber. I know I should get a shave, even though I'll be back in the field tomorrow or the next day, and Fanelli knows our First Sgt. boo coo better than me. He is already walking to the barber shop for a shave and a haircut. And let's not forget the neck massage, which is number one. Wack and I both decide to join Fanelli at the barber shop. Fanelli goes first, while Wack and I wait our turn.

Last time we were here, Fanelli had already shaved, so he just got a haircut and neck massage. He's such a sartorial slut that we tease him that he probably goes to the barber every day back in the Real World. He doesn't deny it and just smiles as he is clipped and shaved. Finally Fanelli gets his neck massage, and the barber is ready for the next customer. Wanting to keep my beard for even a few moments more and also being quite expert at waiting in line, I let Wack go next. All goes well with Wack's clip and shave. But the problem comes when the barber starts to give Wack his neck massage. It apparently aggravates his toothache, causing Wack to jump right out of the barber's chair, giving us all a start given the day’s events.

The barber is a local Vietnamese, and he doesn't understand Wack's situation. We think Fanelli finally gets him to understand, and no harm done as he points to his teeth and says number ten a couple of times.

It's now my turn. Even though I feel number one about surviving the land mine blast, I'm going to miss my beard. I hardly need a haircut, but it's been so hot lately that I let him shave me and cut my hair. As I probably suffered a tee tee bit of whiplash hitting the mine, the neck massage, for me, is number one. Xin loi, Wack.

We have to get going to the armory, or we'll have to hunt down the armorer to turn in our weapons, and it's a boo coo big base. He will be hard to

find, and we know that. So we are hustling on our way to the armory after we've all been freshly shorn, feeling and looking strack. We are passing between two rows of hootches, walking three abreast with Fanelli on the left, Wack in the center, and me on the right side. My hated .45 is in its holster, which I'm wearing on my right side with the butt of it in front so I can reach over and grab it with my left hand, should I need it. I have been wearing my hated .45 for most of the day. It is probably the longest I have ever worn it and I won't mind turning it in to the armorer. I'm still hoping I can get something, anything, besides my hated .45.

Being at base camp and in the rear, we have all let our guard down feeling somewhat safe as we hustle to the armory. We don't hear or notice that we are being approached even more quickly from behind.

Suddenly I am hit hard from behind and knocked to the ground by some REMF who then grabs my hated .45 and promptly runs off with it.

I normally keep my hated .45 unloaded, and for a few seconds, I am unconcerned. Until I remember: due to extenuating circumstances, today I loaded my hated .45 before I put it in my holster and had forgotten to unload it. Damn!

I immediately take off after my attacker, closely followed by Wack and Fanelli who are fortunately still armed should there be gun play needed to get my hated .45 back from what appears to be a deranged REMF. When I catch up to him, he is fighting with his - until now - best friend.

They are both rolling around on the ground, kicking up a cloud of dust, so I'm not sure which guy is which. But I know my hated .45 when I see it, and out of the cloud of dust comes two hands. One hand is holding my hated .45, and the other hand is holding the first hand by the wrist. I grab my hated .45 back, never believing I would feel so number one about seeing it again.

Although this REMF hit me boo coo hard from behind, I'm satisfied enough just to get my hated .45 back without any gun play, so we leave the REMFs to fight it out in the dust as we continue our walk to the armory.

We are, however, boo coo more cautious and are constantly checking our backs as if we were back in the field on patrol. War is weird. We make it to the armory without further incident and are trying to decide whether to report the REMF who was trying to shoot his best friend. I mention to the armorer that my hated .45's safety doesn't work.

He says, "Don't keep it fuckin' loaded."

I say right back, "I fuckin' don't!"

We know not to expect much in the way of food at the mess hall, but Wack and I crave some cold milk. We got to base camp so late in the day that Wack will have to wait until tomorrow to go on sick call to see a dentist. Fanelli, Wack, and I sky for the mess hall. It's pretty late so we don't have to exercise our expertise at standing in line and just walk right in. Wack and I head directly for the milk dispensers, while Fanelli checks the chow line for anything worth eating. Since it's late, the chow has been languishing on the steam table in front of the KP servers for over an hour or more. After 4 or 5 glasses of ice cold milk, I hardly care about food anymore. Wack and I finally go through the chow line and join Fanelli at his table. It's horrible as usual and the paper plates and plastic forks and knives just make it worse.

Fanelli suggests that after we get our bunk assignment, we can sky to the PX and see what food we can get there. I'm in, but Wack's toothache is bothering him again, so he just wants to get a bunk and hit the sack. For someone with a toothache it's been a boo coo long day.

It's been a boo coo long day for guys without a toothache as well. All three of us sky over to the company HQ to see if, now that Faustino is the company clerk, it gets us any preferential treatment.

It does. Normally we would have to go over to the quartermaster to get bedding for our bunks, but when we get to HQ, Faustino has three piles of bedding for us. He, of course, wants to hear about hitting the land mine, and we all just want to forget about it.

Fanelli and Wack didi for the hootch while I chat with my friend Faustino and tell about the events of our past day. It's almost dark when I finish my story. Faustino tells me that Fanelli and I have to go about 35 kliks to a base storage depot where the spare Sheridan tanks are stored. Then we have to drive it back to the motor pool at base camp. We'll have to strip all the gear and weapons off 2-3 and install everything on the new Sheridan.

I sky to our hootch to catch up with Fanelli and Wack. When I get there, I tell Fanelli about the plans for our day tomorrow. He says we probably won't be ready to go back to the field till Friday, because tomorrow will be spent mostly driving the new tank back to Dong ha. We have the whole hootch to ourselves, so there is no card game and guys talking and laughing. It doesn't take long for all three of us to call it a day, and what a day it was. I fall asleep almost the minute my head hits my pillow. I've been on High Alert all day, and now that I feel I'm in a safe place I realize how exhausted I am. No surprise, since I only had about four hours of sleep last night. The bed and

pillow feel number one, but what is really boo coo number one is there are no bugs swirling around my face as I finally fall asleep.

*June 9, 1876*
*Friday*
*Camp Buffalo Rapids*

*Will not move today. Appearance of rain. At 12 o'clock pm the cry Steamboat was raised and in about five minutes the boys were all out anxiously looking for the boat. Sure enough it was no false alarm this time. We were looking at the second steamer that ever came up the river. Boys all started down to the bank of river but were ordered back.*

*General Terry with staff and C Co. of the 6th also General Gibbon who had boarded the boat a few miles down the river.*

*Custer with his twelve companies of cavalry are about 25 miles up Powder River. Cavalry (2nd) were ordered out immediately but it commenced raining so they will wait until it stops. Custer is to go up on the other side of river.*

*Had my troublesome tooth drawed today.*

March 5, 1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province, Base camp at Dong ha

I sleep all night uninterrupted by guard duty or incoming. After being in the field and having my sleep interrupted every night, waking up naturally is number one. My eyes still hurt, and they must be all scratched from the debris blown into them during the land mine blast. I get up and grab my stuff to go take a shower so I can try to really rinse my eyes out. It still feels like I have a bunch of grit in my eyes every time I blink. I hate that. My moving around and getting my stuff has awakened both Fanelli and Wack. They decide to get up and join me on my trip to the showers. Since there's just the three of us here at base camp from the Second platoon, we're pretty sure we don't have to fall out for formation to be inspected by the First Sgt. Pretty sure, but not positive. So we all shave, and I can tell it's boo coo painful for Wack. After yesterday, all he wants is to get to the dentist and have his tooth fixed.

We head back to our hootch and drop off our gear while Wack didi maus

for sick call and hopefully the dentist. Fanelli and I head to the mess hall to see if there's anything we would want to eat. No line when we arrive, but that's no surprise as most of the REMFs have food stashes from the PX or even the Real World. There are some boxes of cereal, so I grab several as does Fanelli. He would prefer Ramen for breakfast, but we have to report to HQ after we eat. We probably won't be able to go to the motor pool so Fanelli can cook up some Ramen he has on 2-3. Several glasses of milk, several boxes of cereal, and one cup of the horrid mess hall coffee, and I'm ready to sky.

It's only 7:30 a.m., but we have to get going since the daylight is so limited in the tropics. We sky to HQ and Faustino and the First Sgt. are both there. They have a jeep and driver to take us to the supply depot and pick up our new tank. The jeep shows up, and we sky for the supply depot.

We don't go to the armorer and retrieve our .45s, and the jeep driver is unarmed as well as we leave the security of base camp and head south on the redball for the supply depot. It's already getting hot. The sky is blue, and the sun is out. Lots of green lush tropical trees and plants all over the countryside and some rice paddies on both sides of the road. Not really any traffic to speak of on the redball, except for an occasional jeep or motorbike. Much of the area we drive through on the way to the supply depot appears uninhabited. As much as I hate my .45, I sort of wish I had it. But as long as I'm wishing, I'd prefer something else; an M-16 perhaps.

It's probably about 35 kliks to the supply depot, at least that's what our driver thinks. That's about 20 miles. This is not the first time I find myself in the middle of nowhere in the Nam, and I am unarmed. I really hate that!

We make good time in the jeep, and we get to the supply depot just after 8 a.m. The supply depot is immense, at least ten acres of tanks, trucks, P.C.s and jeeps, all lined up and ready to go. Looks like someone is planning for a long war. Not a comforting thought.

The jeep driver drops us off and skys back to base camp. Fanelli and I take our paperwork to the supply depot office. We are the only ones here to get a tank, so it only takes about 5 minutes of box checking and rubber stamping before the clerk opens the door and points to our replacement tank. We are ready to sky back to base camp. It was actually a tee tee bit faster blowing 2-3 up than it was getting 2-3's replacement out of the supply depot. I guess that means we can get them blown up faster than the army can replace them.

We give the New 2-3 a quick walkaround and notice the track tension on

both sides is boo coo slack. Taking out one track block on one side should just about correct the tension slack on one side, but the other side needs tightening. We can't do it here, though, as we have no tools with us. We also have no .50 Cal. or coax machine gun, and although we have the main gun, we have no ammo for it. Since we have no ammo for the main gun, Fanelli and I decide to leave the main gun pointing to the rear, which is the transit mode. It is number one we decide to do that, because when the main gun points to the rear there is a passage from the turret to the driver's compartment. We essentially have nothing with us. No commo helmets, no radio, no intercom, and no ammo. We hate that.

Fanelli gets into the TC hatch and is half in, half out of the turret as he stands on the fold-down TC seat. This is no help to me for directions, because we can't see each other, and since we don't have our intercom, we can't communicate.

I drive straight back unguided and without incident. So far so good. I do one neutral steer, and we sky out of the supply depot and didi mau for base camp at Dong ha.

We drove about 40 mph in the jeep, and it took about 30 minutes to get to the supply depot. The Sheridan tanks can go 45 mph, but they will only go about 25-30 mph with a full base load of fuel and ammo.

I start out slow and drive at about 15 mph to shake out the New 2-3 for any unseen problems. After about 10 minutes of driving 15 mph, all is going well, so I floor the accelerator on 2-3. Since we have nothing heavy with us, like our normal base load of ammo, it hits 25 mph with no problem, other than because the track tension is so slack, I'm wandering all over the redball. I let off on the accelerator a tee tee bit, but because we have no weapons and no ammo, I want to get back to base camp ASAP. If I wasn't wandering all over the road, I'd probably see if it can go 45 mph. It must be unnerving for Fanelli up on the turret as the New 2-3 goes from one side of the road to the other.

I probably should slow down a tee tee bit. But I don't until I feel Fanelli tapping me on the shoulder. He climbed into the turret, and because we are in transit mode, he can get right behind me and speak right into my ear. Which he needs to do, because tanks going 25 mph are boo coo noisy inside and out.

Fanelli says, "Hey man, the track tension is boo coo slack. If we throw a track out here, it's gonna be number ten. We got no tools, and we got no radio, and we're gonna have a long walk back to Dong ha, unarmed."

I immediately slow down to 15 mph. We make it back to base camp

without throwing a track or going off the road.

Once again Fanelli keeps me from screwing up. He is still The Man as far as I'm concerned.

We're in good shape, time-wise, so I park the New 2-3 next to the Old 2-3. Fanelli decides to celebrate with some Ramen, and I decide I want a decent cup of java.

Transferring our gear from Old 2-3 to New 2-3 should be easier this time, because we already punted the gear from the M-48 that wouldn't fit on the Sheridan. It's still before lunch, so after our tee tee snack we start transferring our supplies and gear from Old 2-3 to the New 2-3. By lunch time, we have all our gear and supplies on the new 2-3. We just have to transfer all the ammo and the coax machine gun and the .50 Cal. Since I've been here, we have not used the spotlight, but Fanelli insists we transfer it to the new 2-3. We still have some things to do before we can go back to the field. But it will have to wait until after lunch. Fanelli had a late breakfast of Ramen, so he's thinking about going to the mess hall with me. I'm not sure why I'm going to the mess hall, except I'm tiring of c-rats, and at least there is cold milk.

We arrive at the mess hall to find a line of REMFs waiting, so we have to exercise our expert skill at line standing. We hope the line is because there is something worthwhile to eat, but our hopes are not that high as we have eaten here before and know what to expect.

The line is not that long. Some of Fanelli's friends are in line ahead of us, and they try to tease him about our land mine encounter. We take it very well since we are boo coo happy to be alive and uninjured, although my eyes are still irritated from the mine blast.

We finally get into the mess hall, and as usual, the smells in the serving line do nothing to improve our appetite. We both just get a couple of tee tee spoonfuls of the chow as we go through the line. I notice we aren't the only one with tee tee food on our plates from the mess hall’s lunch offering today. Fanelli and I know we have food on 2-3 and really all I care about is getting some cold milk, which I do. We sit down at a table with some of Fanelli's buddies who are at base camp because they are short and leaving the Nam in a couple of days. Hanging out with short-timers is boo coo hard and depressing for someone like me who has ten more months in the Nam.

They tease us relentlessly, and when either of us try to reply, they interrupt us and say, "I'm so short I don't even have enough time to hear you." They continue, "By the time you speak I'll already be on my way to the Real

World."

I hope if I make it to be a short-timer that I won't be so smug. Still, we envy them boo coo. After pushing our food around for awhile, we can take their ribbing no longer, and we sky for the motor pool. If we can finish all the stuff we need to do to the New 2-3, we could make it back to the field by resupply time. We are only trying to do that because we don't want to chance getting put on perimeter bunker guard tonight.

Back at the motor pool, Fanelli starts to boil some water for another Ramen, and I decide to have some c-rats, as our mess hall lunch was abysmal. We don't know why we're in such a hurry to get to the field, except to avoid bunker guard, and as Fanelli likes to constantly point out, the rear sucks. It stinks to high heaven of piss and burning shit and diesel fuel. We are forever forgetting to salute the officers, and they hate that. We then have to suffer a dressing down by some REMF officer. That's probably another reason they don't let us have loaded weapons in the rear.

Fanelli works on transferring the coax and the .50 Cal. while I start on the tank track. The hardest part for Fanelli is putting the 7.62 mm ammo belts containing a total of 3000 rounds in the ammo box for the coax, as it is another hot and humid day. Even with the turret ventilator fan on, it is hot inside the turret. It's hot outside the turret as well, and we are both dripping wet with sweat soon after we start.

I break open the track on one side to take out a track block. I need to correct our toe-in to improve the track alignment on 2-3. Like our first Sheridan, this 2-3 is brand spanking new. Maybe it will last longer than the two weeks the Old 2-3 lasted.

It's boo coo easier to take apart and reassemble brand new track with brand new end connectors. Once a tank has been driven around, the track end connectors get all beat up, and we have to beat them off with a sledgehammer.

Sometimes the end connectors are so smashed up that we have to get Little Joe out. Little Joe is the biggest open end wrench that we carry in our tool box. Little Joe is the wrench we use to adjust the track tension. He is about three feet long and weighs about 50 lbs. If we can't beat the end connector off with the sledgehammer, then we beat it off with Little Joe. Little Joe has never failed us when the sledgehammer lets us down.

We think we are making good progress, but we both forgot about the thermo chests that are bolted to the bustle rack. They're so full, we have to

empty them at least part way to get to some of the bolts. We also still have to transfer all the main gun ammo and the ammo for the .50 Cal. and the coax. We both realize we aren't going to finish in time to go back to the field on resupply today. Even so, we continue with our tasks so we can keep our stay at the rear to a minimum.

I need Fanelli to help me get the track together on the side I opened, and it goes back together exceptionally well. Because Fanelli is dealing with the coax and the .50 Cal. ammo, he reminds me of something else we both forgot. We have to zero the sights to the main gun and then zero the coax to the main gun. We can't do that until tomorrow.

If we don't get back to the field soon, we are going to end up on perimeter bunker guard some night. We hate that, as it would be number ten.

One side of the tank track is done, and I just have to adjust the other side to take up some track slack. Because everything is brand new, everything breaks loose and adjusts with a fair amount of ease. I start unbolting all our thermo chests from the bustle rack while Fanelli removes the radios from Old 2-3 and installs them in New 2-3. Before I start bolting the thermo chests to the bustle rack on New 2-3 Fanelli wants me to help him transfer all the main gun ammo. It's really a 3-man job, but none of the REMFs at the motor pool will help us. We could do it ourselves, but the main gun ammo is so easily damaged, we don't want to have to set it down on the ground in the motor pool.

As if by command, Wack shows up at the motor pool. He looks and feels number one. The dentist corrected his toothache, and so he agrees to help us transfer the main gun ammo.

With the three of us it goes quickly. I hand it out to Wack, and he carries it over and hands it to Fanelli inside the new 2-3, who stows it in the turret and in the driver's compartment. We just have to bolt the thermo chests to the bustle rack, and we're done for the day. With both Fanelli and I working on the thermo chests and with Wack encouraging us, we finish up before 5 p.m. Apparently Wack has learned some encouragement tips from Zack and Big Al after all.

Now the question is, what to do now? We want to stay out of the First Sgt.'s sight, so as to avoid perimeter bunker guard if possible. It's late enough that we're safe from any sort of sand bag filling detail. We try to decide whether to eat c-rats here at the motor pool or to take our chances at the mess hall.

Two things make our decision for us. Wack is recuperating from his visit to the dentist, so first of all, he wants some cold milk. He went to the dentist first thing today and had no breakfast and therefore, no milk. He didn't get lunch either, so he is boo coo hungry. That's a dangerous condition to show up in at the mess hall.

Secondly, and most importantly, the motor pool Sgt. closes the motor pool and kicks us out so he can lock it up. You wouldn't think theft would be a problem so close to the Z, but apparently it is. We have no choice now that we have been evicted from the motor pool, so since all three of us are intent on keeping a low profile, we sky for the mess hall. There's a short line, but we aren't fooled. We know the food will be number ten.

Faustino is in line ahead of us, and I ask him about the availability of the firing range so we can zero our sights on 2-3 tomorrow. He's pretty sure we can just go there tomorrow and zero our sights. He says he'll find out for sure and get back to us in the morning.

We all finally make it to the serving part of the line and get tee tee portions of the day's offerings. There is the typical meat, potato and vegetable offering today. The meat, always a mystery and even called so on occasion, but not today. Today it is said to be Aussie Beef. It's in the realm of possibilities, but highly doubtful. It tastes more like wet cardboard with a smear of some brown liquid the cooks claim is gravy. The potatoes are rehydrated dehydrated and then tortured for several hours on the steam table before being served. I can recognize the peas when that's what is served, because I used to feed my younger brother and sister their strained pea baby food. But today I am at a loss as to what the vegetable is. If it's corn, I never knew it could be reduced to such a deplorable state. Looks like yellow library paste but tastes even worse.

As we push our food around on our paper plates, we decide to go to the PX after we finish here. It might be possible to get something more resembling food there than what is available here at the mess hall.

We want to wait as long as possible before we sky to our hootch, so as to not be exposed to the possibility of perimeter bunker guard. The PX has a few food items we are interested in. For me it's the cheese waffle crackers, and I buy ten tubes of the crackers. They are number one, and as we walk to our hootch in the last light of the day, I open one of the cardboard tubes. Wack, Fanelli, and I polish off one tube of cheese crackers before we get to our hootch. We have the whole hootch for just the three of us again, so no

card games tonight. I eat one more of the cardboard tubes of crackers and consider it my dinner.

We all just lay around on our bunks, and before I turn in, I write some letters home telling them of surviving the land mine. I still have a long time left here in the Nam, so I'm careful to not sound as if I'm bragging. Even though we're still fairly sure we are the first crew to hit a land mine with the new Sheridan tank, the only thing we're proud of is that we survived unharmed. The Lifers might be correct in their assessment that the Sheridans can't take a punch like the M-48s. Although we survived mostly unscathed, Old 2-3 was totaled.

It's dark out now as Wack, Fanelli, and I lounge in our bunks. The hootches are pretty well ventilated. But when a hootch is full of guys farting and burping, it quickly gets rank inside. With just the three of us, it just reeks of piss, to which we are quite accustomed. A tee tee smear of the menthol oil on my upper lip, and it's number one. I offer the menthol oil around, and Wack puts some on his upper lip. Fanelli passes on it. He thinks we're both dinky dao, and we probably are. I fill some of the time catching up on my journal entries. No guard tonight, so we turn off the lights and hit the sack. No bugs either! That is number one. In the field, the bugs are bothersome all night and day. They are particularly number ten at night when you can't see them but you can hear them and feel them landing on you.

*June 13, 1970*
*Tuesday*
*Camp Yellowstone Bend*

*This morning the guard had to herd the teams so that I came near to losing my breakfast. Had to march behind the wagons all day which was very tiresome. Crossed several small creeks. Day being warm made it hard marching.*

*Camped at the bend of the river. Tomorrow we make a permanent camp.*
*Our Indians happy tonight. 13 1/2 miles.*

March 6, 1970
Friday
Quang Tri Province, Base camp at Dong ha

I wake up at 6 a.m. Getting awakened at 4 a.m. most of the time makes sleeping till 6 a.m. feel like an incredible luxury, which it is here in the Nam. I'd lay here longer lounging in my bunk, but the menthol oil has worn off or been wiped off by my pillow, and the smell of stale piss is too much.

Now I have to add a pillow to the things I'm starting to really miss out in the field. I get dressed, and then I go and stand outside in the sort of fresh air and watch it get light like I do on most mornings. I say sort of fresh air, because base camp smells boo coo bad. But they usually don't start to burn the shit until 8 a.m. Maybe they wait till 8 a.m. to give the REMFs a chance to have breakfast before they ruin everyone's appetite. It was a nice and relaxing sleep last night. Not like The Scary Time when we spend the night in the field.

Although the air is fresher than in the hootch, it still smells like piss everywhere except the mess hall. Which smells worse is open to debate. Burning shit has the same awful odor all the time, the mess hall smell varies with whichever horrid thing they are making for the day. I haven't eaten at the mess hall enough times yet to pass judgment.

Fanelli and Wack get up and get ready to hit the showers before the REMFs get up. I get my stuff, and we all sky for the showers. After my shower I think about not shaving, but we have to go to the armory to get our weapons. To do that we have to go to HQ, where our First Sgt.'s office is, and fill out the paperwork to get our weapons back. Unshaven guys can get in boo coo trouble here in the rear. So today, I shave.

Wack and Fanelli and I head to our hootch with the knowledge that we'll be sleeping in the field tonight, which is not a comforting thought. But again, Fanelli is right in that the rear sucks.

As we make our way to the hootch, the REMFs on shit burning detail are already hard at work as evidenced by all the thick black clouds of smoke behind all the outhouses and the god-awful smell of burning shit, piss and diesel fuel. It's number ten thousand! I was hungry when we started on our way, but by the time we arrive at our hootch (which doesn't smell much better), I have lost my appetite. Fanelli wants to go to the motor pool and have Ramen that he has stashed on 2-3. Wack wants to go to the mess hall, only because it's the last time for some cold milk. I decide to join Wack and go to the mess hall. Fanelli skys to the motor pool by himself. We hustle to the mess hall, only because we hope it might smell better there. Maybe.

It in fact does smell better at the mess hall, and what a relief to our sense

of smell. But what is really number one is they have SOS on the breakfast menu. SOS doesn't have a reputation as fine dining, which is easily understood when you learn the full name is "Shit on a Shingle". It is really much better than it sounds. If done properly, it can be quite good, and this morning it is. So good it rates a number one and is the best breakfast I've had since being in the Nam. Even having to eat it off a paper plate with a plastic fork doesn't spoil it. I actually go through the chow line again to get a second helping and another cold glass of milk! Going through the chow line twice is unheard of in these parts.

After breakfast, Wack and I saunter to the motor pool to join up with Fanelli. When we get to 2-3, Fanelli is nowhere to be seen. The motor pool is a boo coo big place, and it's already hot and humid, so we decide to wait at 2-3. Fanelli has friends at base camp, and I assume that he's visiting some now. Since we are going to the firing range later this morning, it will be a lot easier and faster if Wack will load for Fanelli. He agrees, even though most of the guys in the infantry would rather shove a sharp stick in their eye rather than get inside the turret of a tank. Wack has never loaded the main gun on any tank, so we climb into the turret of 2-3, and I give him a lesson on loading. It's fairly straightforward, and there luckily won't be the added stress of being in real combat.

The most important thing for the loader to do, I tell him, is to stay out of the recoil path of the main gun when it's fired.

I point out the red lines painted on the turret floor indicating the main gun recoil path, and I say, "Never step past the red line when the gun is fired."

The whole front of the tank lifts off the ground, and you have to brace yourself for it. There's a flip down seat for the loader, and two hand holds as well. I show Wack how to position himself when the main gun is firing. It's not as wild a ride as it is sitting in the driver's compartment. It's closer to riding side saddle on a horse, because the loader sits sideways in the turret compared to the other crewman.

"Loader lesson over, Wack," I say. He and I climb out of the turret and down to the ground for some fresher air. Still no Fanelli.

I have been trying to even the score with him for pulling the C-4 trick on me, causing my can of c-rats to be deposited on my jungle boots. I want to even the score, but because I consider Fanelli "The Man", I don't want to piss him off. We're together almost all the time. Seven days a week, 24 hours a day. I like and respect him boo coo, so I have to be careful how I do this. We

couldn't agree on a name to put on the gun barrel of Old 2-3, so I just painted Hot Rats in small, 2 inch white letters over the driver's hatch. I can't do that on New 2-3, as it's considered a jinx to reuse a name of a blown up tank. What surprises me is that anyone besides Fanelli or the loader even knew Hot Rats was painted there, since it was very nondescript. However, when Lon and her brother walked to our land mine blast site, they said the word spreading through Cam-lo was that Hot Rats hit a mine, no mention of 2-3. 2-3 is painted on each side of the turret in boo coo big numbers. The numbers are almost 2 feet high and can be seen from a distance, but they still referred to us as Hot Rats. We hate that!

We used some stencils here in the motor pool to paint 2-3 on the New 2-3. Most of the tanks have a name painted on the main gun barrel. Because the main gun barrel is so short on the Sheridan, and because we have a big spot light right next to it, if we paint a name on the barrel, no one will be able to hardly see it. I find a piece of chalk they use to make temporary guide lines on the asphalt in the motor pool.

Fanelli is still not back, so with the white chalk I write “Willy the Pimp” on the main gun barrel of 2-3. Willy the Pimp is the name of one song on the *Hot Rats* album, and the name I wanted to put on Old 2-3. I do a pretty good job of it. Up close you can tell it's chalk, but from about 15 feet away and further, you can't tell. I know Fanelli is going to be really pissed off at first, so I uncoil a water hose and have it ready to rinse the chalk off before Fanelli blows a gasket.

It is boo coo good that I have the hose ready, because as predicted, Fanelli is furious.

"It wasn't enough for you that Hot Rats was noticed by whoever is watching us?" Fanelli asks.

He quickly laughs it off with Wack and me when I rinse it off.

We go to the field with no tank name other than 2-3. But first we have to go to HQ and then the armory and then to the firing range. We leave the motor pool and sky to HQ. Good thing we all shaved and look strack this morning, because while we're getting our paperwork from Faustino, the First Sgt. comes out of his office. He tells us that when we finish at the firing range, we're to come back to the motor pool to escort the resupply convoy to the resupply site.

Once we have all our paperwork, we sky to the armorer to pickup our weapons. It's a slow day at the armory, as we're the only guys going out to the

field today. It smells so bad here at base camp, we are anxious to breathe some fresh air. The armorer hands me back my hated .45 and as I tilt it, the disturbing click is still there. I hate that.

I don't ask if he fixed the safety, as I wouldn't trust it if he had. After Fanelli and Wack get their weapons back, he says, "Wolf, I have something for you." As I have been begging for an M-16 since I arrived, I am hopeful.

The armorer returns and says, "When some of the M-48s were turned in, they had a WWII .45 Cal. machine gun in a bracket mount in the driver's compartment."

He hands me one.

I didn't think there could exist a bigger piece of crap than my hated .45, but I'm holding in my hand proof that something worse exists. It looks like a cross between a mechanic's grease gun and a toy gun. During WWII, its nickname was, in fact, the Grease Gun.

I indignantly say to the armorer, "I'm not signing out this piece of crap!"

Everyone laughs, including the armorer.

He says, "If ya want it ya kin just have it. I don't have any paper work for 'em, so they don't officially exist."

I reluctantly accept it, and I mean boo coo reluctantly.

As Wack, Fanelli, and I walk to the motor pool, we pass the Grease Gun back and forth between us for some of the biggest laughs I have had since being in the Nam. Its utilitarian construction makes it an easy target for all sorts of jokes. If you count the shoulder rest as a moving part, it has only three moving parts: the trigger, breach block, and the shoulder rest. The Grease Gun body is about 12 inches long and about 3 inches in diameter and has a 6 inch long barrel that looks like a piece of pipe that just screws into the end of the gun body. It looks like something that was designed and made at an automobile parts plant, and it probably was. It's boo coo heavy, considering its compact size. I pop out the breach block to have a look at it. It's a beast of a breach block. Over 2 inches in diameter and at least 3 inches long. I can imagine when this thing gets going back and forth in the breach when fired, it's going to add to the excitement. The breach block is so heavy, it will be impossible to actually aim this thing, so you just spray the area and hope you hit something. I hate that.

The armorer gave me two ammo clips for it, and by their length, I guess each will hold about 40 rounds of .45 Cal. Bullets, which is the same ammo as for my hated .45.

"If I tape the two ammo clips together and fill them, they'll be boo coo heavy. Maybe they'll act like some sort of a counter balance to the breach block," I joke. Both Wack and Fanelli laugh.

When we get to the motor pool, I walk over to the driver's compartment on 2-3 and climb in with my Grease Gun. The armorer said the Grease Guns were mounted in a bracket holder in the driver's compartment of the M-48s. I notice I have an empty bracket mount for something in the driver's compartment of the Sheridan. I can't believe it, but the Grease Gun slips right into the bracket mount, because apparently that's what it was made for. If it works, I can see how it would be more useful than an M-16 in the confines of the driver's compartment, as it is quite short, especially when the shoulder rest is pushed in all the way.

But that's a boo coo big *if*. Like my hated .45, the Grease Gun is older than me. Of course I'm only twenty, which means I'm not old enough to vote or legally drink, but I'm apparently old enough to kill people. War is weird.

We still have the turret in transit mode, so the main gun barrel is pointing to the rear. Before Fanelli swings the turret around, I tell him and Wack to climb into the turret and have a look inside the driver's compartment. I don't say a thing, I just point at the Grease Gun, snug in its mounting bracket on the hull wall. This gets the best laugh so far, and I haven't even loaded or fired it yet. I'm already thinking firing this thing is going to be a boo coo big laugh, but not really something to count on for protection.

Faustino said the targets are still up at the firing range, and we only need one target to zero the sights for the main gun and the coax. I start up 2-3, and Fanelli gets up in the TC position and swings the main gun around to the front. Wack is halfway in, halfway out of the turret in the loader's hatch. Like most guys, he's reluctant to get all the way into the turret. Plus there's no breeze in the turret.

We proceed to the firing range. Even though it's considered part of base camp, it is outside the bunker perimeter. As far as we're concerned, it's out in the boonies.

Out in the boonies by ourselves again. At least this time, so far, we are mobile and not a disabled sitting duck. Most importantly, we are armed to the teeth.

We make it to the firing range without incident, and because we don't have Our Dear Platoon Sgt. to contend with when zeroing the sights, Fanelli makes short work of it. He only needs two rounds to hit the bull’s-eye once the sight

is zeroed, and then we adjust the coax to hit the same bull’s-eye, and we're done.

Wack proves himself a quick learner, as he loads all the main gun rounds without any mistakes.

We don't like being out in the boonies all alone, so we sky for the motor pool to meet up with the resupply convoy we have to escort on our way back to the field. As we arrive back at the motor pool, the resupply convoy is lined up and waiting for us. Fanelli talks with the driver on the lead deuce and a half about our destination for resupply. Then he tells me to head to the redball and turn towards Cam-lo. We're going to a resupply point that is west of Cam-lo by about 25 kliks, so it is doubtful any locals from Cam-lo will be there today. The toe-in adjustment I made on 2-3 felt good on the drive to the firing range, but I went fairly slow. Now on the redball, I get going about 20 mph and keep it there. 2-3 is tracking as straight as an arrow, and as Fanelli had a boo coo wild ride on the way back from the supply depot, he comments over the intercom about the smooth ride today. It's going to take about an hour to get to the resupply point going 20 mph, so I'm glad the ride is smooth. It's no fun trying to keep a tank on the road when it's swerving all over the place.

Before we get to Cam-lo, I can smell it. I get my trusty vial of menthol oil out and take corrective action. Soon Cam-lo comes into view, and it's a hot day with blue sky and even some white puffy clouds for an occasional respite from the sun. With the heat and the high humidity, the breeze in my face from driving about 20 mph feels number one. We haven't driven through Cam-lo for a while. Because our arrival is probably unannounced, the old guy is not at his normal spot flipping everyone the bird, except 2-3. I even have a box of c-rats next to me, but I guess I won't need it today.

Cam-lo is a small village, but we don't expect to catch a glimpse of Fanelli's mamasan or Lon and her brother, and we don't. After driving through Cam-lo, we have about 30 more minutes to go to get to the resupply point west of Cam-lo. We're out in the boonies with just 2-3 and four deuce and a halfs with the supplies. I guess no one is concerned about our situation but us.

We finally arrive at the resupply point, and I park 2-3 and shut the engine down. We form a tee tee cluster with the deuce and a halfs. Wack and I get the concertina wire, and we form a small circle with it around 2-3 and the deuce and a halfs. It looks boo coo ridiculous, and when Wack and I stand

back to admire our handiwork, we both just start laughing. War is so weird.

We have an entrenching tool on 2-3 that we only use to bury our crap if we are so inclined. I offer it to Wack, saying perhaps he wants to dig a foxhole so as to get back in the swing of things. Because we are friends, I know he doesn't really mean what says back to me. I think.

It's just past 1 p.m., and the KPs on resupply are nervous about being in the field. I realize now why the hot chow is so horrid. The hot chow for our dinner, which is to be served about 4:30 p.m., was put in the thermo chest before noon today. Five hours in a thermo chest would ruin even the best of meals, but that is not the concern here, as the best of meals it would assuredly not be.

Fanelli is anxious, but not because we're in the field. He's anxious because we are boo coo far from Cam-lo, and he knows his mamasan will not be here today. He has a stash of Ramen, but he likes to top it off whenever he can. He must be thinking about that right now, as he is heating water for his Ramen lunch. We missed lunch at the mess hall, because we had to didi to escort the resupply convoy. Wack and I are hungry, so we rummage through our c-rat stash to find something to our liking.

We heat our food up with C-4 and have a c-rat picnic, sort of. The KPs think the three of us are dinky dao, because we are laughing and joking around most of the time. They are all so freaked out about being in the field that nothing seems funny to them. For us it's just the body bag humor that we use to try to keep some semblance of our sanity. Maybe.

The afternoon passes slowly but without incident. It gets so hot up on the turret that Fanelli and I finally have to rig our poncho up there for some shade. No ice on resupply, so all we have to drink is warm water and hot Cokes. We opt for the warm water. We take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. guarding the resupply convoy while the other two sit in the side shade as the sun moves across the sky.

About 4 p.m. one of the platoons shows up quickly followed by the other two. All three platoons are here at resupply, so it's going to be a boo coo big resupply circle. Wack and Fanelli open up the concertina wire while I get in 2-3 and re-position it into the now much larger circle. It takes about 10 minutes for all the tracks to get in position and for all the concertina wire to be put out and connected together.

No locals have shown up, and we don't expect any, but the Lifers make us put out the concertina wire anyway.

As the dust settles from all the commotion, I can see the loader making his way to 2-3. He is boo coo glad to see us. He didn't like being a side gunner on 2-4 as Wack's replacement, and he displays all his calluses and blisters from digging two foxholes a day. As he walked away from 2-4, we could hear Sgt. Green ordering him to get digging. The loader ignored him, as Sgt. Green didn't realize that Wack is back. Xin loi, Wack.

We still don't have an LT or a new platoon Sgt. The TC on 2-5 is the acting platoon Sgt., and that makes all of us boo coo nervous. We on 2-3 have been here all afternoon with the hot chow, so we don't even think about going over there. But we all want to go to mail call, so the loader and I sky for mail call while Fanelli mans the .50 Cal.

I'm the lucky guy today, as I get a letter from the Real World while Fanelli and the loader get nothing.

We both head back to 2-3 for some dinner. Looks like Ramen for Fanelli and me while the loader is going for c-rats now that we know the lowdown on the hot chow. We don't have any supplies to load, and we topped off the fuel tank at the motor pool, so we eat our dinner without interruption. I'm still putting c-rat crackers in my canteen cup of Ramen soup. It's a number one and filling meal. Boo coo better than the hot chow. Fanelli is nervous, because although he has a pretty good stash of Ramen, we are heading further away from Cam-lo according to the word going around the resupply site.

After Cam-lo, there is nothing but boonies and Charlie. Neither of which have Ramen. We have another c-rat picnic dinner for our reunion with the loader, as he is boo coo happy that 2-3 is back. We're in high spirits now, but we all know it will be dark soon and The Scary Time. I can commiserate with the loader as to the hard life of a side gunner on a P.C.

My time on 2-4 caused me to dig many a foxhole, which I'd like to forget about. After we finish our modest repast, the order comes over the horn to prepare to didi to our RON. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire as I start up 2-3. They both climb aboard, Fanelli in the TC position, and the loader is at his hatch half way in and half way out. For a guy 2 or 3 kliks south of the Z, the loader is happy to be back on 2-3 and not a side gunner on a P.C.

I joke with Fanelli and the loader over the intercom, "Just like old times!"

We uncircle and line up behind 2-5, and we sky. We get back on the redball and head west going even further away from Cam-lo. We go about another klik on the redball before we pull off on a dirt trail and head north

towards the Z. We mine sweep our way at a walking pace, and 2-3 is so far back in the conga line of tracks, I can't see who is mine sweeping. I just hope it's not Smitty. We arrive at our intended site, and I haven't been here before. Fanelli has, but he doesn't have a scary story about it. That is number one. After we drive in circles and flatten everything, we dismount and scour the area for tunnels like it's a sacrament for our chosen religion. We find nothing of concern, so we prepare to put out our night defenses. Fanelli jokes with me as to whether or not I remember how to put out the claymores after being blasted by the land mine.

"Only one way to find out," I say as I grab the trip flare and claymore ditty bag I keep everything in. I head out in front of 2-3 to see if I do remember how to do it. It's been two whole days since the last time.

All goes well, and I do not trip any flares. Nor do I get caught in the concertina wire, all of which is number one.

We finish with all our duties at about 6 p.m., and the sky is already turning dark, so we climb into the turret of 2-3 and turn on the red lights to acquire our night vision and chat for a while. Since there is just the three of us, we are all going to stay up till midnight and then start our guard duty shifts. I take last shift as usual, and all that remains is for the loader and Fanelli to decide who's first and who's second.

Fanelli and I both saw different perspectives of the REMF taking my hated .45 when we were at base camp. So when we tell the loader about it, we keep going back and forth each with our own version. We have to stop often to let the loader stop laughing before we can continue. That tee tee episode highlights some of the problems of life at base camp, and why the rear sucks. Some REMFs abuse the large amounts of drugs and alcohol available at base camp during the long periods of idle time and go around drug-crazed most of the time.

Fanelli says to me, "I never thought I'd see you chase someone down to get your .45 back."

And I say, "Neither did I. Until I realized it was still loaded, and it would be just like the army to charge me with furnishing the weapon for a murder."

At least for the loader, it's just like old times. At midnight I climb out of the turret and down to the ground to make my way to my tent. My stretcher is laid out with my sleeping bag on top and the bugs are everywhere as usual, flying in my face and crawling all over me. I guess no one told them that monsoon is over. At least, I think it's over. Apparently the bugs don't know or

care.

*July 29, 1876*
*Saturday*
*Camp Cottonwoods*

*Broke camp this morning five o'clock am. Marched twenty two miles and are camped in the Cottonwoods. Very hard march today. Hard on account of bad weather and the warmth of the day.*

*As soon as we got into camp I took a horse and went to a spring about 1 1/2 miles from camp and filled all the canteens that belonged to Co.*

*Feel very tired and also felt much like cursing the army and everything with it.*

March 7, 1970
Saturday
Quang Tri Province

It was warm last night, so it was hard to sleep in my clothes again after my mini-R&R at base camp. Maybe this 2-3 will last longer than two weeks. Makes me sort of glad I pay no federal taxes this year since I'm in a combat zone. When you get paid as little as we do for the opportunity to get seriously injured or killed, it's not really much of a perk. Because of the bugs, sleeping any less than fully clothed is not an option. I usually untie and loosen my jungle boot laces, but that's about it.

The loader wakes me at 4 a.m. for my turn at guard. Two days off from guard duty really makes me realize how much I hate it. Staring off into the blackness is boo coo tiring, especially on your eyes. I climb up on 2-3 and get up on the turret. I drop into the TC hatch until my feet hit the TC's seat, and I stand there half in the turret behind the .50 Cal. The sky is clear, and the stars are still out, so it's not pitch blackness, which is sort of a relief. Sort of. I still can't see much, but I can make out the silhouettes of the rest of the P.C.s and tanks as I look around the RON. It is a tee tee bit comforting. Listening to the other guards call in their sitreps every 15 minutes to the Sgt. of the Guard makes it sound like all is quiet, which is number one.

The mess hall coffee was appalling, so I can't wait for it to get light so I can heat up some water and make myself a decent cup of java. It stays so

warm at night that our trick of opening the thermo chest at night and closing it in the morning doesn't work any more. We have warm Cokes, and we have hot Cokes, and of course we have warm water that tastes like plastic. Having ice for a couple of days makes us miss the cool drinks all the more.

The two hours of guard duty drag by slowly, but finally it is 6 a.m., and I can make some coffee. I climb down to the ground with my canteen cup, a wad of C-4, and three packs of c-rat instant coffee, plus three c-rat creamer packets. The water boils boo coo fast using C-4, and I pour the contents of the packets in. Just as quickly, the kamikaze bugs dive into my coffee and certain death. It still tastes better than mess hall coffee, as long as I remember to keep my bug juice soaked fingers out of it.

Fanelli and the loader are finally awakened by all the noise generated as the rest of the Second platoon get up and start fixing their breakfasts. Fanelli heats his water to shave, and the loader heats up a c-rat meal for his breakfast.

I look from one to the other and say out loud, "Just like old times."

The loader laughs, but Fanelli hasn't had his Ramen yet, and therefore has no sense of humor. As I look over 2-3 in the morning light with the dew collected all over it, I notice that I can faintly make out “Willie the Pimp” on the main gun barrel. Fanelli is not going to like that, so before he sees it, I put a tee tee bit of soapy water on my hands and wipe the last vestiges of “Willie the Pimp” off the barrel. Some guys think it's a jinx to name a new tank after a blown up tank. I guess it's not required for a tank or main gun to have a name. The first 2-3, which was an M-48, was not named. And none of the P.C.s have names here in the Second platoon. It was also scary when Lon told us the word that went through Cam-lo was that Hot Rats hit a mine. It was painted in such an inconspicuous place and in letters no bigger than 2 inches. Yet we had obviously been observed close enough that they all knew Old 2-3's name. Fanelli hates that, and so do I, and that's why he wants no name on the gun barrel. Since I still follow Fanelli's advice on all things (with the exception of shaving), the New 2-3 is just that, 2-3.

2-3 is painted in boo coo big digits on each side of the turret mostly for our use, because as we look around the platoon, all tanks and P.C.s look the same.

It's only about 8 a.m. when acting platoon Sgt. 2-5 Tango Charlie calls Fanelli over the horn to tell us we, along with 2-6, have to escort a resupply convoy to one of the forward fire bases right next to the Z. Already starting to sound like a boo coo fun day. Fanelli protests our detail assignment since we

are only a 3- man crew, and 2-5 Tango Charlie responds that he's sending Wack with us to help with the mine sweeping. Wack is boo coo good friends with Zack, Big Al, Fanelli and me. Plus, we all consider him to be the best mine sweeper in the Second platoon.

This is just another example of us, the crew on 2-3, being treated like dog robbers. Just because we had to crew for Our Dear Platoon Sgt., who has now abandoned us when we don't even have an LT. They're sending us to guard the resupply convoy to the forward fire base for two reasons. One, to do the mine sweeping. The second is to deal with any ambushes. We don't mind mine sweeping that much, but we hate dealing with ambushes.

I bring in the claymores and the trip flares, and then take my tent down and roll my stretcher up in it. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen. They tie everything to the side of 2-3 while I finish draining the condensed water out of the diesel fuel filters.

I climb into the driver's compartment, put on my commo helmet, and start the engine on 2-3. I smile as I look at my Grease Gun sitting snuggly in its mount on the turret wall. What a joke that thing is, I think to myself. I can hear Fanelli talking over the horn to Steve, the TC on 2-6, about our mission. We have to get to the redball to meet up with the resupply convoy, then mine sweep our way to the Z and then along the south edge of the Z to the forward fire base. The fact that the resupply convoy will have some armed guards hardly allays our fears. We hate when they break up the Second platoon to go on separate missions for the day. Especially when we're in the smaller contingent. A few armed guards on the deuce and a halfs hardly compares to the fire power of the seven P.C.s. They have the .50 Cals and the M-60s, not to mention all the ammo the P.C.s can carry.

When Wack arrives at 2-3, Fanelli says to him, "Man, the last time you came with us we hit a land mine, and today we're going to a boo coo more number ten place. Xin loi!"

Wack laughs and then replies, "Fuck, Fanelli, every place here is number ten."

Wack mine sweeps in front of 2-6 while we follow, and we make it to the redball without incident. Wack climbs up on the turret of 2-3, and Steve on 2-6 leads the way on the redball until we get to the meeting point of the resupply convoy. We wait about 15 minutes before the resupply convoy shows up. I don't know anyone on the convoy, but Fanelli does. We can tell by their questions that they are all boo coo nervous about our destination.

Most everyone on the resupply convoy stays at base camp, so just being in the field is scary for them. They would probably die of fright if they ever had to spend a night in the field when it's the Real Scary Time.

Steve led the way here to meet the resupply convoy. But of the two tank TCs, only Fanelli knows the way to the forward fire base. Even though Steve is the highest ranking member of our patrol, they have 2-3 lead the way to the trail that runs along the southern edge of the Z.

Wack takes a break from mine sweeping, and the loader takes a turn at it. It's slow going in the heat and high humidity. It's boo coo hot in the driver's compartment as there is no breeze at 3 to 4 mph. At least we're in front of the convoy. 2-6 is bringing up the rear, and when going this slow following the deuce and a halfs belching out all their diesel exhaust, it must be number ten back there. Although it's hot and dusty on the trail, the loader and Wack continue to take turns mine sweeping knowing they have it best for now. It takes over an hour at a walking pace to get to the point where the trail turns west along the southern edge of the Z.

I have seen parts of the Z from a distance, but nothing could have prepared me for the sight of it up close. This is an area that has been extensively fought over for control. And it looks it. Not one stick of vegetation as far as the eye can see. Nothing but burned and bombed earth, scorched in several shades of brown when it's not just completely black.

It's number one to be in the front and leading the convoy, as the tank treads on 2-3 are kicking clouds of dust. Toxic clouds of dust, most likely. After another hour of mine sweeping, we arrive at the forward fire base the supplies are for. It's a scary looking place during daylight, so I know it would be even scarier at night. The fire base is situated at the top and part way down the side of a good sized hill, but that's all it is, a hill. There is boo coo lots of concertina wire surrounding the place, with bunkers every 50 to 75 feet around the circumference of the fire base. Most of what we brought on the convoy is ammo for the artillery and the perimeter defense weapons. This is a boo coo number ten place to be, because Charlie knows they are here and can stockpile ammo nearby until they feel they have enough to attack. Because we in the Second platoon are so mobile, if they want to attack us, they have to find us first. That's not that hard to do. But after they locate us, they have to haul all their ammo on their backs to wherever we are in one night.

It's lunch time when we get here, and we are offered lunch at the fire base’s meager mess hall. We all take up the invitation, if only to be polite,

but we're all glad we do because it turns out to be the first decent mess hall lunch I've had in the Nam. Of course we think these guys here are all dinky dao for staying at this fire base. As if any of them has a choice. And they think we're dinky dao for camping out every night in the bush. As if we have a choice.

After lunch we stand around the convoy chatting and somehow manage to not help unload all the ammo for the fire base. The deuce and a half drivers are nervous and want to start heading back. We don't mind leaving this place either. It will be a much faster trip back, if everything goes well. We don't have to mine sweep so we're not in that much of a hurry. We in the Second platoon will not be in a secure area tonight, so for us it's fun to make the REMFs sweat a tee tee bit. It's probably not fair to call the deuce and a half drivers and guards REMFs, because they occasionally have to leave the "safety" of base camp.

Steve is technically in command of our mission as the highest ranking member and TC on

2-6, so he announces to our group to get ready to sky. When we arrived here at the fire base, we drove straight in with 2-3 in the lead followed by the deuce and a halfs and lastly 2-6 in the rear. Steve wants to lead on the way back, as they on 2-6 had to eat dust all the way here. He has Zack do a neutral steer, and they sky up out of the fire base. It's not that easy for the deuce and a half drivers, as there is no space for them to turn around inside the fire base, and the deuce and a halfs can't do neutral steers. They have to back out, one by one, until they can turn around on the outside of the fire base. Once the deuce and a half directly behind me starts backing up, I put 2-3 into neutral steer and spin halfway around so I can just drive out in forward gear. I didn't expect to get to lead in both directions and knew we would be eating boo coo lots of dust on the drive back.

Because we're not mine sweeping, Zack has 2-6 going about 20 mph on what amounts to a dirt road that meanders between and around boo coo bomb craters. It's really the deuce and a halfs that dictate our top speed. I can hear Steve over the horn talking to Zack about slowing down a tee tee bit to let the deuce and a halfs catch up. I'm trying to let the last deuce and a half get as far in front of me as possible, so as to eat the least amount of dust. The dust is just the worst I've encountered here in the Nam. Now that it seems that monsoon is over, the trails have turned directly from mud to dust. Bringing up the rear, we have to breath hot, dusty air combined with a boo coo amount

of diesel exhaust from 2-6 and all of the deuce and a halfs.

I'm wearing my dust goggles, but they constantly fog up on the inside. They get coated with dust on the outside so often that they should come with a little windshield wiper. I can hardly see the trail at times and have to rely on Fanelli's directions. At times he's having as hard a time seeing ahead as me. My eyes haven't fully recovered from all the grit that got blown into them from the land mine blast, and even with my goggles on I still have dust in them. I hate that.

We make boo coo good time on the drive back, despite all the dust and bomb craters. When we make it back to the redball, the rest of the Second platoon is there already. We park ourselves in with the rest of the tracks and put out the concertina wire. Why? We don't know. We are so far from Cam-lo that none of the locals will come this far. I suppose we could get attacked during resupply and as the .50 Cal. is often unmanned, it's probably Regs to put out the concertina wire.

Wack missed out on digging the foxhole for 2-4's burn hole, so he feels number one about that and almost doesn't know how to act. The hot chow is here, but now that I know it's been in the thermo chests since noon today, and I had a decent lunch at the fire base, I decide on c-rats for dinner. Fanelli has Ramen. His Ramen stash is being quickly depleted, and Fanelli hates that.

After we have our dinner, we unpack and load the ammo we ordered this morning to replace what we shot off at the firing range. We can't carry that much ammo. As it's the gunners duty, Fanelli keeps our ammo base load topped off at all times. That's number one with me. As the driver, I keep our fuel tank topped off when fuel is available, and I monitor the track blocks and their condition. Fanelli and I make a pretty good team of keeping 2-3 tiptop and ready to go. We're still breaking in the loader, who didn't go to armor school. Even though it's technically his job to keep the coax ammo box topped off, we still don't let him do it. And as it's a pain in the ass job, he doesn't mind.

Resupply is just about over and the deuce and a halfs are preparing to didi for base camp, so we bring in the concertina wire. No mad dash of locals to scour through our burn holes for anything of value or use today. We're about 20 kliks or more from Cam-lo, so no one made it to our resupply site. 2-5 Tango Charlie is on the horn ordering the Second platoon to prepare to sky to our RON. We uncircle and the deuce and a halfs head back to base camp as we didi on the redball in the opposite direction, headed for our RON. 2-5

drives about a klik before turning off on a dirt trail. Someone starts to mine sweep, and we proceed through the bush at a walking pace for about 30 minutes. When we arrive at our RON, we drive around in circles flattening everything, and then we dismount and search for tunnels. I hope we don't find any, as it's been an exciting enough day for me already.

I heave a boo coo big sigh of relief when we finally get the all clear to set up our night defenses. I'm exhausted, and it's been a long day, but we're still not done. I get to putting out the claymores, and I set my trip flares while the loader puts out the concertina wire. Fanelli gets down from behind the .50 Cal. as I relieve him so he can help the loader put up the RPG screen. Then they tie the tarp on the side of 2-3, and the loader relieves me from the .50 Cal. so I can set up my tent. When I finish, it's about 6 p.m., and Fanelli and the loader and I are up on the turret swigging some warm Cokes for our sundowner reward.

Another night of guard duty with just three crewman. Fanelli and the loader are taking turns with the first and second shift. As always, I take the last shift, so we don't have to figure that out. Having had only four hours of sleep last night (at best) and a long busy day, I am tired and doubt I can stay up till midnight. But I will try.

The warm Coke rejuvenates me mentally, at least so that when it's finally full dark, Fanelli and I get into the turret with the red light on. The loader is behind the .50 Cal. half in and half out of the turret as we chat about our day. It's harder work as a 3-man crew, but since Our Dear Platoon Sgt. did nothing except his shift at guard, that's the only time we miss him. For the loader, after his two days on 2-4 and having to dig two foxholes a day, being back on 2-3 (even as a 3-man crew) is number one.

I hit the wall about 11 p.m. and beg off to go sleep. Fanelli and the loader pick up my slack and stay up until midnight and the start of guard duty. I make my way to my tent behind 2-3 and crawl in. Despite the warm welcome from all of the bugs waiting for me, I am so exhausted that I fall right to sleep for once.

*May 27, 1876*
*Saturday*
*Camp Command*

*Turned out this morning same as other mornings. E Co. and mounted*

*detachment crossed the river before daylight. They are to scout the other side well so that couriers can go down the river in safety.*

*About ten o'clock this forenoon we heard some Indians yelling and soon after 4 of our Indian scouts came over the bluffs hooping and yelling like demons.*

*Immediately afterwards Lieut. Bradly and detachment came up the other side of river at a gallop. They came over swimming their horses and reported a large camp of Sioux about fifteen miles from us on the Rosebud River.*

*E Co. remained over this evening when they came over in boats. River raising rapidly and the current is very swift; raising 18 to 20 inches every day.*

*Three couriers dispatched to Gen. Terry supposed to be at mouth of Glendive Creek > 5 miles from us down the river. One Co. of cavalry will accompany them on this side of the river for a small distance.*

*Our Indians are living in expectation of having a deal with the Sioux.*

March 8, 1970
Sunday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me 4 a.m .for my stint at guard. I got a few more than four hours sleep last night, so I feel well rested, sort of. I climb up on 2-3 and take my position behind the .50 Cal. It's not completely overcast and thus not pitch black out, which is almost number one when on guard duty. For it to really be number one, it would have to be light out, which it is not.

Standing behind the .50 Cal. makes it harder to fall asleep while on guard, but not impossible. I report my sitreps every 15 minutes, and it finally starts getting light at 6 a.m. I can climb down now and start heating water for my morning cup of java.

Soon Fanelli and the loader are up also and preparing for the morning. Fanelli is heating water for his shave and the loader is picking through an open case of c-rats for one of the meals he hates least for his breakfast. Breakfast for me is pretty standard now: a canteen cup of coffee, a pecan roll out of our treasure chest, and a can of c-rat peaches.

It's my second day back in the field, and my beard only looks like Fanelli's five o'clock shadow. I'm sure Fanelli could grow a beard that would shame me. Beards and mustaches can be a sign of what clique someone belongs to.

For instance, the Heads or pot smokers all have mustaches, if they can grow one. Most would also have a beard, if possible. Necklaces with a Peace Sign symbol or a marijuana leaf medallion are boo coo popular with the Heads. Many of them also have an electrical alligator clip hanging from their shirt pocket flap to be used as a “roach clip” when the joint gets short so they don't burn their fingers.

The Chicanos have their own clique, as do the Soul Brothers or Brothers for short. The Heads, Chicanos, and Brothers all have elaborate handshake rituals when meeting other members of their clique. In real gangs, guys can only be a member of one gang. Here in the field, guys can be members of more than one clique. To be in the Chicano clique, you have to be a Chicano, and you have to be black to be in the Brothers clique. However, to be in the Heads clique, you just have to be a pot smoker. Since some of the Chicanos and Brothers are pot smokers, they can be in two cliques with no repercussions. Even some of the Juicers are Heads, as sometimes they get boo coo drunk and when someone passes a joint around, they get in on it. Though they often deny it when they sober up. Since pot smoking is almost a non-issue here, it really doesn't matter.

Drinking alcohol in the field is an issue, and the juicers hate that, especially since they used to be allowed to. We're quite sure the departure of Our Dear Platoon Sgt. was more about the No Alcohol In The Field rule than anything else.

The platoon seems in no hurry to pull in our night defenses, but not because it's Sunday. Sunday in the field is just another same-same day.

It's still morning, and we can hear the chopper activity nearby. More than usual, and after a while we can hear the mini-guns of the Cobra gunships and the cannons of the two fixed-wing aircraft known as Puff the Magic Dragon and Snoopy. Puff and Snoopy take over keeping a targeted area under fire while the Cobra gunships go back to the base for more ammo and fuel. It pretty much goes on all morning long. As word goes around for the platoon to bring in our night defenses and prepare to didi, we can still hear the mini-gun and cannon fire to the north of us.

I bring in my claymores and the trip flares while the loader brings in the concertina wire. Fanelli's up on the turret of 2-3 behind the .50 Cal. talking on the horn, so I help the loader take down the RPG screen, roll it up, and tie it in place.

When the loader and I finish, Fanelli tells us one of the choppers was shot

down just north of our position. The Second platoon is supposed to locate the crash site and secure it until the shithook can get there to retrieve it.

The Second platoon uncircles, and we line up behind 2-5 Tango Charlie to sky for the downed chopper. We have location coordinates for the crash site, but our maps don't have any of the trails marked on them. We will have to search the area by driving around almost aimlessly. The chopper crew has been rescued already, so we don't have hurry on their account, but Higher doesn't want Charlie to get the mini-gun, or more importantly the radios, off the downed chopper.

The Second platoon moves single file at a walking pace in the places we have to mine sweep. Sometimes we can break brush and make better time. It's a hot day. Although the sky is clear, it's still boo coo humid. It's number one when we drive faster than a walking pace, as the breeze from moving feels number one.

It takes us until after lunchtime to get to the general crash site. Because it's dense brush, we have to search for another hour before someone finally spots the downed chopper. It's a Cobra gunship, and we all want to have a look at it up close. We only get to see them flying, and I have never seen one on the ground. Several of the gunners on the P.C.s are hoping to get their hands on the chopper's mini-gun for a few days.

Fanelli scoffs at the idea of actually using any mini-gun we recover from the crashed chopper. He says, "You can't imagine how much ammo it needs. It's like feedin' the ammo belt into a supercharged meat grinder. Cobra's are just flying ammo boxes, and after a few passes over the target, they didi mau to re-arm and probably refuel."

Although we think the ammo box for the coax holds a lot of ammo, Fanelli says the mini-gun would suck that up in a few bursts of fire.

The chopper was located quickly enough that it can’t have been booby trapped yet. We hope. Several guys dismount and carefully make their way to the chopper to have a look-see. The mini-gun won't be hard to remove, but some of the radios got a tee tee bit smashed up and might be wedged in place. If the shithook doesn't arrive to retrieve it before we are ordered to leave, we'll blow it up with some C-4. We really don't want Charlie to get the radios.

It appears to be booby trap-free, so we spend the afternoon guarding it. Everyone that wants to has a look at the Cobra. The pilot and gunner sit tandem. That is, one in front and one in back, so the fuselage is very narrow.

So narrow that when a Cobra is flying head on towards you, it looks like a plus sign. If an enemy gunner is trying to shoot a cobra, it seems to disappear when he puts his sights on it, as the view of it is blocked by the gun sight. Obviously though, they can still be shot down, as I am looking at a crumpled one right now.

It really is a flying ammo box with some fuel tanks thrown in. They can shoot up their ammo so boo coo fast and have to go re-arm so often, they probably don't need to carry much fuel.

Rule #1 of war is: Carry the absolute maximum ammo that you can.

The crash site is dense brush, but the top of the tanks and P.C.s rise above the top of the vegetation. We're spread out in a rough circle. The brush is so dense, it would be almost impossible to put out the concertina wire. It would get caught a million times on all the branches of the brush if we tried to put it out. But trying to bring it back in would be boo coo worse. We are sitting ducks again. Not that the concertina wire would offer much protection, but it would be some. Charlie could crawl right up to us before being seen, as the brush is boo coo dense in places.

It's hot and sunny, but because we don't know when we might have to move out, we don't put the poncho up for shade. We also don't put it up because we are in a number ten place. If we get ambushed, the poncho would get in the way of the .50 Cal. We take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. on all the tanks and P.C.s, and when it's not our turn, most everyone is hunkering down in what little side shade the tanks and P.C.s provide.

Behind the .50 Cal., it's so hot out in the direct tropical sun, that we take turns at 30 minute intervals instead of one hour. I wish I hadn't given my boonie hat away now. What tee tee shade we get from our steel helmets is largely offset by the heavy weight. The mortar track and the medic track are set up in the center of our site. I can see Doc sitting on the entry ramp on the medic P.C. From my vantage point, it looks like he is making another palm frond hat. I watch him for a while as I take my turn sitting behind the .50 Cal. on 2-3. Sure enough, after about 15-20 minutes, I can see Doc put a palm frond hat on his head.

As soon as I am relieved from my stint behind the .50 Cal. I saunter over to the medic track to get Doc to show me how to make a hat. He was supposed to show me a while ago, but it was the day the LT killed himself. So we sort of forgot about it. One of the villagers from Cam-lo that the medic track crew barter with showed Doc how to make the palm frond hats. It takes

me longer than 30 minutes to make my first hat, but Doc tells me the mamasan that showed him how could make one in less than 5 minutes. I feel a tee tee bit better knowing that. To make a hat, the palm leaf is torn in 1/2 inch strips lengthwise from the leaf tip towards the stem. Then you interweave the strips from the left side with the strips on the right side. When done correctly, it naturally forms a cup shape. It's a goofy looking hat, but it is welcome shade.

I return to 2-3 just in time to try out my new hat up on the turret of 2-3. I test its effectiveness at warding off the sun, and it is number one. It's lightweight and lets whatever breeze there is blow right through. Its only shortcoming, if I don't count the teasing from Fanelli, is that it's not bullet proof. Fanelli may be teasing me, but the loader wants me to show him how to make one, so Fanelli relieves him from behind the .50 Cal. and the loader makes one too.

Fanelli, of course, thinks we're both dinky dao. Fanelli is strack even when in the field. His jungle fatigues have been tailored to fit him like a glove, and it would definitely spoil the image if he were to sport a palm frond hat.

For me, the sun here in the tropics is number ten, so my new palm frond hat is welcome and a boo coo needed source of shade.

We lunch in the field at the chopper crash site as we wait for the arrival of the shithook. The loader and I content ourselves with c-rats while Fanelli has Ramen. Fanelli is getting really low on Ramen, and he hates that. I have a couple left in my stash that I might let him have, as I hate to see grown men cry. Maybe then he'll stop teasing me about my palm frond hat. He can even keep teasing the loader if he wants.

The departure of Our Dear Platoon Sgt. has made a world of difference in all our attitudes. We joke around boo coo more and laugh a lot for guys probably 2 or 3 kliks south of the Z. Body bag humor is all I can say. We know it won't last for long.

On one hand, we feel like orphans out here in the field without an LT and without a real platoon Sgt., so the Second platoon gets treated like we're dog robbers by the other two platoons in our troop. Being on the platoon Sgt.'s tank has taught all three of us on 2-3 a thing or two about being treated like dog robbers. We hate that! For instance, our mission of the moment to guard this downed chopper as a bunch of sitting ducks. War is so weird!

That having been said, it's unlikely that if we ever get another LT, he will be as number one as our last LT. LTs are in such high demand and in such

low supply, we don't expect to have one soon or ever. It's even more unlikely that our new platoon Sgt. will be any better than Our Dear Platoon Sgt. was.

If we have to blow up the chopper, it will probably be Fanelli who does it. We talk about how much C-4 we should use. Fanelli's confident that half a stick of C-4 should do it. I advocate for a whole stick of C-4. Don't want there to be anything left that could be useful to Charlie.

We have a boo coo long drive to resupply, so as afternoon wanes, we are getting nervous about our situation. We're positioned as sitting ducks in this dense brush, and we know that Charlie would love to get their hands on the Cobra's radios. We just want to take the mini-gun off and blow the chopper up and get out of here. There is a lot of horn chatter complaining about our situation. 2-5 Tango Charlie, our acting platoon Sgt., tells everyone to hang loose a while longer.

We hang loose a while longer, as ordered. Finally we hear, and then see, the shithook. We start our engines and start to line up. The tracks closest to the chopper move further away to give the shithook room. The shithook isn't going to land, but it's going to lower a cable with a hook on the end to pick up the Cobra. One of the Second platoon members climbs on top of the Cobra while 2-5 Tango Charlie talks to the shithook over the horn. There's a lifting eye bolt on top of the Cobra just for this purpose. Our guy hooks up the cable and jumps off the Cobra as we watch it being lifted skyward by the shithook.

Our job being done, we finish uncircling and line up behind 2-5. We probably should mine sweep our way our way back to the redball, but we don't.

Someone, probably 2-5 Tango Charlie, must be feeling lucky for some reason. I'm not, but I know everyone is boo coo glad to get out of here as fast as possible. As long as I don't have to lead when we don't mine sweep, I'm not as nervous now that I've had my land mine encounter.

We make good time on our way back to the redball by nothing more than dumb luck. We only drive about 5 minutes on the redball to our resupply site. We're still boo coo far from Cam-lo for any of the villagers to walk to our resupply site, and Cam-lo is the only village in our current area of operation. The other two platoons are there, and we insert ourselves into the spaces left and put out the concertina wire even though it seems pointless. The things we ordered for resupply are minimal, and we stow it quickly on 2-3.

We're off the hot chow for now, but we want to get over to mail call. There's a boo coo big crowd of the three platoons waiting to have their name

called indicating that you have mail. We wait, which is another thing we are all expert at. But the wait is worth it, as Fanelli, the loader, and I all get mail. We are all feeling number one until we realize we all got unsolicited brochures for pornographic magazines and calendars from Denmark. Stuff that would be illegal back in the Real World. The brochures are boo coo graphic themselves, and although the pictures are boo coo small, you can easily make them out. There are ads for full-size inflatable dolls that we all know about because anytime anyone gets a package at mail call, they are all teased that their inflatable doll has finally arrived. To abate the teasing by the rest of the platoon, someone who receives a package has to prove to them it's not an inflatable doll by revealing the contents of the package. During such inspections, it is considered good manners to share any goodies that may be in the package. Guys know this, so some will allow themselves to be teased unmercifully until they give in to a look-see at the contents of their package.

Currently it's Charlie Brown who's being teased about receiving an inflatable doll in the mail today. He denies it, of course, but he hasn't shown anyone its contents yet. It's probably dog food for his dog. He spoils that thing like you wouldn't believe. We don't mind though, because the dogs are often our early warning of number ten things that are about to happen. Often enough to justify keeping them around, even if it is against Regs. We don't have a dog on 2-3. It would be too hard to deal with a dog during monsoon on the tanks, so only some of the P.C. crews have a dog.

We saunter back to 2-3, and as expected, there are no villagers waiting outside our concertina wire, so we start making our dinner. Fanelli, of course, has Ramen. He will continue to have Ramen for breakfast, lunch and dinner until his stash is gone, and then he says he's going to stop eating until they send him home.

I believe him about the not eating part. It's the being sent home part I can't agree with. For that to happen, someone other than the loader and me would have to notice that Fanelli has stopped eating. That's not going to happen. I'm not sure eating Ramen for all three meals a day is considered eating, so he may have already stopped eating and no one has noticed.

The loader and I pour over an open case of c-rats to decide which one we hate the least. In just a couple of days of not seeing Lon and her brother to unload some of our excess c-rats, we are overflowing with open boxes of c-rat meals with one item removed. We have to throw away and burn our excess supplies, because we don't have anywhere to keep it on 2-3. Every

cubic inch is already filled, and that's why we have stuff tied and strapped all over the turret and hull. It's getting late, and we're just waiting for orders to sky to our RON.

We were busy all day, and then we didn't go to hot chow, so we haven't had much of a chance to chat with the rest of the Second platoon today. That's pretty common. On most days the tracks are spread out and separated, so a lot of chatting is done over the horn. There are no private conversations but a boo coo lot of teasing.

Charlie Brown is used to being teased, being TC of the screw-up crew, so it's going to take a while to get him to reveal what's in his package. It's getting late, and we're getting nervous about the soon-to-be dark. Our acting platoon Sgt., 2-5 Tango Charlie, doesn't instill any confidence in us by making us wait. We are all expert at waiting, but we practice it so often that it does get tiring after a while. I add a few more entries in my journal while I wait. I don't always have time to keep it current.

I'm in my driver's compartment relaxing in the only comfortable place I have to sit in the whole wide world right now, my driver's seat. We still have the concertina wire out, and as Fanelli is acting TC, he really needs to be on the horn when we make ready to leave the resupply site for our RON. When word comes to prepare to sky, I climb out of my driver's compartment to assist the loader with bringing in the concertina wire, knowing full well that I will be cautioned and teased by the loader and Fanelli.

Fanelli yells to the loader from up on the turret, "Keep an eye on Wolf, FNG. Don't want him gettin' tangled up in that stuff again."

I'd flip Fanelli the bird, but he'd probably throw a box of c-rats at me. Just like old times.

We roll up the concertina wire and tie it to the side of 2-3. The loader gets up on the turret of 2-3, with Fanelli at the TC position behind the .50 Cal. I get into my driver's compartment, start the engine, and await Fanelli's directions. We uncircle and line up behind 2-5 and sky west on the redball.

We don't drive far. That's number one because we left resupply so late. We turn south off the redball on an existing trail, so someone on 2-5 gets off. They start mine sweeping into the fading sunlight. This is number ten, and it will be even worse than number ten if we find tunnels or something when we finally get to our RON. We don't go far when we come to an open area. 2-5 Tango Charlie orders everyone to drive in circles and flatten everything.

We dismount and then we go over every square inch for tunnels. It is

really getting dark now, so it's number one that we don't find any tunnels. I'm in a boo coo hurry to get my trip flares out during that last tee tee bit of daylight. The claymores don't take as much finesse as the trip flares. Especially because I set the trip flares on such a hair trigger that it just takes longer to put them out without setting any off accidentally.

We're still dealing with our night defenses when it's full dark. We hate that. Fanelli and the loader put the tarp on the side of 2-3 while I sit behind the .50 Cal.. When the loader relieves me, I climb down off of 2-3 and set my tent up behind 2-3. I have set it up so many times that setting it up in the dark is no problem. I think I could set it up with my eyes closed, but no reason to press my luck. I put the stretcher in my tent and toss my sleeping bag inside, and then I get back up on 2-3 and climb into the driver's compartment and turn on my red light.

My hearing is back, so I can chat with Fanelli and the loader. Fanelli's half way out of the turret behind the .50 Cal. now that it's dark, and he has to duck his head inside the turret for me to hear what he says since none of us want to wear our commo helmets. There's a boo coo lot of horn chatter before 10 p.m. when guard duty officially starts, and there's more than usual since we don't have an LT.

Charlie Brown is really getting it from the rest of the platoon about his package from mail call today. He's still mum as to its contents. If it is dog food, he'll get teased boo coo more than if it is an inflatable doll.

Fanelli and the loader and I all stay up till midnight, and then I head for my tent for some shut eye. I am so tired I have been nodding off and on in my driver's seat for the last couple of hours. It's not hot, but it's warm enough that I just lay on my sleeping bag, covering my face with part of the sleeping bag trying to escape the bugs.

*June 8, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Buffalo Rapids*

*Today very pleasant. Left the river this morning and crossed some very high bluffs where we struck Squaw Creek which we crossed several times. After marching about ten miles when we struck the river again and made coffee then marched until dark.*

*Our scouts saw two men on a high bluff who as soon as they saw our party*

*dropped everything and ran. Coming up to the place (Buffalo Rapids) where the two men had been they found some cartridges and a quantity of provisions. It is supposed the two men were Gen Terry's scouts and seeing they were chased, lit out. E Co. went on down to Powder River in the boats.*

*16 miles today.*

March 9, 1970
Monday, Two months in-country
Quang Tri Province

The loader wakes me at 4 a.m. My four hours of sleep coupled with a few cat naps in my driver's seat before going to bed has me less than refreshed. But I make my way to 2-3 and climb up on the turret and position myself behind the .50 Cal. I'm afraid to even wonder about what mission we could be sent on today. We are in the worst position of all. Being the crew on the platoon Sgt.'s tank, we are considered the dog robber crew of the dog robbing Second platoon. We don't know who to fear more, the Lifers or Charlie. Sometimes there is not much difference. Both seem intent on causing us harm. We hate that.

It's still dark, so I can't make the coffee I want yet. It feels even damper and more humid than it's been lately, if that's possible. I notice this as I wake up fully and start to be aware of my surroundings. Nothing to report on my sitreps, and no one else reports anything either, and that's number one. It seems to take forever to get light, and when it does I realize why it feels more humid. It's not raining, but it's misting. Might as well be raining. I thought monsoon was over. Maybe it rains once in a while after monsoon is over. It did seem like monsoon went away quickly, as if someone flipped a switch and turned it off. I guess that type of end to monsoon would be unlikely, but it has to be over soon.

It's been so hot lately that not having the sun beating down on us will be number one, but being wet again is number ten. Being out in the tropical sun all day has to be experienced to fully appreciate its brutality. It can barely be described by the written word. You think of nothing except: Where is the nearest shade and how can I get there?

Light finally comes, and I can get down from the turret of 2-3 and start heating water for my morning coffee. I'm a java junkie for sure now. But I don't care. The burning C-4 wakes Fanelli and the loader, and they both get

up, as does most of the rest of the Second platoon. Fanelli attends to his shave while the loader is opening a can of c-rats for his breakfast.

After Fanelli shaves he says, in reference to the Mad Minute, "Certain things have to be considered. Although we try to set up our RON fairly late, just before dark, if Charlie is watching us, they know exactly where we are, even in the dark. If they observe the Mad Minute without getting killed, they can even see if any of the tracks or tanks have any deficiencies with their weaponry, or if there seems to be some extra firepower on part of the RON."

So Fanelli says, "After I have some Ramen, I'll show you guys how to make a fake mini-gun."

We're pretty sure our troop movements are being watched, as we find land mines all the time. But more troubling for both Fanelli and me is that the Old 2-3 was known as *Hot Rats* by whoever is watching us. We hate that!

Fanelli continues, "If we're being watched, Charlie might be led to believe we have the Cobra's mini-gun since we guarded the Cobra crash site."

After Fanelli has his breakfast, all three of us sit under the tarp on the side of 2-3 with boo coo boxes of coax ammo belts. Fanelli has us pull the tracer round out of several belts of ammo and throw them in a pile. We replace the tracers with a regular round from a pile of ammo Fanelli is creating by removing one regular round from a belt and replacing it with a tracer round. We repeat this over and over until we have two complete belts for the coax that are all tracer rounds. Altogether we have 400 rounds on our fake mini-gun belt. We also have several belts of ammo that have no tracer rounds now. Xin loi, resupply. Fanelli explains that the next time we have a Mad Minute, we'll load the two tracer belts as the first two ammo belts for the coax. When firing the coax and moving the barrel up and down, the tracer rounds give the characteristic serpentine look that tracers on the mini-gun have. I don't normally look forward to Mad Minutes, because it's just a lot of extra work for us the next day, and I usually can't hear for a couple of days afterward. But now we can't wait for a Mad Minute so we can try out our fake mini-gun.

I've been in country for two months today, so I have 10 more months left in the Nam if I don't get killed or wounded. I can't even think about 10 months, as the 60 days I've been here seems like an eternity.

The platoon is slow to get going this morning, but finally word come over the horn to bring in our night defenses and prepare to break camp. I bring in the claymores and trip flares. I set off two trip flares accidentally, but no big deal about it when bringing them in. Except I have to suffer some teasing

from Fanelli and the loader. The trip flares don't really make much noise when they go off, just a tee tee poof sound. But the trip flares are so extremely bright, they get your attention when they go off, even when its full light out. The loader brings in the concertina wire and the RPG screen while Fanelli covers us from behind the .50 Cal. When we're done tying all our gear to the side of 2-3, word comes to prepare to didi.

I climb into the driver's compartment, start the engine, put on my commo helmet, and wait. Fanelli talks me back as we uncircle and line up behind 2-5, and we sky. Where to and what for we don't know. We start to mine sweep soon after leaving our RON and continue at a walking pace until we arrive at the redball.

We sit and wait at the redball for a while, so it's number one that we are all expert at waiting. After about 30 minutes, the First and Third platoons arrive. We all move out together, heading west on the redball for about 10 kliks, and then we pull off the redball onto a dirt trail. The Second platoon is pulling up the rear, so we get to breathe all the diesel exhaust. No dust today, but it never really rained. It's just cloudy and overcast now. We proceed at a walking pace, so I assume we're mine sweeping, but I can't tell for sure because we are so far back in the procession. We continue for about an hour before the tanks and P.C.s start to spread out in a defensive formation. We set up in a line and wait for our orders.

2-5 Tango Charlie wants one crewman from each track to go on a patrol. 2-5 Tango Charlie tells Fanelli that we don't have to supply a man, because we're one crewman short. The first logical decision I'm aware of since I got here.

The patrol is supposed to look for dead or wounded NVA from when the Cobra gunships worked this area out this morning. They sent a tracking dog and his handler to find and follow blood trails. The patrol finally gets formed up, and they sky. We can listen to their sitreps over the horn as they keep 2-5 Tango Charlie informed as to their current situation. The tracking dog is an official army dog and looks to be a German Shepherd. Unlike our unofficial dogs, which look like mutts. The patrol, along with the tracking dog, are finding boo coo blood trails, which makes it number ten. But it makes me feel number one about not being on this patrol.

It's close enough to lunch time that I start looking through our opened case of c-rats. Fanelli still has some Ramen, but it can't last much longer. Fanelli mans the .50 Cal. while the loader and I have our c-rat lunch. Because it's not

raining, the transistor radios are out in force. I can only hear Fanelli's radio since the tracks are spread at least 50 feet apart. After my lunch I relieve Fanelli from behind the .50 Cal. Fanelli's radio was set so loud that I couldn't hear the patrol's sitreps, but now that I'm up on the turret I can hear them both.

The patrol has found and followed several blood trails. But so far they haven't found any NVA, dead, wounded, or otherwise. Someone in the platoon is still teasing Charlie Brown over the horn about the contents of the package from mail call yesterday. Charlie Brown, being the TC of the screw-up track, is expert at suffering teasing. It will be a while before he gives in, if ever.

The teasing of Charlie Brown reminds Fanelli about the brochures for porn that we all got on mail call yesterday. He drops into the turret and comes back out with the .50 Cal. ammo box he keeps some of his personal items in. Fanelli pulls out all the brochures he has received since being in the Nam. He has at least a dozen, and he hands a couple to the loader and me. The brochures themselves are so explicit, they would probably be illegal back in the Real World. The loader wonders aloud why anyone would actually buy any when they send you pictures for free. Fanelli has to point out that some guys like pictures of naked women a tee tee bit bigger. The pictures are really only about 1/2 inch by 1/2 inch. Although it's boo coo clear what they are, I'd need a microscope for them to get me excited.

We continue to monitor the patrol's progress, but after about 2 hours, the sitreps end. It could be number ten for the patrol, but their horn battery probably died, which is boo coo common. They are close enough that we would hear the gunfire if they run into trouble. But we still worry about their safety. We wait for over an hour for the patrol to return, and they have nothing to report other than the horn battery died after 2 hours.

They found boo coo blood trails, but no dead or dying NVA. To us, this is no surprise. When a Cobra gunship flies over an area spraying it with gunfire from the mini-gun, it puts a bullet in every square foot of the ground it passes over for an area the size of a football field. Unless you are under something protective, you are going to get hit for sure. Xin loi!

It's getting late in the afternoon, and we need to sky for resupply soon, or we will have to set up in the dark again. We hate that. The Second platoon brought up the rear on the way here, so we are ordered to lead the way back to the redball. Someone's in a hurry, so we don't mine sweep. I don't mind

except when I have to lead. We make good time and get to the redball in less than half an hour. We head east on the redball towards Cam-lo, so Fanelli has hopes of resupply by Cam-lo. We are boo coo far from Cam-lo, and we pull off the redball the same place we had resupply yesterday, so we know there will be no local villagers at resupply. Xin loi, Fanelli. No Ramen today.

We circle up with all three platoons, so it's boo coo big with the convoy of deuce and a halfs parked in the center. We see no new faces, so that means still no LT or platoon Sgt. for the Second platoon. All we get on resupply today is our two cases of c-rats. That part of resupply is easily finished.

We are all still off of the hot chow, but we go to mail call. A couple guys get goodie boxes from home, so unless they share the contents, there will be boo coo teasing about inflatable dolls over the horn again.

We head back to 2-3 and start making our dinner. Fanelli has one of his last few Ramen, and I can tell he is extremely anxious about his Ramen situation. The loader and I opt for c-rats as usual, and soon the three of us are having our dinner.

Mostly we miss our chats with Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother. But the Ramen and bread were also number one. We have to throw boo coo amounts of stuff away now that we can't give any of it away.

Our dinner being over, we on 2-3 are ready to sky for our RON. But we have to wait for the order from 2-5 Tango Charlie. 2-5 Tango Charlie, being new to being in charge, is slow getting us to our RON lately. We hate that. We can hear Higher giving 2-5 Tango Charlie the coordinates for our RON. Since 2-3 is the platoon Sgt.'s tank, we have a stack of three radios. *Higher* and *Higher Higher* and *Higher Higher Higher*, so we can listen to just about everything. We can hear the horn transmissions of the Cobras and Snoopy and Puff the Magic Dragon all the time, if we want to.

2-5 Tango Charlie is probably looking over his maps trying to figure out how to get to our RON. Soon the order comes to uncircle and line up behind 2-5. 2-5 Tango Charlie heads west on the redball, and we travel about 2 kliks before we pull off on a dirt trail. We stop momentarily to start mine sweeping, and we proceed at a walking pace for at least 30 minutes before we arrive at our intended site. As usual, we drive around in circles to flatten all the vegetation. Then most of us dismount and go over the area looking for any and all tunnels. Our luck holds (what there is of it), as we find no tunnels. Orders are given to put out our night defenses. Also, word goes around that because we know there are NVA in the area, as evidenced by all the blood

trails found today, tonight we are going to have a Mad Minute.

The loader and I are elated that we already get to try out our fake mini-gun.

Fanelli, having seen it before, tee tee less excited. But to add a little more smoke to our smoke and mirrors mini-gun, he gets on the horn and calls Charlie Brown, who happens to be parked next to us.

Fanelli starts teasing him about his inflatable doll. "Double Deuce Tango Charlie, this is 2-3 Golf, over."

"2-3 Golf, this is Double Deuce Tango Charlie, over", says Charlie Brown.

"Charlie Brown, how's that new girlfriend working out for you? Over," asks Fanelli.

"Negative on that, 2-3 Golf. Don't know what yer talkin' 'bout, over," replies Charlie Brown.

"Okay, Charlie Brown, be that way," says Fanelli. He continues, "Listen up. The real reason I called was to make sure you don't miss our mini-gun working out tonight during the mike-mike, over."

"Roger that, Fanelli. I can't wait to see that. But I won't be holding my breath either, over," replies Charlie Brown.

"Yeah, we had to slowly order extra ammo over the last few days on resupply for the mini-gun. Didn't want the armorer getting suspicious that we're the ones who have the mini-gun off the Cobra," says Fanelli.

"Fanelli, you must be smoking some dinky dao tobacco or maybe something even stronger, over," replies Charlie Brown.

"Just make sure you watch tonight is all I'm gonna say, out," says Fanelli.

I'm putting out the claymores as I listen to Charlie Brown and Fanelli sparring over the horn, and even though I'm distracted, everything goes number one. It's still a tee tee bit light out as I start to set up my tent and put my stretcher and sleeping bag inside. It's full dark as I finish with my tent and Fanelli and the loader finish tying the tarp to the side of 2-3.

Fanelli gets behind the .50 Cal. half in and half out of the turret while the loader and I get into the turret with the red lights on. We're both boo coo pumped up about our fake mini-gun. If it works like Fanelli says, Charlie Brown is going to be impressed.

We joke around and tease each other as we work on acquiring our night vision. 2-5 Tango Charlie must have an itchy trigger finger, because it's only been dark about 15 or 20 minutes when he orders the Second platoon to prepare for the Mad Minute. He had to have heard Fanelli and Charlie Brown

talking over the horn about the mini-gun, and he like everyone wants to see what we have.

I climb out of the turret and go to the front of 2-3 to push down the RPG screen, then open my hatch cover and climb into the driver's compartment. I drop my seat all the way down and close my hatch. I'm going to have to watch our fake mini-gun through my three vision blocks. The vision blocks are like tee tee periscopes on a submarine. My vision is boo coo limited, so I hope to be able to see our show. If it looks number one to me, it will be really impressive for everyone else. The main gun is always loaded with a can round, and we always fire that right at the start of the Mad Minute. If there is anyone or anything up to 200 feet in front of us, or even further depending on the vegetation, they or it are no more.

Everything after that is just for show. And a show it is when Fanelli starts to fire the coax with the two belts of all tracer ammo we made up this morning. He moves the coax up and down while firing it in boo coo long bursts, and it looks exactly like a mini-gun. We get boo coo questions and comments over the horn about how number one it was. Wack wants to know how we did it since his M-60 uses the same ammo as the coax. It's a tee tee bit exhilarating for a while, but it's early still, and we being a three man crew have to stay up to midnight. After the finish of the Mad Minute, Fanelli climbs down off the turret while the loader replaces him, and we put the RPG screen back up.

After we get it back up, I climb back into the driver's compartment so I can relax in the only comfortable place I have. I can stretch out in my seat, and because I kept my commo helmet on during the Mad Minute my ears aren't ringing. I can sort of hear Fanelli and the loader talking in the turret. We're both boo coo complimentary towards Fanelli about the fake mini-gun. It looked so real, and that's number one if we are being watched. And we know we are.

"If we get hit tonight, Charlie is not going to attack the RON in front of 2-3. And that," says Fanelli, "was exactly the point of doing it. Smoke and mirrors."

The loader and I are considered cherries, because we haven't been in a firefight yet. Fanelli has been in firefights, and he says they always attack one of the three tanks first to try to put the main gun out of commission. Knowing this new tee tee bit of information is not comforting to either the loader or me, but Fanelli reminds us about the fake mini-gun and says if we get hit, it

will be one of the other 2 tanks. Xin loi, guys! A tee tee consolation for us.

We spend the next couple of hours telling stories, and I tell Fanelli, "No scary stories!" Especially since it been dark know for hours and is The Scary Time here in the Nam.

I'm able to nap off and on in my driver's seat a tee tee bit until finally it's midnight, and I can make my way to my tent mostly by feel along the side of 2-3. I crawl in and cover my face with part of my sleeping bag, and that's the last thing I remember.

*June 12, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Sage Brush*

*After loading up this morning commenced pulling up the hill which took us nearly all forenoon. Found some beautiful specimens.*

*No accidents except the turning over of one of the wagons which was soon righted again as all that was broke at it was the tongue.*

*Marched along table land all afternoon. Camped in the river bottom on a small creek. No wood, have to use sage brush for cooking which is in plenty.*

*Detailed for guard. We hardly have time to wash ourselves as we camp late at night and leave early in the morning. All very tired.*

*15 miles today. Warm.*

March 10, 1970
Tuesday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m. for my turn at guard. I got a couple of cat naps in my driver's seat before going to bed last night, so even though I only had 4 hours of sleep, I feel as well rested as I ever feel here in the Nam. It's not pitch black as I start my stint at guard duty behind the .50 Cal. I can't wait for 6 a.m. so I can make some coffee. As I look around and up in the sky, I realize I can see some stars, so maybe yesterday didn't mean monsoon is not over. It's certainly warm already, and I'm sweating enough that I have to mop my brow occasionally with my handkerchief.

I have a couple of Cokes left, but I'm sort of off warm cokes for now. My stint at guard finally ends at 6 a.m. with the first hints of daylight. I cannot

fully relate the amount of relief we all feel once it starts getting light out, indicating the end of The Scary Time. I think that's one of the reasons I prefer last shift of guard duty. I experience that feeling of relief as soon as possible every morning. It's also number one to see the sun again after monsoon, which I hope is over.

I jump down off of the turret of 2-3, and I have my C-4 lit but the water in my canteen cup hasn't started to boil yet. From opposite directions, both Wack and Charlie Brown show up. Visits to 2-3 are always rare, but since the departure of Our Dear Platoon Sgt., it's currently considered safe to stop by 2-3 for a chat. If you don't mind being razzed about consorting with dog robbers.

Of course they both want to know about the fake mini-gun. Our chatting wakes Fanelli and the loader, so they both get up. I'm surprised that Wack and Charlie Brown can't figure out what we did on their own, so we have a tee tee bit of fun by not letting on right away. Charlie Brown's dog, Snoopy, followed him to 2-3. He is snuffling around the loader, who is snuffling around in an open case of c-rats for his breakfast. Snoopy knows all about c-rats, and so he waits patiently as the loader opens and then heats his chosen c-rat. Snoopy knows none of us ever finish a whole can of c-rats. His patience is rewarded when the loader has had his fill and dumps the rest on the ground for Snoopy, who snarfs it down in one bite. He's boo coo expert at eating off the ground and barely eats any dirt.

Fanelli works on Charlie Brown about his package, as he has not yet revealed the contents.

Fanelli says, "OK Charlie Brown, we'll tell how we did the fake mini-gun for a tee tee look-see in your goodie box."

"Negative on that, Fanelli," says Charlie Brown, and he abruptly turns and skys back to Double Deuce, closely followed by Snoopy. After Charlie Brown didis, we tell Wack how we did it. Now he's all excited, because he realizes he can do the same thing with his M-60. We point out it took the three of us about 45 minutes to make up the two all tracer ammo belts. It would be doubtful that his TC on 2-4, Sgt. Green, will let him do it. I know Our Dear Platoon Sgt. wouldn't have allowed us to do it if he were still here.

Wack skys for 2-4, and the rest of the Second platoon start the task of cleaning all of our weapons after last night's Mad Minute.

Besides bread and milk, we all miss chocolate, and that's what Fanelli was hoping was in Charlie Brown's package. A couple of Hershey bars would be

number one right about now. We only have two kinds of chocolate available to us, and both are number ten. In some of the c-rat meal boxes is a round disk about 3/8 of an inch thick and about 2 1/2 inches in diameter. It looks like a chocolate covered candy bar with some sort of white filling. I will say it is sweet tasting as you bite into it. However, it is so hard you can't bite all the way through. At least I can't. It only looks like a candy bar, and its nickname is the “John Wayne Bar”. After a few failed attempts at eating them, I finally gave it up.

One day I asked Fanelli why they were called John Wayne Bars?

Fanelli laughs and says, "Because only John Wayne can eat them. We could probably just leave some laying around for Charlie to find. Deadlier than a land mine."

Worse yet is the Hershey Tropical Chocolate bar that comes in the sundry pack we get about once a week. The sundry pack is mostly cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and some cheap cigars. There is also more toilet paper, so we don't have to open a c-rat meal box just to get the toilet paper out. And then there is the Hershey Tropical Chocolate bar. If you have ever tried to eat bakers chocolate, then you know what the Hershey Topical Chocolate tastes like, and it isn't chocolate. It's harder than a rock, bitter, and only faintly smells of chocolate. I don't think even John Wayne could eat the Hershey Tropical bar. At least the John Wayne Bar is sweet.

After spending the first part of the morning cleaning all the weapons, the Second platoon is slow to get going this morning, and it's no wonder. It's already about 90 degrees, and I don't even want to talk about the humidity. 2-5 Tango Charlie is still cutting his teeth at being in charge of the Second platoon. We hate that.

We hang loose (both ways) at our RON until about 10 a.m. Part of the time I sit in my driver's compartment and make some entries in my journal to waste some time but mostly to stay out of the sun. Finally orders come over the horn to prepare to break camp. I bring in my claymores and the trip flares, roll up the detonator wire for the claymores, and stow it all in one of the few storage compartments we have. The loader brings in the concertina wire, and I help him take down the RPG screen while Fanelli keeps us covered with the .50 Cal. The loader climbs up on the turret and gets half way in the loader's hatch as I climb into the driver's compartment, put on my commo helmet, and start up 2-3. Fanelli guides me back, and we follow 2-5 at a walking pace while we mine sweep our way to the redball.

It takes about 30 minutes to get to the redball where we stop mine sweeping and head west at about 15 mph. The breeze I'm getting is number one. It's a tee tee bit before 11 a.m. when we start driving on the redball, and as we move along we catch up with the First and Third platoons, and we start a process of stopping and going instead of just going.

The breeze I was getting at 15 mph is gone as we proceed at 5 to 10 mph for a couple of minutes, and then we stop for a couple of minutes. We are boo coo far back in the vehicle procession, so we can't see what all the stopping is about. There's no sound of gunfire and nothing alarming being reported over the horn. But we keep stopping in places where we are sitting ducks, which is something the whole Second platoon is becoming expert at. We hate that.

At about noon, we stop and are ordered to space the tracks at 50 foot intervals with the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times and to be ready to move out at a moment’s notice. As we drove on the redball, there has been boo coo chopper activity around and ahead of us the whole time. One Huey loach has been whizzing up and down the path of the redball at just a tee tee bit above treetop level all morning. We have spotted it at least 6 or 7 times this morning, so when the Huey lands on the redball between a couple of the tracks ahead of us, we think nothing of it.

Since it appears we'll be here a while, I decide to heat up some c-rats for my lunch. I rummage around in the open case of c-rats for my least hated c-rat meal, currently the Spiced Beef. I grab some C-4 and start heating my lunch.

I can hear that Fanelli is saying something to me, but even though I had my commo helmet on during the Mad Minute, my hearing is bad again. I think he is just trying to distract me while I'm heating up my c-rats so it will pop out of the can right onto the ground.

Ha! Ha! Nice try, Fanelli. I continue heating my c-rats, carefully adjusting the temperature by moving the can closer to or farther away from the flame of the burning C-4.

C-4 makes boo coo noise when it burns, so I don't hear the officer from the Huey loach walk up behind me. But I do hear him when he says, "Did you know that stuff costs $600 dollars a stick?" referring to the C-4.

I know it's against Regs to use C-4 for cooking, but everyone, and I mean everyone, does it. I stand up from my hunker to find I'm looking face-to-face with a Full Bird Colonel. Too late to salute now. That would probably only make it worse. Anyway, no one salutes in the field, and there's no way they're

going to send me to the rear for cooking with C-4.

I'm feeling cocky, so I reply to his question, "No, Sir. I was told it is $1000 a stick."

I continue, "You see this tank here. I'm told they are $500,000 each, and it's my second one in two weeks."

To say that this colonel is strack is like saying the pope is Catholic. Full Bird Colonels have only one focus in life, and that's to make General. If they don't make General in a timely fashion, it's considered an insult, and they usually retire. This Full Bird is already dressing the part of a General. Usually colonels stick strictly with proper uniform, whereas Generals sometimes dress a tee tee bit flashy with such things as two silver and pearl handled revolvers. Like we're playing Cowboys and Indians. This Full Bird has only one silver and pearl handled revolver. Probably waiting to make General before he gets the second revolver.

This is my first time being smart alecky with an officer, let alone a Full Bird Colonel, so I don't know what to expect for my insolence. But I don't care anymore.

He says nothing further and just walks away. When the Full Bird is out of earshot, I hear Fanelli laughing.

Fanelli then says, "I tried to warn you that he was coming. Man," he chuckles, "I almost lost it when you told him you thought the C-4 cost a grand instead of 600 bucks!"

We have driven down this part of the redball in the past, and we're boo coo close to where we saw a tiger when I was an excess crewman on 2-4. We're stopped in a place where once again we are sitting ducks. We hate that!

On one side of the road the jungle goes uphill, and on the other side the jungle goes downhill. The uphill side is the one we're most concerned with. It's number ten to get in a firefight when Charlie is uphill from us.

We seem to rely on luck boo coo too often, I think. Fanelli says it's all luck. If you're in a number ten situation, good luck can sometimes get you out of it. Although, admittedly, skill doesn't hurt.

"But the army wants us to think it's all about skill," says Fanelli.

He continues, "Skill will not help you when some FNG is behind you with his M-16 on Rock and Roll, and he has the safety off, and his finger on the trigger, and he stumbles, causing him to fire off several rounds into your skilled, but unlucky, back."

"Good luck or bad luck, it's all just luck," he finishes.

I'll keep that in mind. Given my current situation, I don't feel very lucky.

Our current luck holds as orders come over the horn to prepare to move out. I climb into my driver's compartment and start the engine on 2-3 while Fanelli and the loader position themselves up on the turret. We sit for a few minutes, but eventually we are on the move. Pretty soon we're going about 15 mph and the breeze blowing into my driver's compartment is number one again.

I'm boo coo comfortable sitting between the main gun ammo now. I lean on it, eat off it, and rest my head on it, to the point that I hardly think about it being boo coo dangerous stuff, which it definitely is.

2-5 Tango Charlie has said nothing to us on 2-3 about today's mission, but he may know nothing more than us. There's been a lot of chopper activity around us and within earshot of us, besides the Full Bird Colonel and his Huey loach. As usual, they don't tell us where we are going or why, so we just follow orders no matter how stupid they seem. I guess I could have asked the Full Bird what was going on, but it was more satisfying to be a smart aleck.

We stop a couple of times for a few minutes, and then we sky up at 15 mph for some long periods. The breeze is a real life saver for me in this heat. It must be 90 degrees today, and all we have to drink is warm water and warm Coke. The redball is quite shaded in places, and when I can see we're slowing down to stop, I always try to get 2-3 in the shade so we don't have to sit right out in the tropical sun. This time of day, the sun is number ten up on the turret. Depending on where the sun is, I can be in the shade sometimes, but Fanelli and the loader being up on the turret are out in the sun unless we stop in the shade.

There is quite a bit of horn chatter as we stop and go on the redball. That's all we've done this afternoon and late morning. Charlie Brown is still being razzed about his possible inflatable doll, as he still won't reveal the contents of his package. Some guys are just gluttons for punishment I think.

I haven't been paying attention to my odometer to see how far we've driven, but I know we're farther west on the redball than I've ever been before. It's mountainous with high vertical inclines on one side and a sheer drop in places on the other side. Very lush jungle covered terrain, just the kind of stuff that Charlie loves and we hate. Besides going up and down, the redball curves all over the place, so we can never see very far ahead. We don't know why we're stopping, except that the track directly in front has

stopped. No radio chatter about anything number ten up ahead, so we just stop and wait to move on again.

It's getting to be late afternoon, and if we're going to have resupply, we need to be turning around soon. If we're staying around here somewhere, the resupply convoy can't make it all the way here and back to the rear before dark. We continue heading west, and word comes over the horn there will be no resupply today.

The three platoons separate to set up our RONs. We in the Second platoon sit on the redball for a while as 2-5 Tango Charlie looks over his map coordinates to figure out which way to go for our RON. He orders the rest of the Second platoon to follow 2-5, and we sky. No resupply is number ten, because we shot up a boo coo lot of ammo during the Mad Minute last night. Both Fanelli and I hate it when we have less than our maximum base load of ammo on 2-3. No resupply is really number ten for the guys who actually eat the hot chow.

We don't drive very far, and 2-5 Tango Charlie pulls off the redball at a trail and has someone dismount and start mine sweeping. 2-3 is so far back, I can't see who's mine sweeping, but I know it's not Smitty so that's number one. It's boo coo dense jungle here, and if it doesn't get more open than this, it's going to be a number ten place to set up our RON.

Before too long we get to a good sized open area. Looks almost like there has been a forest fire or something here, and I say so over the intercom.

I can hear Fanelli laughing over the intercom, "The ROKs must have camped here not long ago."

The ROKs, from South Korea, operate around us sometimes. Most people don't know they're involved in this war. It's number one our site's open, but everything has been burned to a cinder so when we walk around to look for tunnels, we kick up black dust that swirls around and covers us and everything, and that's number ten. We almost hope to find tunnels so we have an excuse to set up somewhere else, even though it's too late for that.

We find no tunnels, and so we start putting out our night defenses. I put out the trip flares and the claymores while the loader puts out the concertina wire and then starts putting up the RPG screen. Fanelli leaves his post behind the .50 Cal. to help the loader. I take his place and connect the detonators up to the claymores and hang them on the bullet shield behind the .50 Cal. Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3, and then the loader relieves me from behind the .50 Cal. so I can set up my tent.

After I have my tent up, I carefully put my stretcher in so as to not raise any black dust. Then I slip my sleeping bag in the tent. Fanelli and the loader and many other guys in the Second platoon are going to sleep on the ground tonight on all this black dust. It's going to be number ten for all of them.

It's just about full dark, so Fanelli and I get into the turret and turn on the red lights while the loader is at the TC position behind the .50 Cal. We're still a three man crew, so it's stay up till midnight until we start our guard.

We all have black smears on our faces and hands already, so we look even eerier than usual in the red light inside the turret. The black smears get even worse when we slather ourselves with bug juice for the night. It's just between the loader and Fanelli to decide on first and second shift on guard, as they know I'll take last shift. We chat for a couple of hours and make it without any scary stories from Fanelli. At midnight I decide to call it a day and climb out of the turret. I make my way, mostly by feel, to my tent. I am boo coo glad to have my stretcher so I don't have to sleep in dirt burned to ashes. The bugs correct any thoughts I have about sleeping without their assistance. I hate that!

*April 10, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Supply*

*This morning packed away stores in large tent.*
*Train left for agency.*
*Toothache again all night, could scarcely sleep. Tried to catch some fish but broke through the ice and got a wetting for my pains and thought I would never go fishing again. Went to hospital steward to get tooth pulled.*
*When I got there he was eating dinner. Asked him to pull it or give me something to fix it so it would not ache. Told me he would as soon as he had his tooth fixed (meaning as soon as he had his dinner). Went back soon after and had it pulled.*
*First one I ever had pulled and thought it pretty rough work, but feel first rate.*
*A Company will stay here, this place being fixed as a supply camp.*
*E Company came in today marching in sets of four. Sergeants caps on side of head.*
*Fellow that came up with us made First Sergeant. Coming up pretty fast,*

*got it by dog robbing though.*

*Raining with a vengeance while I am writing. Some of the boys have a banjo and are playing in the next row of tents. Sounds like old times.*

March 11, 1970
Wednesday
Quang Tri Province

I'm awakened by the loader for my stint at guard. It's been a week since Our Dear Platoon Sgt. deserted us for a REMF job, and the only time we miss him is during guard duty. I need something to wake me up so before I get behind the .50 Cal. I go to the bustle rack and grab one of my last Cokes out of the thermo chests. It's warm, but so is everything now that it seems monsoon is over at last. I hope.

It's not complete pitch black as I stand behind the .50 Cal. half in and half out of the turret. I call in my sitreps every 15 minutes while I sip my Coke. After having the Coke, I can easily wait for my morning java fix at daylight. The sky is clear enough that I can see around inside of the RON a tee tee bit.

The surrounding area is too dense to see through even at daylight, but when the ROKs left, and probably while they were here, they cleared a boo coo larger area than we need. So there is still some open ground between the jungle and the start of our trip flares and claymores. This whole RON is like walking around in a fire pit after the fire is out. Black dust swirls around our feet with every step we take. Because most of us are slathered with bug juice, we have black smears all over our face and hands. We look like we're getting ready to do a minstrel show in black face. Even the Brothers aren't dark enough to not have the burned dirt and ashes show on their face and hands.

Finally 6 a.m. arrives, and it's light enough to climb down off of 2-3 with a chunk of C-4 and my canteen cup. I fill my canteen cup and light the C-4 and the noise wakes both Fanelli and the loader, and they are up before my water boils. They both stand there, and we look at each other. This is the worst we have ever looked since being in the field. Fanelli especially, because he tries to maintain a strack appearance. He is miserable. We are often covered in mud or dust but nothing is as number ten as this ash pit RON. We hope we don't hang loose here too long.

We're boo coo far from base camp, and we didn't get resupplied yesterday. We on 2-3 need supplies, including fuel and ammo and of course, Ramen.

Xin loi, Fanelli!

Fanelli has heated his water and the loader has heated his chosen c-rat for breakfast when Johnson shows up. We haven't seen him for quite a while, and I have been throwing the Ham and Eggs c-rats in our burn hole lately. Even so, we still have a couple of cans accumulated already. I'm just getting my pecan roll from our open case of c-rats, so I toss him one as he arrives. He opens it right up and starts to eat it cold. He explains that since no one but him eats the Ham and Eggs, he doesn't need to walk any further than one track on either side of his for Ham and Eggs except if we don't get resupplied. I don't tell him how many Ham and Eggs I just threw away yesterday, because I hate to see people cry. I offer him a second can, and he accepts but saunters off with it.

It's probably just force of habit, as no one likes to hang around the 2-3 (it being the platoon Sgt.'s tank) even though we have no platoon Sgt. currently. Plus, guys don't like to be seen with anyone thought to be dog robbers.

Everyone must be complaining about this place, because we have barely finished our breakfasts when 2-5 Tango Charlie gets on the horn and orders the Second platoon to prepare to break camp. We can't get out of here fast enough for me. I hustle out to get my claymores and trip flares. Being in a tee tee bit of a hurry causes me to set off most of my trip flares. It's like a domino effect. Once I set off one trip flare, I usually set off one or more of the others in running over to kick out the first one. At least it gives Fanelli and the loader something to laugh about. Not much else here in the Nam to laugh about. After messing with the trip flares, I am just about covered in black dust. I look like a coal miner, and we have no prospects of being able to clean off today. We hate that!

I use our drinking water to rinse my face and hands off, and then wash and rinse them again. Tee tee better. Mostly I just smeared the ashes around. I don't even want to think about what the ROKs poured all over this place to get even dirt to burn. I'm really careful when I take my tent down and when picking up my stretcher so they hardly get any ash on them. Number one for something finally.

After securing all our gear on 2-3, I climb into the driver's compartment and Fanelli and the loader get up on the turret. I put on my commo helmet on, start 2-3, and wait for Fanelli to guide me back. All the burn holes have been set on fire, and they're going boo coo good with billows of black diesel smoke. As the tracks start moving around, kicking up boo coo amounts of

black ash, a more Hellish sight could not be imagined.

Sitting down low compared to Fanelli and the loader, I am engulfed in all the dust, ash, and smoke so that I can hardly breathe. It's number one that we are close to the redball. When we uncircle and line up behind 2-5 Tango Charlie, it's just like old times except there is no LT, just our acting platoon Sgt., who has one of his side gunners mine sweep our way back to the redball.

When we get to the redball, 2-5 turns east towards Cam-lo and base camp and starts going about 15 mph. All the dust blows off boo coo fast, and soon I'm getting a number one dust-free breeze in my face as we proceed on the redball.

We drove boo coo far away from our normal area of operation yesterday and used up a lot of fuel. We're going to have to meet resupply either halfway or all the way to our normal area of operation. Unlike yesterday, we are driving by ourselves, just the Second platoon single file heading east on the redball. No stopping and going, stopping and going like yesterday. Today, so far, it's been all going. It's number one to have the breeze from driving 15 mph in this heat.

Yesterday when we stopped, we could hear and sometimes see the Slicks flying around with their door gunners quite visible, and we could see the dust off choppers going back and forth so something was going on. But they tell us nothing. Yesterday we drove boo coo far out of our normal area of operation for what and for why we do not know, and now it seems we are heading back after doing nothing more than driving there. War is weird.

It's not noon yet, but we stop for a break so the track drivers can walk around and check their tracks after a long fast drive and so the crews can have lunch if they want. Fanelli only has a couple of Ramen left, but he plans on eating them until they're gone, so it's Ramen for his lunch. He's hoping we'll resupply near Cam-lo. So far 2-5 Tango Charlie hasn't said where resupply is. So Fanelli heats his water with C-4 while the loader and I heat up our chosen c-rat meal for our lunch. No Full Bird Colonels to bother us about breaking Regs for using C-4 to cook today.

It's hot, and there's no shade where we stopped, but we're not sure how long we'll be here for our break or we would put up our poncho for some shade. Fanelli gets on the horn to 2-5 Tango Charlie to get a sitrep on how long we're going to be here. 2-5 Tango Charlie says we're waiting for the Third platoon to meet us, and he thinks another 30 minutes at least. That's

long enough to justify putting the poncho up.

When I take the poncho out of one of the storage lockers, directly underneath it is the canvas shower bucket I almost threw away when outfitting the Old 2-3. I grab it too, and after I help Fanelli put up the poncho, I walk to the back of 2-3 and get the water jug. I get some soap, a clean t-shirt, and a clean pair of jungle fatigue pants out of my thermo chest and head for the front of 2-3. We are out in the middle of nowhere, but we're not too modest to take a shower in public if we have to. This is probably a number ten place to take a shower, but I don't care anymore. I feel and look like crap being covered in ash for all night and half the day. I strip down to my birthday suit, fill the canvas shower bucket with our very warm drinking water, and I hang it from the end of the main gun barrel. It is number one. The water is warmer than the showers in the rear at base camp. I am finally able to rinse all the grit out of my eyes. The shower bucket worked boo coo good, and the loader is already waiting for his turn.

Fanelli is threatening the loader to not use all the water. He wants a shower too. They both better hope the Third platoon doesn't show up soon. I'm in no hurry to get dressed, so I towel off in the heat of the sun and revel in the feeling of being clean. It is number one. Both Fanelli and the loader get showers before we have to move out.

We finally get moving again with the arrival of the Third platoon, and so we sky for resupply. We drive non-stop again at about 15 mph with the Second platoon in the lead and the Third platoon bringing up the rear. By going at least 15 mph, I get a number one breeze blowing in my face. And I've got a comfortable seat despite the intense heat of the day.

We arrive at one of the resupply sites just off the redball. It is about 5 kliks west of Cam-lo, so it's doubtful any of the locals will show up. Xin loi, Fanelli. No Ramen to buy today. The First platoon is already there, and so the Second and Third platoons fill the gaps. We have a boo coo big area enclosed by the tracks and the concertina wire. That's number ten for us, because we didn't resupply yesterday so today we have to unload, unpack, and load up two days worth of supplies and ammo before we can sky to mail call or hot chow.

Hot chow is a big If. But after mail call, we want to saunter over to the hot chow line and mingle with the rest of the Second platoon, who still look like members of a minstrel show.

First we unpack the main gun ammo we ordered to make up for the Mad

Minute and stow it in the driver's compartment. Whenever we have less than our base load of main gun ammo we try to keep the turret main gun storage spaces full. That way, once in a while, I have some extra space to move around in the driver's compartment. Fanelli already topped off the coax ammo box with real ammo instead of our fake mini-gun ammo belts, so all we need to do is stow the full ammo boxes for the coax and the .50 Cal.

While Fanelli and the loader do that, I top off the fuel tank. I put the most fuel I ever have into 2-3. We drove boo coo far there and back, and it's number one to have the fuel tank full again. We finish with our duties of resupply.

The loader and I go to mail call while Fanelli mans the .50 Cal. Most of the platoon members are at mail call, so our clean faces go unnoticed because the First and Third platoon didn't have to RON last night in an ash pit like the Second platoon did. It takes a while for the mail clerk to call out all the names of the lucky guys who get mail today. It turns out to be worth the wait, as I am one of the lucky guys who gets mail today. I get a letter from Annette H., who is the sister of my best friend Jerry H. from back in the Real World. Annette is a senior in high school, and letters from the Real World are always number one, but even better from attractive young women. I save Annette's letter to read later, as it's so number one to get mail you don't even have to read it to feel boo coo good about it.

The loader and Fanelli get no mail, so the loader and I saunter over to the hot chow, mostly to show off our clean white faces. There were so many guys at mail call, it was overlooked there. That is not the case when we get in line behind Wack, Zack, and Big Al. Actually Steve is there too, but I didn't recognize him at first in black face. We act nonchalant about our cleanliness.

"Where did you guys get a shower?" asks Wack.

"Some guys just know how to be clean livin' and strack, Wack!" I reply.

The loader and I have a tee tee bit of fun with the guys before we let on about our canvas shower bucket. The hot chow, as always, is not worth eating, so mostly we just push it around on our paper plate with our little plastic forks while we joke around, waiting to be excused from the dinner table. Since there is no dinner table to be excused from, the loader and I finally toss what's left of our dinner into the first burn hole we come to on our way back to 2-3.

As we approach, we can see Fanelli talking to someone wearing brand new jungle fatigues. It's not like Fanelli to casually chat with FNGs, but it turns

out this particular FNG is our new platoon Sgt.

I can tell right off before he says a word that he's a Lifer by the way he has his mustache trimmed. Facial hair of any sort is still largely frowned upon, but mustaches are allowed by current Regs. Mustaches cannot extend past or below the corner of your mouth, so if you have a mustache that meets Regs it makes most guys, and that would include our new platoon Sgt., look like Adolph Hitler.

Most guys like me that have a mustache grow it beyond and below the corner of our mouth, especially the Heads. If you're a head, mustaches are a must. Even if it looks like you could wash your mustache off with warm water. In the Second platoon, Bishop has such a bushy mustache, you can't even see his mouth. I think it is called a walrus mustache. I not only have mustache that doesn't conform to Regs, I also haven't shaved in five days. Right now my beard isn't too noticeable. But it will be soon. It's always interesting to me that with all the life and death situations we face almost daily, the Lifers feel that they personally have it so “together” that they can concern themselves with the personal hygiene of others. We sometimes barely have enough water to drink, so I think that some of us not shaving would be a non-issue. We don't salute officers in the field, and smoking pot is sort of a non-issue, but growing a beard for the Lifers is number ten.

I expect to have problems with our new platoon Sgt. in the future, but he seems friendly enough now, even if he looks like Hitler. At least it will be number one to have a full crew during guard duty again. Four hours of sleep starts to feel like poking yourself in the eye with a sharp stick after a while. Fanelli takes our new platoon Sgt. over to meet 2-5 Tango Charlie, our acting platoon Sgt. until now.

Fanelli leaves our new platoon Sgt. at 2-5 before returning to 2-3. The only thing Fanelli picked up from our new platoon Sgt. before our return to 2-3 was that he is a Lifer.

I have a boo coo good laugh about that epiphany. "Fanelli!" I say, "Look at that mustache. Only an idiot or a Lifer would grow a mustache that makes you look like Hitler.” But there I go repeating myself.

2-5 Tango Charlie fills in our new platoon Sgt. as to our intended RON and offers to lead the way tonight. Our new platoon Sgt. agrees to that and returns to 2-3. H tells us to prepare to didi the resupply site. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire while I climb into the driver's compartment and start the engine on 2-3. Fanelli and the loader finish tying

the concertina wire to the side of 2-3 and climb up on the turret.

Our new platoon Sgt. is at the TC position, so Fanelli sits half way in and half way out of the loaders hatch while the loader sits on some of our gear on the bustle rack. Our new platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and orders the Second platoon to uncircle and line up behind 2-5. He talks me back over the intercom, calling me "Driver." I hate that!

I pull up behind Double Deuce, and I can see Charlie Brown with his dog at his side and Smitty on one side with his M-60 and the FNG that shot up the First platoon on the other side. Double Deuce is definitely the screw up track. But we decide to let our new platoon Sgt. find that out for himself. Why ruin all the fun?

Charlie Brown is still mum on the contents of his package, so whatever it was, it's probably boo coo gone by now. Unless it really was an inflatable doll, which it couldn't be. If it were, the whole Second platoon would know by now, as you can't keep something like that a secret here in the Nam. We know boo coo more about each other than we would ever care to know. When and what you eat, when you fart, when you crap, etc., etc. Way more stuff than I ever want to know about anyone!

2-5 starts to move out, and we sky for our RON. 2-5 turns west on the redball and drives about a klik before turning off at a trail and stopping to let someone start mine sweeping. We proceed at a walking pace heading south into some boo coo dense jungle. So far this is a number ten place, and we hope our RON is more open than here. We follow 2-5 for about 30 minutes, and we arrive at a fairly open site surrounded by dense jungle. Not a number ten place, but not a number one place either. I don't think there are any number one RONs here in the Nam, but some are definitely worse than others.

After all the ash and burned dirt at the ROK RON, this place is closer to number one than number ten. We circle round and round flattening all the vegetation, and then most of us dismount to look for tunnels and anything number ten. Each track has someone behind the .50 Cal. because the jungle is so close and dense. We find no tunnels, and so we start putting out our night defenses.

Since our Dear Platoon Sgt. of the past did nothing to help set up at night, it seems natural for our new platoon Sgt. to do nothing except sit behind the .50 Cal. while Fanelli and the loader and I put our stuff out. When I hang the detonators for the claymores over the bullet shield around the .50 Cal., I

notice our new platoon Sgt. is not having a sundowner. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. of past would have been working on his second or third sundowner by now. At least, for now, our new platoon Sgt. appears to not be a juicer. Xin loi, Smitty!

Fanelli and the loader finish with the concertina wire and the RPG screen. While I'm up on the turret, I caution our new platoon Sgt. about the RPG screen, because some guys can forget it's there once it gets dark. When it's dark, you can't see it, and in the excitement of the moment, some guys have fired into the RPG screen. That can be number ten for anyone on either side of the RPG screen.

Because the RPG screen is a recent protective device being used here in the Nam, if no one has knocked down the RPG screen, we just blow it down by firing off the can round we keep chambered in the main gun. It totally destroys the RPG screen. But as it's just some cyclone fencing and a couple of engineer stakes, we can get another RPG screen on resupply the next day.

I tell our new platoon Sgt. that if he's going to blow down the RPG screen with the main gun, to wait until I am safely in the driver's compartment first. It would be number ten to be standing in front of the tank when the RPG screen is blown down by the main gun. Heck, it would be number ten to be standing in front of the tank when the main gun is fired, period!

Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3, and I set up my tent behind 2-3. I kept my sleeping bag separate from the other two, so mine isn't covered in ash. Now that we have a full four man crew, I'll have to share it. Fanelli and the loader are looking with disgust at their ash covered sleeping bags. I still don't know how most of the guys sleep directly on the ground. It must be some badge of honor unknown to me. It is definitely one badge that will not be awarded to me.

Our new platoon Sgt. claims to feel well rested and ready to get to playin' army by being on guard. He volunteers to take the first shift, and I offer to take last shift, so now it's just up to Fanelli and the loader to decide on second and third guard shift.

Our new platoon Sgt. climbs up on the turret of 2-3 and positions himself behind the .50 Cal. Fanelli and the loader climb into the turret, as it's just about full dark now, The Scary Time. Because the turret is full, but mostly because my driver's seat is the most comfortable place I have, I climb into the driver's compartment and turn on my red light. They have the red lights on in the turret as we all work on acquiring our night vision.

I have my letter from Annette H. that I open and read. Annette's still in high school, so it's number one that she writes me. When I was in high school, I knew some guys in the Nam, but I never thought about writing to them. No number ten news in Annette's letter, and it sounds as if all is well back in the Real World.

I'm half amused by her grammatical and spelling errors as it's really the thought that counts. However, I brought some red ink and a fountain pen with me to the Nam, thinking it would be a boo coo big joke to write letters home seemingly in blood. Even though we like body bag humor here in the Nam, pretending to write in blood no longer seems funny. But I realize I now have a use for my red ink, so I go over Annette's letter and correct all the spelling and grammatical errors. Then I write her a return letter, not in red ink, and put them both in an envelope to mail off tomorrow at mail call.

My work done here, and my night vision having been acquired, I climb out of my driver's compartment and make my way to my tent. I hope to catch up on some missed sleep now that we're a four man crew again. As always, the bugs have other thoughts. So much for the end of monsoon and any effect that would have on the bug situation. In truth it may have had some minor effect on the bugs, because I think they're tee tee worse now, if that's possible.

*June 26, 1876*
*Monday*
*Ft. Pease*

*This morning cold and rainy but afternoon cleared up and was very beautiful. About 3 o'clock p.m. a citizen (McCormick) with four cavalrymen came down the river in a small boat with the mail.*

*Received a letter from friend Cliff, J.D. Kintz. They tell me that the firm I have lent my money to have made an assignment. I am afraid it is lost. But even if it is, it is no use to cry over spilt milk. But money does not come easy.*

*Report states the Indians are raising the devil in the Black Hills. I wish they were all in I will not say where.*

March 12, 1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m., and despite the insect activity, I managed to get some sleep. It would be number one to be able to sleep some more, but I don't feel as weary as when we're doing guard as a three man crew. I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and drop half way into the turret behind the .50 Cal. I feel well rested enough that I don't need to drink a warm Coke to make it to first light.

I listen to the rest of the platoon call in their sitreps over the horn, and when my turn comes I call in mine.

I say, "This is 2-3 Delta, sitrep negative, over."

That is what you want everyone to say, and that's what everyone says now. That's number one when it's still dark and The Scary Time.

The Sgt. of the Guard replies to me after my sitrep, "Roger, 2-3 Delta, out."

It's not pitch dark, but close, as I can barely make out the silhouettes of the other tracks as I look around the RON from my perch. Soon it will be light, and I for one will sigh with relief as I do every day at first light. I snack on my cheese waffle crackers as I wait for it to get light. In lieu of potato chips the crackers are number one. I'm wondering if I can order more on resupply since I'm reluctant to hit another land mine just so I can go to the PX to buy more cheese waffle crackers. And that would be the only way I can get to the rear anytime soon. I bought quite a few tubes of crackers, but since I've been sharing them, they're going fast.

Finally it's 6 a.m., and it starts to get light. I feel a tee tee burst of energy as I make it through another night in the Nam. I jump down off of 2-3 with a chunk of C-4 and my canteen cup. As I heat up my canteen cup of water the rest of the crew are awakened and get up. It's not just the noise of my burning C-4, but some of the other crews are talking loud to each other, especially when some of them are stepping out in front of the .50 Cals and the main guns to answer their first call to nature for the day. Our new platoon Sgt. and Fanelli are both heating water to shave. Our new platoon Sgt., unlike our departed Dear Platoon Sgt., does actually need to shave, or he'd have a beard like me soon.

The loader is having his morning c-rat breakfast, and I'm having my usual pecan roll with my coffee. Our new platoon Sgt. doesn't drink or smoke, which is kind of number one since Our Dear Platoon Sgt. used to drink like a fish and smoke like a chimney even around the ammo. We hate that!

Our new platoon Sgt. marvels at our c-rat treasure chest, especially all the pound cakes we have accumulated. He takes one for his breakfast, and I really don't care, as we haven't been anywhere near enough to Cam-lo to barter for anything. I actually prefer the pecan roll for now, and because Fanelli and the loader don't like either, there's always boo coo amounts of both.

It's not a perfectly clear day but boo coo amounts of blue sky and sun. It's hot and humid. A number one kind of a day to drive up and down the redball at 15 mph for no other reason but to cool off a tee tee bit in the breeze. That's not going to happen, but it would be number one. Our new platoon Sgt. walks over to 2-5 to chat with 2-5 Tango Charlie about getting himself oriented on our maps.

He returns after a short while and gets on the horn to tell the Second platoon to prepare to didi. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares while Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen. We tie everything to the side of 2-3, and I climb into the driver's compartment and start the engine on 2-3. I put on my commo helmet and wait for my orders. The new platoon Sgt is letting 2-5 Tango Charlie lead the way, because he's not sure where we are yet. That's a comforting thought.

The tracks start to uncircle, and I back 2-3 up according to our new platoon Sgt.'s directions. We take our place behind 2-5, and we sky. Just like old times, except we still don't have an LT for the Second platoon. We slowly mine sweep our way to the redball. 2-5 turns west on the redball and we follow.

It's my dream come true, as we cruise at about 15 mph, and the breeze is number one. It is, however, not Fanelli's dream. By heading west we are getting even farther away from Cam-lo, dashing any hopes Fanelli had of getting more Ramen on resupply before he runs out (if he hasn't already). He had one for his breakfast, but it could have been his last. I have two Ramen left, I think, and I might have to give them to him, as I can't stand to see someone cry. And if I eat a Ramen in front of Fanelli when he has none, he will surely cry.

We're driving single file about 50 feet apart on a road that was cut into the side of a mountain. Dense jungle going up on one side and dense jungle going down on the other side. It's very lush and green with some very large trees that are maybe 100 ft tall surrounded by boo coo smaller trees. The rest of the space is filled with bushes and vines in every shade of green

imaginable. The vines and the bamboo are the two things that make it near impossible to just drive through the jungle with the tanks. I would appreciate the beautiful view more if I wasn't boo coo worried about being shot at, as this is a number ten place.

We drive non-stop for about 45 minutes when our new platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to halt and space out at 50 foot intervals with the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times. It's hot, so we ask our new platoon Sgt. about how long we might be here. He thinks maybe most of the day, so Fanelli and I rig the poncho over the .50 Cal. for some shade. We don't even mind taking our turn behind the .50 Cal., because it's the coolest place we have as we are directly out in the tropical sun here on the redball.

I'm wearing my palm frond hat as is the loader. Fanelli teases us without mercy again. So far our new platoon Sgt. hasn't said anything about my beard or my non-Reg hat. When we're not behind the .50 Cal., the other three of us move around the side and front of 2-3 trying to stay in the tee tee bit of shade provided by 2-3.

Fanelli has his transistor radio out, and the volume's cranked up to near full blast so we can hear it. We don't have to fight over which radio station to listen to as there is only one, the Armed Forces radio station. It's really our only source of news, and even that is highly filtered. Except for what our family and friends tell us about what's happening in the Real World in letters, the army tells us nothing about what's going on. They play my favorite song, the one by B.B. King. I still think the name of it is “The Grill is Gone”. It makes me dream about BBQ! Because my hearing is so bad, I don't know the name of it for sure. I hate that! They play “Midnight Rider” by the Allman Brothers next, and we all love that song boo coo. Mostly because we want to be Midnight Riding out of the Nam.

The rest of the morning passes uneventfully, and eventually we all have lunch. Fanelli is out of Ramen, so I give him the two I have left. I can tell it is unexpected. He loves Ramen so much, he can't believe I'm willing to part with my last two, but he accepts them without hesitation. Maybe he'll stop teasing me about my palm frond hat. Maybe.

Fanelli is behind the .50 Cal., and I climb up on the turret to read him the letter I received from Annette H. I have a tee tee bit of fun with her poor grammar and show Fanelli the spelling errors. He notices a couple more grammatical errors I missed. Xin loi, Annette!

He's pretty happy given the circumstances we're in. He's got lunch and

dinner for today, and we rarely think further ahead than that about anything. We're sitting ducks again, because on one side of the road the jungles rises up steeply. If Charlie could find us from up there, it would be number ten for us. Our luck holds, as the early afternoon goes by without incident, and our new platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and has the Second platoon prepare to didi for resupply. All the tracks just do a neutral steer in place. The last track on the way here is now the lead track as we head east on the redball. Fanelli is hopeful that we will drive all the way to Cam-lo, or at least nearby to Cam-lo, so he can get more Ramen.

Double Deuce is leading the platoon on the redball. The only thing I'm hopeful about is that we will get to resupply without incident. We drive non-stop at about 15 mph all the way to resupply, and the breeze I'm getting in the driver's compartment is number one. We stop at a boo coo big area about 5 kliks west of Cam-lo that we have resupplied at before. It's likely too far for the locals to come to, though. Xin loi, Fanelli. Fanelli is boo coo sad, because the direction of travel to resupply got his hopes up only to be crushed.

The other two platoons arrive, and soon it's a swirling mess of dust and diesel exhaust and circling tanks and P.C.s. Eventually all the tracks are positioned and Fanelli and the loader get the concertina wire out. We don't need any ammo, but we need food and diesel fuel. So while Fanelli and the loader attend to our supplies, I top off the fuel tank when the fuel truck pulls up to 2-3. My thoughts turn to mail call. I have gotten mail recently, so I can't count on any for a while. But the loader and I sky to mail call anyway, as Fanelli heats water for his last Ramen meal for a while and maybe forever. Xin loi, Fanelli!

We get no mail at mail call, but we have some fun joking around with Zack, Big Al, and Steve, and even Wack shows up to join the group. The only thing so far that we can tell them about our new platoon Sgt. is that he is a Lifer. But we all expected that.

I'm apparently not the only one that thinks his mustache makes him look like Hitler, as someone else makes that observation. No mail and the chat being over, the loader and I saunter back to 2-3. Our new platoon Sgt. is there, and Fanelli is just finishing his Ramen. The loader and I look through our c-rats and pick out our respective dinners. As we expected, we are too far from Cam-lo for any of the villagers to show up at our resupply site. At least when we break camp there won't be the mad dash of locals into the resupply site trying to scavenge anything they can from all our burn holes. It's a boo

coo lot of people running around in the dust and smoke, and I always worry I'll run over someone which would be number ten for both of us. So far I have run over no one, and for me that's number one.

Everyone finishes with their resupply duties, and we are ready to didi for our RON. Our new platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and tells the Second platoon to uncircle and line up behind 2-5. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire, and then tie it to the side of 2-3. The tracks line up behind 2-5 and as he pulls onto the redball we head west away from Cam-lo.

Fanelli couldn't feel worse. He is now out of Ramen, and we are heading even further away from Cam-lo where his only source of Ramen is. I don't know what he would have done if we had actually driven through Cam-lo on the way to our RON. He's desperate. I doubt he would have jumped off 2-3 had we gone through Cam-lo. Well, I sort of doubt it. Anyway, no way to find out since we aren't going to Cam-lo. Where we are going, we don't know, as we are just following 2-5 Tango Charlie.

2-5 Tango Charlie drives about 2 kliks west of our resupply site, and then turns south onto a dirt trail. We start to mine sweep through the bush on the way to what we hope is our RON. It's about 5:30 p.m., so we want to get to our RON ASAP so we don't have to set up in the dark. We hate that!

After about 15 minutes, we arrive at an open area big enough for the Second platoon's RON. After we flatten everything, most of the platoon dismounts. We survey the area for tunnels with the intensity of someone looking for body lice in their pubic hair. We find nothing, and that is number one, especially when it's this late. If we had to find another RON, we would be searching for it and setting up our night defenses in the dark. We really hate that!

It's too scary even to think about. I set out the trip flares and the claymores while Fanelli and the loader put out the concertina wire and set up the RPG screen. I climb up on the turret of 2-3 to connect the claymores to the detonators. Our new platoon Sgt. is talking to 2-5 Tango Charlie on the horn while I'm up on the turret, so I hear them confirm we are having a Mad Minute tonight.

I'm disappointed for two reasons. One is my hearing is almost back to normal, and secondly, with such short notice on the mike-mike, we won't have time to do a fake mini-gun. Not that we know whether or not our new platoon Sgt. would even let us do it. Wack may have made up a tracer belt without Sgt. Green's permission, so there might be some excitement during

the Mad Minute.

Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3 while I set up my tent. I put my stretcher in and throw my sleeping bag in, and I'm ready for The Scary Time. Or as ready as I ever am for The Scary Time.

By the time we finish, it’s still dusk and not dark yet, so Fanelli and the loader and I stand behind 2-3 and watch it get completely dark. Our new platoon Sgt. appears to like playing soldier, and he willingly sits behind the .50 Cal. while we attend to the rest of the duties. When it's completely dark, I climb into the driver's compartment and Fanelli and the loader climb into the turret. We have the red lights turned on, and I really have the only comfortable seat in the tank. Xin loi, guys!

We chat and joke around for a couple of hours. At about 9:00 p.m. our new platoon Sgt. gives orders over the horn to prepare for the Mad Minute. I climb out of the driver's compartment and push down the RPG screen. As I start to climb back into the driver's compartment, our new platoon Sgt. (who from this time on will be referred to as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt) fires off the main gun. It just about knocks me unconscious.

The whole front of the tank lifts up about 2 feet when the main gun is fired, so I get flipped backwards off the front of 2-3 and land flat on my back. The muzzle blast alone is enough to knock someone unconscious. My ears are ringing louder than ever, so I can't hear, and I can't see because of the bright flash of the muzzle blast.

I find my way by feel to my driver's hatch, only hoping I can climb inside and close my hatch before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. fires off another main gun round. He's already firing away with the .50 Cal., so I hope that keeps him occupied for a while. I finally manage to get completely inside the driver's compartment, and I close my hatch. I put my commo helmet on and grab onto the steering bar just as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. fires off the second main gun round.

Why I put on my commo helmet, I don't know. I can't hear anything except a loud ringing in my ears. The Mad Minute is soon over, and now tomorrow we'll have boo coo to keep us occupied in the morning, cleaning all the weapons.

I want to think that Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., in all the excitement of the mike-mike, accidentally fired off the main gun before I got back into the driver's compartment. If that ever happens again, I might think he is doing it on purpose. That would be number ten for him.

I can't chat with Fanelli or the loader, because all I hear is a loud ringing in my ears. I lounge around in my driver's seat only because it is comfortable. Finally, when I think it's safe, I climb out. With the loader's help, I set the RPG screen back in place, and then I sky for my tent. I have last guard so I hope I can hear again by the time I am awakened. I crawl into my tent, and it takes forever to fall asleep with the bugs swirling around and the sound of alarm bells going off in my ears.

*June 19, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Reno*

*Today pleasant. Had a very easy guard, were dismissed, then took a bath.*
*Two horsemen from Reno's camp came opposite our camp on the other side for the dispatch. Then two boys tried to swim over but gave it up, but finally another tried and was more successful.*
*Day closed with horse races between the Indians and some enterprising jockeys with us.*

March 13, 1970
Friday the 13th
Quang Tri Province

The loader wakes me at 4 a.m., shaking me to wake me. I can just make out his face in the dark, and I can see his lips moving, but I can't hear a word he is saying. I get up and climb up on the turret of 2-3 and drop halfway into the TC hatch behind the .50 Cal. I turn the volume on the horn to almost full blast so I can hear the Sgt. of the Guard when he calls for my sitrep. I slowly wake up, and I realize it is Friday the 13th, again. We just had a Friday the 13th back in February. It must take another million years for there to be two Friday the 13ths one month apart. It's number ten that it has to happen this time while I am in the Nam. Although I wouldn't consider myself to be superstitious, there is boo coo bad luck around here. Any added bad luck omens are number ten.

Another partly clear sky, so it's not pitch dark during my stint at guard. It's still a big relief when it gets light at 6 a.m. I call in my last sitrep, but I'm not sure anyone heard as I can barely hear myself when I talk. I jump down off of

2-3 with a chunk of C-4 and my canteen cup. The burning C-4 is unusually quiet, I think, as I heat my water. It still wakes Fanelli, the loader, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. It takes me a while to realize Fanelli is talking to me. I just happen to turn in his direction, and I see he is looking at me. I can see his lips moving, but I can't hear him. This is number ten.

I walk close to Fanelli, and I say to him, "Say again, I couldn't hear you?"

As he answers, I can tell he is practically yelling his question, "Can't you hear?"

"No!" I answer.

I tell them about getting flipped off the front of 2-3 when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. fired the main gun during the Mad Minute, and now I hear ringing in my ears and barely hear anything else. I think they all heard, but since I can hardly hear myself, I'm not sure. I am sure that if Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. heard, he's not apologizing, because I can see his lips are not moving.

Fanelli and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. have their shave while the loader heats up his c-rat breakfast. I'm having a pecan roll with my c-rat coffee. After he shaves, Fanelli makes ready to heat up some c-rats. I've never seen Fanelli eat c-rats, except for the time we got some bread from his mamasan.

Bread! Can't think about bread, especially when Fanelli doesn't even have any Ramen.

I watch Fanelli, and he has a can of c-rats and one of the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese. He carefully heats them both up and takes a spoonful of the heated c-rats and throws it on the ground. Then he pours the heated c-rat cheese into the can of c-rats, stirs it all up, and eats. What a great idea. I almost can't wait for lunch so I can try it out. The loader also noticed Fanelli's c-rat trick and is talking to him, but I only see their lips moving.

Fanelli and the loader take the tarp off of 2-3 and lay it on the ground in preparation for cleaning the .50 Cal and the coax. I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and lift the .50 Cal. out of its mount and hand it down to Fanelli. This is really a 2-man job, but if you know how to grab it right, one guy can lift and hand the .50 Cal. down to someone on the ground. He takes it back to the tarp and starts taking it apart so he and the loader can clean it.

While I'm up on the turret, I grab a couple of boxes of coax ammo and drop into the turret to carefully top off the coax ammo box.

After that I drain the water out of the fuel filters on 2-3. Fanelli and the loader are just about done cleaning the .50 Cal. so I wait up on the turret until

they bring it over and hand it up to me. The .50 Cal. is a beast of a weapon, both in heft and in being a pee-bringer. Of course Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. offers no assistance. Could be number one, as he is technically an FNG. I drop back into the turret and remove the Little Bastard from his mount and hand it out to Fanelli to clean.

It's already boo coo hot, and we have no shade except for one side of 2-3, so that's where we're cleaning the weapons. After disassembling, cleaning, and reassembling, I climb back up on the turret and Fanelli hands me the coax. I drop into the turret and put the coax into its mount on the turret wall.

The loader and Fanelli have the bore cleaning rod at the end of the main gun. The main gun on the New 2-3 is really easy to clean compared to the main gun barrel on the M-48. It just takes a couple of swabs with the cleaning brush and the inside of the main gun barrel is spotless and shiny. We're a tee tee bit faster at cleaning our weapons compared to most of the other crews. Possibly because we have constant encouragement from Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

"Now you boys look like ya know whatcher doin'," says Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. "But somma the boys on the other crews look like their thinkin' 'bout goin' to Bangkok to get a shot o' leg from some bar girl when they should be thinkin' 'bout what they're doin'." Encouragement, but no real help.

I say to Fanelli, "Just like old times." Fanelli smiles back.

We have to wait for the rest of the crews to finish cleaning all their weapons before the platoon can leave our RON. It's not long before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally gives the order to prepare to break camp. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares and stow everything. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen and tie everything to the side of 2-3.

Our gypsy caravan look complete, we are ready to sky. I get into the driver's compartment and start up 2-3. When I put my commo helmet on, I realize the ringing in my ears has almost completely subsided, and I can sort of hear. It's number one! I guess the ringing was blocking everything else. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to uncircle and line up behind 2-3, and we are leading the way as we sky. The loader starts mine sweeping as we proceed at a walking pace to the redball.

It's hot and humid, and at this speed I get no breeze. Being in the lead is still number one, as I get no dust in my face. It only takes 15 minutes or so to get to the redball, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me head east on the redball

with the rest of the Second platoon bringing up the rear. Where we're going, we don't know. To do what, we don't know. We just follow orders no matter how stupid. We only drive for about a klik before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me turn north on a trail. Fanelli gets off 2-3 and starts to mine sweep as we continue to lead the Second platoon.

We proceed at a walking pace until we reach the Cam-lo River trail and the Cam-lo River itself. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me turn west on the river trail, and Fanelli continues to mine sweep. When we get to the first river crossing, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. tells the Second platoon to prepare to cross the river.

We know this crossing, if only because it is boo coo steep on the other side, and the P.C.s sometimes can't make it to the top of the river bank. The trail on the other side looks dry and passable now, but after a couple of tanks and P.C.s cross the river and drive up the bank on the other side dripping gallons of water, it will soon be a mud slide.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. will not be deterred, as he wants to explore his new domain. He orders me to cross and the rest of the platoon to follow one at a time. The river is about 3 feet deep and fast flowing here. Not the best place to cross, but not the worst. I make it across with no trouble and quickly climb to the top of the river bank. I pull far enough forward so there's room for the rest of the platoon, should they make it across. Of course after five more tracks make it up the trail, it’s now a mud slide. The driver on Double Deuce has tried twice to make it up, only to get part way before sliding backwards into the river. As scary looking as it was, it also looked quite comical. The driver on Double Deuce likes to wear a winter helmet liner for a hat, so he looks like Goofy, the Walt Disney character. So there was Double Deuce, sliding backwards and out of control into the river below, being driven by Goofy and TC'ed by Charlie Brown with Snoopy by his side. Xin loi, Snoopy!

2-4, which was behind Double Deuce, has a try at climbing the now slippery riverbank, only to meet the same fate as Double Deuce. I guess exploring his new domain will have to wait for another day. With no explanations and certainly no apologies, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the other four tracks with us to turn around, re-cross the river, and rejoin the rest of the platoon.

Because I was at the front of the line of the tracks that managed to cross the river, I am the last to re-cross. Being at the end of the line, I can't see the

rest of the tracks slide almost completely out of control down the river bank and into the river. Until I crest the top of the river bank and start down. By then it's too late, as the river bank is slippery mud and almost a 45 degree angle. 2-3 slides down the riverbank at close to 20 mph, and with a boo coo big splash, goes right into the river. Although we were sliding out of control, at least we didn't go down backwards like 2-4 and Double Deuce.

I wondered what all the excited chatter on the horn was about. Everyone was talking at once and cutting each other off when they keyed their microphones at the same time, so I couldn't make out what was being said. I can easily guess what was being said now. The loader and Fanelli sound like they're riding a roller coaster down the first steep hill, and we sort of are.

We cross back over to the south side of the Cam-lo River without further incident. For Friday the 13th, 3 kliks south of the Z, that is number one. It's close to noon, so our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has the tracks in the Second platoon spread out at 50 foot intervals with the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. seems content to stay behind the .50 Cal. after I position 2-3 on the south side of the Cam-lo River.

Fanelli, the loader, and I are rummaging around in the open case of c-rats. I'm anxious to try the cheese trick I saw Fanelli do for his breakfast. Now that I can hear, I ask Fanelli why he never showed us the cheese trick before.

He laughs and then says, "The loader asked me the same question this morning." He continues, "If I had shown you a while ago, you would already be bored with it."

There's just enough tee tee cans of c-rat cheese to go around. We all heat up our c-rat meal and our tee tee can of cheese with C-4. To make room for the cheese, we dump a spoonful of the heated c-rats on the ground. For c-rats, it is number one. We won't be throwing the tee tee cans of cheese away anymore. Fanelli relieves our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from behind the .50 Cal. While Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets his lunch, I saunter over to 2-4 for a chat with Wack.

Now that we have a platoon Sgt. on 2-3 again, no one will come and visit us. Wack and the rest of the crew on 2-4 are still laughing about the mud slide this morning. I ask Wack why he didn't do the fake mini-gun at the Mad Minute last night.

"Sgt. Green wouldn't let me," he says. "He didn't want to have all the ammo belts left without any tracers."

I hang loose and chat with Wack and Sgt. Green for part of the afternoon,

but I hear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. telling the Second platoon to prepare to sky to resupply over the horn. It's number one for us to get going to resupply, because we'll have a boo coo amount of ammo and supplies to deal with. I didi mau back to 2-3 and climb into the driver's compartment. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. announces to the rest of the platoon to line up behind 2-3.

It’s still Friday the 13th, but Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is feeling lucky as we proceed without mine sweeping back to the redball. I hate that! We do make fast time, and when we arrive at the redball, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me head east towards Cam-lo. Fanelli is hopeful. But no such luck, as we arrive at a resupply site about 5 kliks west of Cam-lo. One of the other platoons and the resupply convoy are already there. Fanelli, I think to myself, it's Friday the 13th, what did you expect?

We finish situating 2-3 among the rest of the tracks and put out the concertina wire. Once again, why? We don't know. There will be no locals coming here today. Xin loi, Fanelli! We stand around a tee tee bit before we get to dealing with our supplies and ammo. We joke about going to hot chow, knowing we are joking about it and aren't really going to go. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. does take off for the hot chow, if only so he won't have to help stow all the supplies and ammo.

I top off the fuel tank when the fuel truck arrives. Fanelli and the loader deal with the ammo, replacing all that we shot off last night. We stow the rest of our supplies and c-rats, and then Fanelli and the loader head for mail call while I sit behind the .50 Cal. until Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns, which he eventually does. I'm heating up my chosen c-rat and c-rat cheese when Fanelli and the loader return from mail call. They're both empty handed. We hate that!

Going to mail and getting nothing is number ten, so I'm glad I didn't go. They both rummage the c-rats for their chosen dinner. Now that the whole crew is eating c-rats, we hardly have anything left over except the Ham and Eggs. We wouldn't have anything to give to Lon and her brother even if they were around.

After resupply, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. announces to the Second platoon to uncircle and line up behind 2-3. We head west on the redball away from Cam-lo. Our idiot platoon Sgt. decides to let 2-5 Tango Charlie lead the way when we turn off the redball onto a trail that leads to our RON. We mine sweep at a walking pace for about a half an hour.

After flattened the brush and scouring every square inch for tunnels, we

proceed to set out our night defenses. Then while Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp on to the side of 2-3, I set up my tent. Both the tarp and my tent reek of gun oil and solvent.

We're done with our tasks, and we can finally relax. Sort of. It's The Scary Time soon, and we dread that.

2-5 Tango Charlie is playing a practical joke on Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. at my expense. He tells Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. that the Regs require all the tracks to dig a foxhole, and that the P.C. crews are all complaining about the tank crews not digging their foxholes. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. believes 2-5 Tango Charlie and returns to 2-3 just when I'm finishing with my tent. I think I'm done for the day, and he tells me to go dig a foxhole. First, I try to reason with him. Why? I don't know, as he is an idiot, and you can't reason with an idiot. So far he seems to lack any sort of reasoning capabilities that I have observed.

Even though I say, "The P.C. crews dig foxholes because they have M-60s they dismount and set on a bipod in the foxhole. We don't have any M-60s to dismount." I continue, "I'm not going to sit in a foxhole with my .45 when my battle station is in the driver's compartment. Almost half the main gun ammo is in the driver's compartment and has to be passed to the loader by me."

Nonetheless, he insists that it's Regs and says, "Get crackin' diggin' that foxhole, or you'll be doin' it in the dark!"

Which it almost is. He skys up to order the other two tank crews to start digging foxholes. I get our entrenching tool and a whole stick of C-4, a blasting cap, a detonator, and some wire. I dig a hole about one foot deep. I stop and think, because I want to do this right. Otherwise Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. will probably make me finish the foxhole with the entrenching tool if it's not deep enough. I was going to use about a 1/4 stick of C-4 which has boo coo explosive power for my purpose, but I want to be sure the foxhole is deep enough. So I decide on a half a stick of C-4. I put C-4 in the foot deep hole, and I push the blasting cap into the C-4. I string the detonator wire over to 2-3, and we all get on the far side of 2-3, away from the blast zone.

Fanelli announces, "Fire in the hole," over the horn while I shout it out loud. I wait a few seconds to make sure everyone is clear, and then I set the C-4 off.

It creates an awesome crater. A tee tee bit deeper than I intended but number one. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. shows up with several other curious members of the Second platoon, including 2-5 Tango Charlie.

Everyone gets a good laugh when they hear me say to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., "Deep enough for you, Sarge?"

Fortunately, 2-5 Tango Charlie tells Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. it was all a joke before things get out of hand. That's the last time Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. asks me to dig a foxhole. It's dark now, so everyone goes back to their tracks after having a good laugh just before The Scary Time on Friday the 13th.

I climb into the driver's compartment to relax for a while in my comfortable driver's seat. Fanelli and the loader are in the turret, and they're still laughing about the foxhole. Even Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. thinks it was a funny joke. We have the red interior lights on, and it gives everything an eerie look.

I have the ammo storage spaces filled, so space is tight. After a couple of hours, I finally climb out the driver's hatch. I climb up on the turret and stick my head inside the loader's hatch. Gross. The loader and Fanelli are now both eating c-rats and have been farting up a storm. It smells worse than an outhouse in the turret.

I make sure I have last shift on guard. and then make my way to my tent to sleep, I hope. As always there's more hope than sleep, thanks to the bugs. Xin loi, Driver!

*April 20, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Yellowstone River*

*Broke camp and marched all day. This forenoon over bottoms and afternoon across hills and ravines and camped on the Yellowstone. Very pretty country.*

*Ft. Pease is but three miles from here. It was built in the winter of '74 by a citizen from Bozeman of this territory. Was garrisoned by 46 men for the purpose of trading with the Indians but they were so bad they could not stay there and after four of their men were killed they abandoned it.*

*This fort is six miles from the mouth of the Big Horn River and is built on the bottom with no timber around it at all and think it would be a hard fort to be taken if only a few men were in it.*

*Corporal Smith and Baaer came pretty near having a fight. Smith hit Baaer a kick and then went and reported him.*

*The scouts crossed several large fresh Sioux trails and they are supposed*

*to be going for the Big Horn Mountains. It is thought by many that they have been watching us for some time now.*

*Seventeen miles today. Country very broken. Curious rocks of all shapes and forms. Few pines on bluffs and few they are.*

March 14, 1970
Saturday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m. for my turn at guard duty. I can actually hear him when he wakes me, and that is number one. After I set off the C-4 last night to make my foxhole-crater, my ears started ringing again from the noise of the blast. But it has stopped now. We made it through another Friday the 13th without serious incident, and that's also number one.

I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and drop half way into the TC's hatch behind the .50 Cal. It stayed warm last night but tee tee cooler than during the heat of the day when the sun is out. I spend my guard calling in my sitreps every 15 minutes as I stare into the nothingness of night. It must be overcast, because I see no stars or the moon. It's nearly pitch black, so much so it might as well be full pitch black. I can barely make out the silhouettes of the other tracks around the RON. No one on guard is reporting anything, and that's number one. But no one can see any better than me, and I can see nothing. Finally it starts to get light, and The Scary Time is over. As always it's a boo coo big relief. Plus now I can make some coffee.

I jump down from the turret with a big chunk of C-4, and as I heat my water, Fanelli, the loader, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. all wake and get up. The rest of the Second platoon also wake and start moving around. Several of them who didn't make it over in the dark last night to see my crater now take a chance of crossing paths with Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to stop by for a look-see. Fanelli and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. heat water so they can shave. I want to see what Fanelli does for breakfast, to see if he has more new tricks for cooking with the c-rats.

When Fanelli finishes shaving, I mention the second Friday the 13th (yesterday), and I wonder aloud if there is going to be a Friday the 13th next month. Fanelli climbs up on 2-3, opens his personal belonging thermo chest, and pulls out his calendar.

He flips over to April and says, "We're in luck, no Friday the 13th." He

continues to flip through the rest of the months ahead and finally says, "Another Friday the 13th in November." That's no concern for Fanelli, because if he survives, he won't be here in November. I, on the other hand, will be here in November (if I survive). Three Friday the 13ths in one year, and it has to be the year I'm in the Nam! It's number one I'm not superstitious.

Fanelli does nothing new for his breakfast, and I can tell he misses his Ramen. Heck, I've only eaten Ramen a few times, and I miss it. Johnson and No Jets stop by 2-3, taking a chance on having an encounter with Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. Johnson doesn't want to waste his trip and asks for our spare Ham and Eggs c-rats. Some of the guys, and that would include No Jets, have been trying to guess how much C-4 I used to create my foxhole-crater. I haven't let on yet, but several of them have guessed correctly, as most of us are well versed at blowing things up with C-4.

There are no weapons to clean this morning, so when it's time to break camp, things go quickly. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and tells the rest of the Second platoon to prepare to didi. I bring in the claymores and the trip flares and as usual now, I set off several trip flares. I get a tee tee bit of exercise as I run around kicking the trip flares to put them out. After Fanelli and the loader get done laughing and teasing me, I tell Fanelli to make sure he orders more trip flares for resupply today. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen and tie everything to the side of 2-3.

I climb into the driver's compartment and start the engine. We uncircle and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has the rest of the platoon line up behind Double Deuce. Charlie Brown has Smitty walk out front to mine sweep our way back to the redball. We've decided to let Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. figure out on his own that Double Deuce is the screw-up track. It shouldn't take too long. Xin loi, Sarge! But mostly Xin loi, Charlie Brown.

I'm glad to be at least three tracks back from the front, as Smitty would be the last guy I would have mine sweep. Xin loi, Smitty. But mostly Xin loi, Second platoon! We make our way slowly to the redball, and it takes about 30 minutes. Smitty finds no land mines. But more importantly, he doesn't miss any either.

We sit at the redball for a while as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. talks to 2-5 Tango Charlie over the horn. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is still intent on exploring his new domain, and he and 2-5 Tango Charlie are discussing their options. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is also still intent on crossing the Cam-lo River with

the whole Second platoon, so he asks 2-5 Tango Charlie about a better crossing for the P.C.s. 2-5 Tango Charlie says there is a better river crossing a tee tee bit east of our current location.

We're still boo coo far west of Cam-lo, but every time we start heading towards it on the redball, Fanelli can't help himself, and he starts hoping we'll resupply close enough that he might be able to get some Ramen.

Xin loi, Fanelli, today as well. Before we are even close to Cam-lo, 2-5 Tango Charlie turns off of the redball onto a trail that leads to the Cam-lo River. 2-5 Tango Charlie has one of his side gunners dismount and start to mine sweep our way to the river.

It's boo coo hot now, so it's number ten to stop our 15 mph cruise on the redball. Moving along now at a walking pace, it's hot and dusty now. It takes another 30 minutes to make it to the river crossing. The river banks on both sides are fairly flat, like a gently sloping ramp. The river is wide and shallow at the crossing, so it should be an easy cross, and it is. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me cross first so we can cover the rest of the platoon as they cross the river. No slipping and sliding today, and that's number one.

2-5 Tango Charlie takes the lead again, and we bring up the rear in 2-3, eating boo coo amounts of dust as we go. The dust finally stops when we get to an area of elephant grass. This stuff is number ten. If you walk through it improperly, you can get some bad cuts. Any wound, even a small cut, is number ten here in the Nam. Even if you know how to properly walk through elephant grass, there are other number ten things about it. It's so tall, even elephants can hide in it. If elephants can hide in it, so can Charlie. We hate that!

Also, the prospect of encountering a tiger is a distinct possibility, as we've seen one in the past. As a tank driver, I sit low to the ground compared to the P.C. drivers. I dislike the elephant grass boo coo more than them. I can't see anything but a green sea of grass, and if I let the track in front of me get out of sight, when I get to a fork in the trail I don't know which way to go. Our now departed Dear Platoon Sgt. use to have a fit if I didn't know which way to go or if I turned the wrong way. If I don't keep up, I'll soon find out how Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. reacts when I get lost. I didn't realize it was necessary to have x-ray vision in order to be a tank driver.

So far I'm behind Double Deuce, and I'm having a fairly easy time keeping up with Charlie Brown's driver, Goofy. The elephant grass all looks the same, and there are trails criss-crossing all over the place, none of which are marked

in any way. Sitting up on the turret gives the rest of the crew a decent view of our surroundings, and all of the P.C. crews have their heads well above the elephant grass. However, just because you have your head above the elephant grass doesn't mean you can see everything. Elephant grass is boo coo dense and thick so until you part the grass directly in front, you don't know what's there. Tiger? Elephant? Charlie? We hate that!

This is a number ten place to meander slowly around. If Charlie is around, we make so much noise and are so noticeable, they will eventually see us. In reality that's probably why Higher has us do these sitting duck missions. The Lifers want so much to engage Charlie that they make us drive around like sitting ducks, hoping we get attacked so they can play soldier. War is weird.

The problem is that if we hang around long enough to get noticed, Charlie can see us, but we can't see them. That's number ten, despite the Lifers itching for action. We hate that!

After a hot morning of driving around in a sea of elephant grass, we finally get to the edge of it. We spread out defensively and have a good enough view of our surroundings that we can break for lunch.

Because Fanelli and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. both are eating c-rats, there is much less choice than before. We're fighting for the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese and end up opening a new case of c-rats just to purloin the cheese. I thinking about going around to the other tracks when I have a chance to see if I can trade some of the cigarettes I'm accumulating for the tee tee cans of cheese we all want now. Fanelli is finally coming around, as he has resigned himself to the fact that he may never have Ramen again. But he is not happy about it.

Fanelli and many of the guys here suspect that the army puts something in the c-rats to suppress our libido. Why else would guys like Johnson eat the Ham and Eggs unless they were having trouble functioning sexually? In a way it's ironic that Johnson is eating the Ham and Egg c-rats hoping to increase his libido. My thought is there is a boo coo amount of stress producing situations here. So if you're not sexually excited, it's kind of understood. If Fanelli's like the rest of us though, he's going to be popping the seams of his well tailored jungle fatigues, as all of us gain boo coo weight on the c-rat diet. I weighed about 165 lbs when I got to the Nam, and I know I'm now up to at least 180 lbs.

I relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from behind the .50 Cal. so he can fix his c-rat lunch. Fanelli has his transistor radio out, and I can sort of hear it, but

my hearing isn't back to normal yet. From up on the turret, I can finally look around and get eye contact with some of the other platoon members as we chat over the horn and try to tease one another. I still haven't let on how much C-4 I used to create my foxhole-crater last night, so I'm still getting some mileage and laughs about that.

After his lunch, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. climbs up on the turret and into the loader's hatch and emerges with his maps of our area of operation. He and Fanelli go over the maps and Fanelli shows Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. where we currently are on his map. As Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. surveys our current location with our intended resupply point, he determines there's a shorter route there so we don't have to drive back through the elephant grass. That is number one with me. But that he wants me to break brush and forgo mine sweeping with 2-3 in the lead; that is number ten. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn to the rest of the Second platoon to announce his plan and has me pull forward to the front of the line of tanks and P.C.s.

While I wait for the order to move out, I get my hated .45 out of its holster. I reluctantly put a loaded magazine in, and even more reluctantly I chamber a round and put it on safe. Why? I don't know, as I know the safety doesn't work.

I set my hated .45 on my lap and try to figure out the best way for it to point. There is no good way really. The inside of the tank hull is curved, so any bullet fired inside is going to ricochet all over the place. I've got boo coo live main gun ammo in the driver's compartment, so a bullet bouncing around would only be the start of my trouble. Boo coo trouble! I've got to drive through brush that, while not as thick as elephant grass, is thick enough that I can't see very far ahead. I hate that! I need both hands to drive or else I would hold my hated .45 and point it directly in front of my driver's hatch and pity anyone or anything that passes in front of it. But I have to settle for laying it on my lap so that it points at the .50 cal. ammo box I keep some of my personal stuff in. My hope is that if my hated .45 goes off unexpectedly that it will be contained in the ammo box. But I'm still boo coo nervous about the situation.

"Move out, Driver," says Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to me over the intercom. So I put 2-3 in drive, and we sky.

If there's a good thing about breaking brush, it’s that for once I'm not expected to have x-ray vision or know where to go. Breaking brush is not a guarantee we won't hit any land mines, and when I'm in the lead I hate that!

At least it's not Friday the 13th again! Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. directs me as we proceed through the brush. We get to some boo coo dense brush, and we have everyone behind us and nowhere to go but right through it. We could get hung up in this stuff. Some people think tanks can go through anything, but they have their limitations, and we are at one now. But Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is intent on proceeding. It's so dense, I'm worried about getting my eyes poked out by all the branches, so I drop my seat down and close my hatch.

Since I am now fairly well protected, I un-chamber the round in my hated .45 and unload it. I have three vision block type periscopes to see out in front of 2-3. Through the vision blocks, I can only see a tee tee bit, so I have to rely on Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. for directions. Because it's such dense brush, when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gives me the order to move out, I really punch the accelerator on 2-3 almost to the floor. 2-3 moves out smartly, despite the thick brush. I can see virtually nothing now that I'm under way. All I see is brush, branches, and leaves moving across the vision blocks.

I hope Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is paying attention up there on the turret, as I inform him over the intercom that I can see nothing. I hate that!

At some point Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. says to me over the intercom, "Stop here, Driver."

I can't really see anything out my vision blocks, so I raise my seat to the top position and slide open my hatch. There, directly in front of me, about 15 feet away is a water buffalo. He doesn't seem to be disturbed by our presence and continues on his business of foraging. It takes me a while to find my slingshot and the M-16 slugs I pulled out to use as slingshot ammo.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is yelling at the water buffalo, who appears to not hear him at all. If we had any extra c-rats, they would be throwing them at the water buffalo. He’s not causing any problems, except I can't go around him because of several trees in the way. I don't want to put its eye out, so I'm waiting for him to turn a tee tee bit. Right now he's facing me head first, so I move 2-3 a few feet forward trying to encourage him to move or at least turn so I can shoot him in the side with my slingshot. This is a number ten place for a water buffalo. He surely belongs to someone and must be on the lam.

Walking around in the bush here is boo coo dangerous. Some guys will open up with the .50 Cal. or at least the M-60s at the least provocation. If you see the brush moving around here in the Nam, it's shoot first, ask questions later. I move 2-3 forward a tee tee bit more, and he finally turns enough so I can shoot him in the side. He seems to barely notice; it affects him about as

much as when a fly bites him. But he does move a tee tee bit, enough for me to finally get by. The closer I get, the farther he moves away, and that's number one for him and for me.

This is the closest I've been to a water buffalo, and he is immense in size. Considering how much smaller the Vietnamese are compared to us, it's hard to believe they can control something so huge with nothing more than a stick or a switch. It's going to be number ten for whoever owns this water buffalo, because we are in an area that the locals are strongly discouraged from entering. Reasons would include land mines, booby traps, and a policy of shoot first - ask questions later, just to name a few. However, water buffaloes are a prized possession, and someone will be searching for this guy no matter how dangerous the area might be. I can hear some horn chatter from the rest of the platoon regarding the errant water buffalo. It sounds like some of the other tracks had to resort to their slingshots, as well. Water buffalo can usually do just about anything they want, and I think they get a tee tee bit used to it.

This being Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.’s first chance to show us he can read and follow a map, it would be number ten for his reputation to get us lost. We are driving through boo coo dense stuff, although since the water buffalo encounter I have been able to drive with my seat all the way up and my hatch cover open. I've also had to reload my hated .45 and set it on my lap again. I hate that! Because we are driving through such dense stuff, there are virtually no landmarks for Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to orient himself on the map. It will be a miracle if we don't get lost. He's already been asking 2-5 Tango Charlie some questions regarding our location, and that doesn't bode well for us. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally has me stop so he can dismount and walk back to 2-5 to confer with 2-5 Tango Charlie about our current position. Or what they think our current position might be is more like it.

Traveling over the bush using dead reckoning as your means of determining your location and direction of travel can work when flying in aircraft because you can see some landmarks. In the Nam, dead reckoning will more times than not lead you to get lost and possibly in the end, dead, I reckon.

After conferring with 2-5 Tango Charlie, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns to 2-3 and climbs up on the turret.

He gets on the intercom and says to me, "Move out, Driver."

"Anywhere in particular?" I ask.

"Straight ahead, Driver." So I drive straight ahead into the bush. After about 30 minutes of crashing through the bush, we finally hit a trail. Which trail, we don't know, because none of our maps have any of the trails marked, and we create new ones all the time.

Anyway, we have found a trail, and now have to just decide which way to go. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. chooses a direction and has 2-4 come to the front to lead the Second platoon by mine sweeping our way. Wack is put on mine sweeping detail, and that's number one for the rest of the platoon but number ten for Wack. Xin loi, Wack!

We proceed at a walking pace for another 45 or 50 minutes before we hit the redball. We are all relieved. As we pull out onto the redball, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me take the lead in 2-3 as we proceed east towards Cam-lo. Fanelli knows better than to be hopeful, but he can't help himself and neither can I.

We haven't operated close to Cam-lo ever since we hit the land mine. We drove through Cam-lo once on our way to our current area of operation, but that's been it. We pull off the redball at an area we have used for resupply often, about 4 or 5 kliks west of Cam-lo. Xin loi, Fanelli. No locals here today, and that means no Ramen. The other two platoons are already here, so we fill in the spaces left around the resupply site. Fanelli and the loader jump down off of 2-3 with the concertina wire in hand as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. talks me into position.

I shut the engine down and relieve our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from behind the .50 Cal. as Fanelli and the loader finish putting out the concertina wire. Why we're putting out the concertina wire, we don't know. Habit, I guess, as no locals will show up this far from Cam-lo. If we put it out because we're concerned about being attacked (and when are we not concerned about that, being 3 kliks south of the Z), then why don't we set up the RPG screen? The RPG screen is boo coo more important during a daylight attack than the concertina wire. But we just follow orders, no matter how stupid.

The loader relieves me from behind the .50 Cal. when the fuel truck shows up. We used boo coo fuel today driving in the bush, especially when we were breaking brush so I want to top off 2-3's fuel tank. When I finish re-fueling 2-3, Fanelli and I leave the loader on guard while we go to mail call.

Mail call takes a long time because all three platoons are here. Fanelli and I find Wack, Zack, Big Al, and Steve. We chat with them while we all wait for our name to be called, indicating that you have some mail. Steve tells me

he was arguing with Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. about the need for the tank crews to dig a foxhole every night when I set off the C-4 to create my crater. We all agree. He's an idiot.

Fanelli and I get no mail, and so we didi mau back to 2-3. The loader is heating some c-rats for his dinner, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. eating the hot chow on a paper plate. I think about going over to the hot chow for a second or two. Then I ask the loader what Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s dinner looked like.

"Why do you think I'm eating c-rats?" he responds.

Of course. So Fanelli and I peruse the open case of c-rats for our least hated meal, and we quickly heat it up with C-4 and eat. At resupply, except mail call, there's not a lot of slack time, so we usually have to eat quickly. We eat because we are hungry, and because we need to. There's nothing to savor, so eating turns into another task to be performed instead of a meal to look forward to. I hate that!

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. leaves to chat with 2-5 Tango Charlie about our intended RON. When he returns, he gets on the horn and tells the platoon to prepare to didi for our RON. The other platoons are also bringing in their concertina wire in preparation to didi.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has the Second platoon uncircle and line up behind 2-5. After our afternoon of jungle cruising and not being sure exactly where we were at times it will be number one to get to our RON and know we are where we say we are. We hope!

2-5 Tango Charlie pulls onto the redball and heads west with the Second platoon following single file for about 2 kliks before we turn onto a dirt trail that probably runs to the Cam-lo River. 2-5 Tango Charlie stops to let one of his side gunners dismount and start mine sweeping. We proceed for about 15 minutes at a walking pace. Well before we reach the river, we start to circle around in preparation of setting up our RON. There's a tee tee bit of vegetation that we flatten, mostly out of habit, because it wouldn't have hidden anything.

Most of us dismount and search for tunnels. After a thorough search of the area, we start to set up our RON. I set out the claymores, and then I set my trip flares all on hair triggers as usual and some are tied together. I tie some trip flares to the concertina wire, and then I bury the wire. I string the detonator wire up to the turret of 2-3 and hang the detonators on the bullet shield for the .50 Cal.

While I'm connecting the detonators for the claymores, I overhear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. telling the rest of the Second platoon TCs to send one guy each to 2-3 to be prepared to go on an overnight Ambush Patrol. That's number ten for several reasons. Either Fanelli, the loader, or me will have to go on the Ambush Patrol, and the rest of the platoon will all just have three crewmen for guard duty. Something I know a tee tee bit about. Even more number ten for the AP, because they will probably get zero sleep tonight and no consideration for that fact tomorrow.

Everything about night Ambush Patrol here is number ten. We have little or no training on conducting night ambushes, and our radio batteries continually fail us, so we can't stay in radio contact with the rest of the platoon to call for help, if need be. They send us out at night with no compass, no map, and we have no idea where we are, where the other two platoons are, or where their APs are.

The very last time any of the platoons sent out an AP, it was the First platoon. They stumbled into our RON with their LT leading the way after their horn battery died. One of our FNGs shot them up boo coo bad. So now we get our chance to be shot up by one of the other platoons or their AP. Oh, and there is Charlie to consider. We're about 2 or 3 kliks south of the Z, so there is a good prospect of enemy activity as well. That's really why they're sending us out on AP. It's just that there can be boo coo unintended consequences when walking around in the dark armed to the teeth with automatic weapons and a shoot-first-ask-questions-later attitude.

It takes a while for the members of the AP to get their gear together and report to 2-3. If Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is trying to get as many of the Second platoon to hate him as soon as possible, he is going about it right and proper I would say.

He informs the loader that he is going on the AP, and before I can feel any sense of relief, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. turns to me and says, "Wolf, you lead the AP out of the RON after dark through your trip flares."

"No can do, Sarge," I reply.

He says, "I'm ordering you to lead the AP out of the RON."

"You can order me all you want. I can't get through my set-up in the light, so I know I can't get ten guys through my stuff in the dark."

Both Fanelli and the loader come to my defense as witnesses to my trip flare fiascoes. I then point out that if the AP is supposed to be a clandestine affair, it won't be after most of my trip flares get set off. Plus, we on 2-3 will

spend the rest of the night with a gaping hole in our night defenses. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. refuses to change his mind. What mind? Once again, all this goes to prove is that you cannot reason with an idiot.

When the AP is ready to depart, Out Idiot Platoon Sgt. again orders me to lead the AP through my trip flares. Xin loi, AP! We all have flashlights with a red lens in place. But in the pitch dark, you can see about 2 feet in at best. We are moving out of the RON by just about feel, because it is overcast. We are moving boo coo slow and quietly. I am full of dread, because I know I can't get through my stuff.

As expected, I set off the first flare trying to make an opening in the concertina wire. I yell for everyone on the AP to look away so they don't lose their night vision. They know not to look at it, and as I am expert at dealing with lit trip flares, I run over to it and kick all the phosphorus out of it to put it out. The AP's night vision has been retained. But now I can see almost nothing until I set off the next flare as I stumble forward. As I run to the flare that is currently burning, I set off two more. I feel number ten for these guys on the AP, and I hope they're mad at Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. and not me.

I'm still so blind that I set off two more trip flares as I try to get back inside the RON.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is behind the .50 Cal., so I climb up on 2-3 and drop into the turret through the loader’s hatch. Fanelli is already in the turret with the red lights on. My night vision was completely lost in my encounters with all the trip flares, so I decide to sit in the turret and chat with Fanelli while I regain my night vision.

We have to stay up till midnight as a three man crew, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is taking first shift so he can monitor the AP’s sitreps before their horn battery dies. Fanelli takes second guard shift, and I take last shift as usual. The turret has no comfortable seats, so I finally climb into the driver's compartment to stretch out in my seat and relax a tee tee bit. I think I might have napped a tee tee bit as well before I finally call it a night. I have some of my night vision, but I still have to feel my way to my tent. A number ten night to be on AP. Of course all nights are number ten to be on AP when you’re 2 or 3 kliks south of the Z.

*June 20, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp Reno*

*Morning dawned clear and bright. Drawing rations the first thing done. Next had a swim. Three companies will leave tomorrow to go ahead to fix up the roads.*

March 15, 1970
Sunday
Quanq Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m. for my turn at guard. He tells me the AP hasn't been heard from since about 3 a.m. No gunfire has been heard either, so it is assumed their horn battery died. I take my place behind the .50 Cal. up on the turret of 2-3. The sky must have cleared during the night, as I can see more than just the silhouettes of the other tracks as I look around the RON. Sending out Ambush Patrols at night is so stupid, I can't even think about. Worse yet, sooner or later, I will end up on one. I hate that.

As the other guards call in their sitreps, the AP is still not responding to the Sgt. of the Guard when he tries calling them. I badly want a cup of coffee to wake myself up, but I'll have to wait until at least 6 a.m. when it starts getting light. It stayed hot all last night, so it will be even hotter when the sun finally comes up.

Ice is just a distant memory, and I'm not sure I would recognize it should I happen onto some. It could prove to be an interesting day ahead, as most of the platoon has had only 4 hours sleep, and the 10 guys on the AP, if they're still alive, have gotten no sleep. I call in my sitreps, as does the rest of the Second platoon until it's 6 a.m.

When I climb down from the turret, I can tell I'm not the only one craving a java jolt by all the C-4 I see burning. It's still just barely light when I see the AP. They are standing out in front of 2-3 just beyond where we typically set out trip flares. I walk out in front of 2-3 so the guys on the AP can see and hear me. Since I assume they're waiting for me to lead them through my trip flares, I yell to them that there are no trip flares left, so they can just come on through.

They are tired and boo coo pissed off, but not at me. Xin loi, Sarge! Fanelli is up and so is Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. and both start heating water to shave. The loader, while rummaging through open case of c-rats, confirms that the horn battery died around 3 a.m. Since they weren't sure where they

were, they decided to stay put until daylight. Considering the last AP that tried to get back to their RON ended up getting shot up by us, that was a wise decision.

Since we're on the subject of APs, Fanelli and I both ask Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. exactly what is the point of the APs.

In answer to our question he says, "In my opinion, some members of the Second platoon are too lax. There are also too many cherries who need to see some action so they understand what combat is all about."

After listening to Out Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s discourse, Fanelli and I can only shake our heads. This guy is so dumb, he's going to give idiots a bad name.

After scoffing his breakfast, the loader dives under the tarp hoping to catch a few winks before we start breaking camp. That will be a good trick, because although it stayed hot last night, it is stiflingly hot now that the sun is up and beating down on everything including the tarp.

I attend to my maintenance tasks as the driver. I drain the water out of the fuel filters and check the engine oil level. Then I walk around both sides and inspect each track block, especially the end connectors which are easily broken. I find a couple of cracked end connectors on both sides of 2-3, so Fanelli and I remove each one and replace it with the spares we carry. That's what driving on the rocky river trail does to our tracks. We have to pull the tarp back to get at some of the cracked end connectors, so the loader gets his snooze interrupted. Xin loi!

It's Sunday but in the field it's just a same-same day, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. proves that by announcing to us and the rest of the Second platoon to prepare to break camp. I bring in the claymores, but it goes quickly since there are no trip flares left to bring in. But I collect all the trip flare wire. I don't like to leave any presents for Charlie. I pack up my tent and my stretcher, and then I help Fanelli take down the RPG screen and tie all of our gear to the side of 2-3. The loader is trying to nap up on the bustle rack until we didi.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me pull forward and has the Second platoon follow us down the trail as Fanelli mine sweeps to the Cam-lo River. It's a boo coo hot day. We could smell the river from our RON this morning, so the thought of getting a bath or a swim has crossed the minds of many in the Second platoon.

As we arrive at the river, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has all the tracks space out at 50 foot intervals with orders for the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times. The

loader is half asleep on the bustle rack as Fanelli and I rig our poncho over the .50 Cal. so Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. doesn't have to sit out in the direct sun. It's not just for him, as we will all get our turn to sit behind the .50 Cal. eventually.

The transistor radios come out, and they are all blaring the one and only channel we can get. Fanelli has his out, but in deference to the loader, who is still trying to nap on the bustle rack, doesn't have it on full volume.

The bustle rack is partially in the sun, so when we stop driving around, it isn't long before the loader is hunkering down with Fanelli and me in the side shade of 2-3.

It's so hot, I want to go for a swim and have a bath. I don't care if there are 20 corpses upstream. We finally ask Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. if we're going to be here for a while, and he says we'll be here for most of the day. That's good enough for me, as I open my thermo chest and get out a clean t-shirt and a bar of soap. I head for the river, being careful to not be directly in front of the .50 Cal. on 2-3.

The Cam-lo River, while not quite as cold as the last time I had a swim, is still boo coo cold, and no one can stay in very long. It's so hot that after a few minutes in the sun, you are ready to go in for another cool down. I do that for about 20 minutes before I make my way to the shallows at the river's edge. I lather up out of the current and in the sun and then plunge in to rinse off. It is number one! Since it's not noon yet, I already plan on having another swim after lunch if we are indeed still here. I finally get my pants and t-shirt on, and in seconds I'm hot already.

I go back to 2-3 and get a dirty shirt and pants out of my thermo chest and take them down to the river to wash. I see I still have three brand new white t-shirts in my thermo chest. I'm saving them for something special. What, though, I don't know yet. When washing clothes during monsoon, it was almost pointless because it was so hard to get anything to dry. I'm pretty sure when I hang them to dry in this sun, they'll be dry in about 15 minutes. Okay, maybe 20 minutes. And sure enough, they are dry in 20 minutes, causing both Fanelli and the loader to decide it is a number one time to do some laundry.

We are still boo coo far away from Cam-lo or any village, so no locals come out to us offering to wash our clothes today. It's close enough to lunch time that I decide to eat some c-rats while Fanelli and the loader do their laundry. The swim and bath really stimulated my appetite, which is welcome

when eating c-rats for three meals a day. No competition at the case of c-rats for the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese that we all fight over now. First come, first served, Xin loi, guys! As I heat up my c-rat lunch, I wonder what else I can mix into the c-rats for a tee tee change. The jam I think? No, I don't think so. How about the peanut butter? Hmmm. I think the peanut butter could be good and at least worth a try.

As I'm eating my c-rat lunch, Fanelli and the loader return from their laundry detail. I ask Fanelli if he has ever put peanut butter in any of the c-rats.

He stops and almost looks wistful for a moment and says, "No, but the peanut butter is number one in the Ramen."

"Really?" I say. Usually Fanelli is such a purist about his Ramen. I've never even seen him put c-rat crackers in his Ramen, so the peanut butter surprises me. Definitely worth a try though.

I'll have to remember that if we ever get some Ramen again. When I finish my lunch, I relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. so he can have lunch. Up on the turret of 2-3 and under our poncho sunshade, there's an occasional breeze that feels number one. But when it stops (which is often), the heat is oppressive.

The dip in the river really recharged my batteries and got my core body temperature down a tee tee bit. I jumped up here to take my turn manning the .50 Cal. in hopes that I'll have an opportunity for an after lunch dip in the river.

I have a good view up and down the river from my perch on the turret. The countryside is quite beautiful and tropical looking now with all the sun and the past rain of monsoon. During monsoon when the sky was always gray and overcast, the beauty of this place was hard to appreciate. But now the sky is clear and blue and the sun is fierce and takes no prisoners, so once again the beauty is difficult to enjoy.

Finally Fanelli relieves me from behind the .50 Cal. I can see other platoon members up and down the river taking advantage of its cool temperature. I'm ready for another dip, but the loader decides to try to nap in the side shade of 2-3. I walk about 25 feet to the side of 2-3 before I get in the river again. It's not that I don't trust Fanelli specifically (who is currently behind the .50 Cal.), it's that I don't trust anybody behind the .50 Cal. when I'm in front of it.

The river still feels number one in the heat of the day. But the sun is so intense and the river so cold that eventually you can't take either. When I get out of the river, I seek shade immediately. We're boo coo far from Cam-lo, so

the longer we stay here, the less likely it will be that we resupply near Cam-lo.

The loader wakes from his nap and relieves Fanelli from behind the .50 Cal. so Fanelli and I decide to visit 2-6 if we can make it that far before we are ordered to move out. As we walk along the river bank, we have to stop and chat at least briefly with each crew. Fanelli, who has been here boo coo longer than me, has friends on just about every track, while I just barely know (or don't know) most of the platoon members. The way we operate and set up during the day and at night makes it hard to get to know the guys on other tracks.

The first track we get to is Double Deuce. Charlie Brown and Fanelli are friends, so we have to stop for a chat. Smitty, one of Charlie Brown's side gunners, looks miserable. Just as Fanelli can't get any Ramen, Smitty - being a major juicer - can't get any Tiger beer and is in dire straits. I can easily sympathize with Smitty. Because of the intolerable heat, it would be number one to chug down an ice cold Tiger beer right now. As long as I'm wishing, might as well wish for several ice cold Tiger beers. Won't get either wish so it doesn't matter.

The other side gunner on Double Deuce is the FNG who shot up the First platoon with the

.50 Cal. I still don't know his name, and before I can find out, Fanelli and I didi. Charlie Brown, being the TC of the screw-up track, has a pretty thick hide as far as teasing goes. He has suffered boo coo teasing about the possible contents of the package he received long ago. At least long enough that whatever was in it is long gone by now.

We sky over to 2-4, where Sgt. Green is the TC. Wack is one of the side gunners on 2-4, and he's in the river. But when he sees Fanelli and me talking to Sgt. Green, he comes out. The racial tension in the Second platoon is a tee tee bit less now that our Dear Platoon Sgt. has departed. I never heard him refer to Sgt. Green as “boy”, but he called Johnson and No Jets “boy” all the time. I guess it's fair to note that he called me and Fanelli “boy”, and he often referred to the LT as “boy” behind his back. We all resented it. But I doubt as much as Johnson and No Jets did.

Sgt. Green wants some Kools, but neither Fanelli nor I have any. I gave my Salems to Lon and her brother, and although we have some cigarettes in our barter stash, we have no Kools. Xin loi, Sgt. Green. Wack, Fanelli, and I don't smoke so it's hard for us to sympathize with the smokers and the lack of

their preferred smoke. Especially since the army seems to revolve around cigarette smoking. Even during basic training, smoking is not only allowed, it's almost encouraged. Frequent smoking breaks are common with the retort, "Smoke 'em if ya' got 'em!" Boo coo boredom and free cigarettes turn a lot of guys into smokers while in the army.

Wack joins Fanelli and me as we make our way to 2-6. 2-6 is the next track over, and the whole crew is there. Since Zack and I are both drivers, we compare notes on maintaining the new track, especially the end connectors which so far seem a tee tee bit fragile for this operating environment. I mention I've already replaced several cracked end connectors, prompting a quick walk around on 2-6 where we find a couple of cracked ones on 2-6. Xin loi, Zack! The entire track block and the end connectors don't seem as durable as on the M-48s.

We all have an opportunity to vent angrily about Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. and his Ambush Patrol. He just seems so intent on getting us hurt and for what we don't know. It's not bad enough that we go around like sitting ducks all day hoping we get attacked. But now they want to send us out at night during The Scary Time. It's scary enough inside the RON at night, but outside, I don't even want to think about it.

Fanelli and I envy the crew on 2-6, because they are all friends, as well as a crew. So far our platoon Sgts have been of the unfriendly sort, so the tension level is always a tee tee bit high. We need to trust and rely on the other crew members. But none of our platoon Sgts have been deserving of our trust, and both have proven unreliable to some extent. We spend a tee tee bit more time venting and cussing about our situation. Tough life, a soldier’s, we all agree.

Speaking of a tough life, Fanelli and I need to didi mau to 2-3 before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. thinks we have been gone too long. Wack tags along on his way back to 2-4, knowing we'll probably be moving out soon. By the time we get back to 2-3 (maybe 250 feet), I'm so hot all I want to do is jump in the river again.

No such luck, as we can hear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. on the horn to 2-5 Tango Charlie about our resupply plans. We listen in, especially Fanelli, hoping for a resupply close to Cam-lo. Luck continues to elude us, as we are going to resupply where we did yesterday. That's almost as number ten as camping at a previous RON, which we have also done. If we keep resupplying in the same place, not only will we *need* to put out our

concertina, but we will probably *need* to put up the RPG screen as well. It's also number ten as far as Fanelli is concerned. No locals will come to resupply, and that means no Ramen. I'm starting to miss the Ramen myself, as the c-rat cheese trick seems old already.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. eventually orders the Second platoon to prepare to didi. He has me lead the way back to our RON without mine sweeping, as he for some reason feels lucky. I hate that. When we reach last night's RON, he has Double Deuce take the lead mine sweeping to the redball. In short order, we reach the redball, and so Our Idiot Platoon lets Double Deuce lead the way to resupply. The Second platoon is already considered the dog robber platoon for more reasons than one. We just hope that when we get to resupply Charlie Brown's driver doesn't run over anyone. As the known screw up track, if something happens to go wrong, Double Deuce or someone on Double Deuce is usually involved. It doesn't help when the driver on Double Deuce wears a hat that makes him look just like Goofy. Xin loi, Charlie Brown.

We arrive at the resupply site and we are able to insinuate ourselves into the openings left in our three platoon resupply site without incident. The area enclosed is so huge, it will be a hike for mail call. We need supplies that we'll have to hump from the convoy at the center. Fanelli and the loader get the concertina wire out as I adjust 2-3's position to suit Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s liking. I replace Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. when he didi maus for the hot chow. Fanelli and the loader get some of our supplies before heading over to mail call. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns and climbs up on the turret to have his dinner behind the .50 Cal. like a soldier. I climb down and take advantage of opening a new case of c-rats, ensuring I get one of the tee tee cans of cheese. I'm almost finished with my c-rat dinner when Fanelli and the loader return from mail call. We are decidedly out of luck, as there is no mail for any of the crew on 2-3.

It's on both Fanelli's and my mind that if Our Idiot Platoon sends out an AP tonight, one of us will be on it. After Fanelli and the loader finish eating, we saunter over to the convoy to get the rest of our supplies. No ammo today, but I have a boo coo big box of trip flares that I really need after last night. The resupply convoy wants to get back to base camp and all the platoons want to get to their RONs soon, before dark preferably.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and orders the Second platoon to follow 2-3 to the redball. We drive at least 5 kliks before we turn south on a

dirt trail. Because the loader hasn't fully recovered from the AP, Fanelli starts mine sweeping our way to the RON. The drive on the redball felt number one to me in the breeze, but now it's stiflingly hot in the driver's compartment. I'm sure Fanelli is feeling tee tee hot as well. On the plus side, I don't have to rely on Smitty to mine sweep for me as we proceed at a walking pace for 30 minutes before we arrive at our intended RON. We hope!

We're still not positive Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. really knows where we are. It's sort of important to know exactly where you are, especially if there are APs out at night. But we never get that feeling, mainly because no one ever tells us where we are or where the other APs are. No one gives us maps or compasses for our APs, so the other APs are probably lacking in these things as well.

The reality of the situation is that nobody knows for sure where anybody else is. And did I mention Charlie? He's the main reason we're here. We may not know where we are or any of the other platoons or APs are, but Charlie knows where everyone is and that's number ten.

We drive around and flatten everything in sight. It's fairly open here, so our distance view is number one for once. Most of the Second platoon dismount and go over the entire area as if we're searching for an airplane ticket back to the Real World. The reason I say this is because this place is littered with small pieces of paper. Some of it caught up in the branches of the bushes we just flattened, but boo coo of it is just laying on the ground. Most of it faded and rumpled from being wet from monsoon and now laying out in the tropical sun. After carefully scrutinizing one to make absolutely sure it is not booby trapped, I pick it up from the ground. It looks like a ticket for something and turns out to be a Chieu Hoi pamphlet. It's written in Vietnamese, and the only words on it that I know the meaning of are Chieu Hoi, which is written in large print across the top. Chieu Hoi is the official name of the surrender program the army has for the NVA. The army aerial drops pamphlets all over the Z and the northern part of South Viet Nam. The joke around here is that every NVA carries a Chieu Hoi surrender pamphlet in their back pocket, as an insurance policy, should they ever find themselves in a jam with the US Army.

Fanelli says to me as I look over the pamphlet, "Just be careful, Wolf. The Chieu Hoi may have more in his back pocket than the pamphlet." As always, I consider advice from Fanelli as sage advice and not to be ignored.

With that thought in mind and a shoot-first-ask-questions-later policy, only

tee tee Chieu Hoi ever survive to surrender. Xin loi, Chieu Hoi!

After a thorough search, we find nothing else. At least something that's number one. I start to put my trip flares out, mindful that it might be all for nothing. I don't know what to do. Do it my way and end up with a big hole in our night defenses if I have to take the AP out tonight. Or, do a cake walk so I can get the AP through and at least have something in place tonight?

I do it my way in hopes that the AP goes out somewhere else. It's only fair, I think and hope. Fair? What am I thinking? After the trip flares, I do the claymores. Fanelli and the loader deal with the concertina wire and the RPG screen, and I set up my tent behind 2-3. It's not dark yet, so we made boo coo good time.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and tells the rest of the TCs to send one crewman over to 2-3 for Ambush Patrol just after dark. When I hear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. announce the AP, my first worry was that I'd have to get the AP through my stuff. I had forgotten I might actually have to go on the AP tonight when he says to Fanelli, "You're on the AP tonight."

He then tells Charlie Brown that the AP is going out tonight in front of Double Deuce. That should prove to be no problem. I could probably walk blindfolded through the trip flares they set out in front of Double Deuce. But that doesn't make Fanelli or any members of the AP happy. Going on AP, much like the rear, sucks!

It's soon dark, and Charlie Brown has his driver, Goofy, escort the AP through their night defenses. As I predicted, they make it through without incident. That's number one for the AP. But it makes me think I always want to be as far away from Double Deuce as possible when we set up our RON.

A three man crew again on 2-3 and all the tracks tonight. I'm tired, but the loader is even more tired. We climb into the turret of 2-3 and turn on the red lights to get our night vision. It's not really comfortable in the turret, so after I have my night vision, I get out of the turret and move into the driver's compartment. My driver's seat lets me stretch out for a nap before bedtime. The loader is already under the tarp and asleep. I doze off and on till about midnight. Then I get out of the driver's compartment and close the hatch almost all the way. I climb up on the turret to check on Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. He's having a boo coo good time playing soldier up here listening to the sitreps from the AP.

I take my leave climb over to my tent. I am so tired, even after my naps. I dive in and cover myself with my sleeping bag despite the heat. I can't stand

the heat of keeping my face covered very long and soon it's just like old times, with the buzz and hum of bugs flying close to and landing on my face. At night the bugs range from very annoying to boo coo bad. Most of the bugs here in the Nam are huge, especially the scorpions. Some of the flying insects are so boo coo big that it sounds like a bird has gotten into my tent and is flapping around trying to find its way out. It's the biting bugs that are the worst at night. Even with bug juice slathered all over us, the mosquitoes still bite. Malaria carrying mosquitoes, I should add. Just like old times, I think as I fade off to sleep. Just like old times.

*May 26, 1876*
*Friday*
*Camp Command*

*Had a very good guard last night, all quiet, no Sioux.*
*F Co. and cavalry came in this morning. Traveled all last night. Left a company within 8 miles of Ft. Pease.*
*Day pleasant with several small showers of snow.*
*E Co. goes across the river with mounted detachment for what all I do not know. Our carpenter has been making oars for the boats here.*
*Had a supply of peaches and eggs.*
*No Indians saw today. All is so very quiet which bodes ill I think.*
*General Terry is reported coming up the river when I expect we will have warm times.*
*Seen something curious today that I never heard of. That is, saw the sun, moon and stars shone very bright and seemed to be moving around the moon.*

March 16, 1970
Monday
Quang Tri Province

The loader wakes me at 4 a.m. for my turn sitting behind the .50 Cal. on guard duty. He tells me that the AP hasn't been heard from since the 2 a.m. sitrep they called in. Once again, because of the lack of any gunfire being heard, it is assumed their horn battery died. The purpose (we think, since no one tells us anything) of the AP is to ambush Charlie as they approach our RON at night.

The biggest problem with that plan is that Charlie can attack the RON from any of 360 degrees of our set up, and we encompass a boo coo huge area. The AP can only guard a tee tee portion of the many possible attack points. It should be pointed out that should the AP engage Charlie, it would probably cost all the AP members their lives so that the rest of the Second platoon is forewarned of an imminent attack. Xin loi, guys!

If the APs go out like when I took them out (setting off all my trip flares), Charlie will know where they are. So Charlie can either avoid the AP or wipe them out first. Also, for the AP, being just outside the RON in the dark often means being close enough to be hit by the .50 Cal. or the can rounds from the tank's main gun. That is a number ten place to be. If we're being attacked and the AP has somehow survived, their chances of safely getting back inside the RON are slim. Anyone running into the RON in the dark is apt to be shot first by the Second platoon. Not to mention Charlie: If Charlie sees the AP trying to get back inside the RON, they're going to try to prevent that. No one, it seems, has thought about the ramifications of when an AP is sent out at night.

It's not pitch dark out when I get up, and the stars are out. Optimal conditions when it's still dark and The Scary Time. Unless something happens to change it, I will probably have to go on AP tonight. It's such a scary thought I can't think about it now.

It has been said or inferred that the rest of the platoon will come to the aid of the AP should they be attacked. The only problem being the dead horn batteries which prohibit calling for said help. The dead horn battery also prevents the AP members from calling their buddies in the platoon to say their goodbyes before being killed. It's just a tee tee thing, I know. But we hate that!

I busy myself calling in my sitreps as I wait for sunrise. Still no word from the AP. But no sound of gunfire either. Slowly it starts to get light at 6 a.m. In the tropics you can just about set your watch by the sunrise and sunset year round. That is, when you can actually see the sun. I jump down from the turret and start heating water for my morning coffee. I barely finish making it when Fanelli returns from his night on AP. His absence has been our first long term separation in over six weeks, as we are together 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

I can tell by the scowl on his face that he is not happy, so I try a tee tee bit of teasing to bring him out of his current bad mood.

"Fanelli," I say, "man, I hope the next time you're going to spend the night

out that you at least tell me first. You know how I hate that!" And then I make a tee tee pouty face.

"Fuck you!" he says. "Boo coo fucking funny!"

He's not laughing though. The big question for me, which is soon answered: Is Fanelli going to sleep first or shave?

Sleep wins as he crawls under the tarp while it is still partially in the shade.

I have my pecan roll as I finish my canteen cup of coffee. The loader is heating his c-rat breakfast as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. heats water for his shave. Someone should talk to him about his Hitler mustache. But it won't be me.

It's scorching out already, and the sun is just starting to show its power. I can only hope we head to the river again today. But I'm not going to jinx it by saying anything about it.

The heat and the noise of the Second platoon moving around in the morning finally forces Fanelli to give up trying to get any sleep. He had better shave soon, I think, because the normally strack Fanelli looks like hell. No sleep last night and now no Ramen for breakfast and not just breakfast - no Ramen at all! He probably feels like he looks. So I decide to let him mellow out a tee tee bit before I try to tease him again.

I'm trying to think which c-rat meal might be improved with the addition of some peanut butter, as we are fighting over the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese. Something I never thought I'd see. So if I can use the peanut butter, it would be number one.

Johnson shows up unexpectedly and of course wants our Ham and Eggs. He is in luck, and I toss him two cans. He opens one with his P-38 and quickly starts to eat it cold before it gets stale. Actually, I think, getting stale might improve Ham and Eggs. It's almost the highlight of our day watching Johnson eat the Ham and Eggs. If he doesn't like them, he is a boo coo good actor. I vote for actor, having tasted and eaten Ham and Eggs myself.

We hate when the highlight of our day happens so soon. Now we have nothing to look forward to. Except for me and nine other Second platoon members, who will most likely be sent on AP tonight. I still can't think about that.

I busy myself draining the water from 2-3's fuel filters, and then I give all the track blocks some close scrutiny for damage. Everything looks number one. I take my tent down and roll up my stretcher inside it and put it next to 2-3 to get rolled up in the tarp when Fanelli and the loader take it down. Our

Idiot Platoon Sgt. has made me realize we had it boo coo better when we were orphans with no LT and no platoon Sgt. It might be number one if we can get a new LT before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets us all killed.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn to inform the rest of the Second platoon to prepare to break camp. I bring in my trip flares, which takes longer this time since I still have some to bring in instead of setting them all off the night before. I wind up the claymore detonator wire and then stow everything. $500,000 is what we are told 2-3 costs, and yet we look like gypsies on a camp out with all our gear tied to it. Xin loi, gypsies; no offense meant, really.

I climb into the driver's compartment, the loader climbs up on the turret, and Fanelli stretches out on top of our gear on the bustle rack hoping to catch forty winks. Good luck with that, Fanelli.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has 2-6 lead the way out of our RON and back to the redball. I can see Big Al is out front, mine sweeping the trail. We don't get far and Big Al finds a land mine. We hate that! Of course, we hate not finding them and running them over more. But finding a land mine on a trail we just mine swept yesterday means we are being watched, and that's what we really hate.

Big Al clears the land mine with some C-4, and we are on our way again at a walking pace. We're cautious when clearing mines, because where there is one mine, in all likelihood there are several more. Often, the explosion to clear a found mine can set off another un-found mine. That's number one. But we hate counting on luck here in the Nam. Clearing the mine took a tee tee bit of time so it takes us almost an hour to get to the redball.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has Steve on 2-6 lead the way heading west on the redball going even further away from Cam-lo. Xin loi, Fanelli! We drive to a point where we are the furthest west on the redball that I've ever been. The south side of the road is now rolling hills covered with green scrub. It looks lusher than it really is. In the distance everything looks boo coo lush and green, but when we finally get to an area we looked at from afar it's just the same short green scrub and a tee tee bit of exposed earth as the area we came from.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally takes the lead from 2-6 and has me turn off the redball into the bush. Instead of mine sweeping, we break brush. It's hot and humid in my driver's compartment. We drive through the scrub, and when we get to the top of a hill or a ridge we have a good view of our

surrounding area. But when we're in the bottom of the ravines, we can't see much and that's number ten.

I couldn't see Fanelli on the drive on the redball, but it was a fairly smooth ride so he might have gotten some sleep. He's up now, because I can hear him talking to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. over the intercom. Fanelli, unlike me, has been here before, so he is filling in Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. on the details. When you're 2 or 3 kliks from the Z details can be important, even to an idiot.

We stop at the top of a ridge line and space out the tracks for a break. We have a good view east, west, and north, and we can see the choppers flying back and forth. When we can't see them, we can hear them. There is a lot of chopper activity today, and I've been seeing everything we ever see, such as the dust off choppers, Slicks, Cobras, and some Huey loaches as well. We even see a Shithook, and that's number ten. A chopper must have gone down somewhere.

There must be something happening to the north of us, but so far we haven't been called in. It was number one driving on the redball. But going slow while breaking brush has me all hot and sweaty again. We want to set up the poncho for some shade. But since Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is up on the turret, we're in no hurry. We hunker down in the side shade of 2-3 and wait for our orders.

It's getting close to noon and some of us want to eat. But we have to wait and see if we actually have to do something as they tell us nothing. We sit on the ridge in the sweltering heat for about 30 minutes before the loader asks Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. if we're staying here long enough to have lunch. He won't commit, so we decide to take a chance and have a go at lunch. One of the advantages of using C-4 to heat our c-rats is that if done right, it is fast. If we have to move out before we finish our food, we just throw it away. We do that all the time. Probably one reason why we get more c-rats than we need.

Today we finish our lunch before we have to move out, and that's number one. For my first peanut butter augmented c-rat meal, I heat up a can of the boned chicken, eat a bite out of it, and put the heated peanut butter in. Reminds me vaguely of something I've had at a Chinese restaurant once. Not exactly number one, but close. Maybe cheese and peanut butter would be even better. Fanelli is starting to act like himself again. Since he and the loader both get some cheese for their lunch, he's as happy as he can be without Ramen.

We watch the choppers going to and from their battle site most of the

afternoon. The Cobras have been busy all afternoon. When they leave to get more ammo and fuel, Snoopy and Puff the Magic Dragon show up and work the area over until the Cobras return. It's got to be a number ten day for Charlie I would think, as many will undoubtedly be wounded or killed.

When Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally has the loader take his place behind the .50 Cal. so he can have his lunch, I help the loader put the poncho up for some shade. This has been one of the hottest days yet since monsoon has ended. It's number ten that we are sitting out in the open under the tropical sun with tee tee shade. Nothing to drink but warm water that tastes like plastic. I have a couple of Cokes left, but I can't stand to drink them warm anymore. If I make it out of the Nam, I will never let warm water pass my lips again as long as I live.

It's so hot we only move into the sun when we have to. There's only a hint of a breeze noticeable when sitting up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. But it doesn't help in this sweltering heat. I've been wearing my palm frond hat, as is the loader. I notice Fanelli hasn't been teasing us about them. Maybe because now he wants one.

The afternoon passes slowly in the stifling heat. Although we hate when it gets dark and scary, the sun is so intense, we can't wait for sundown. Later in the afternoon, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn for confirmation of the resupply location. Not close enough to Cam-lo from what we can overhear of the horn chatter, so no Ramen today. Xin loi, Fanelli!

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has the Second platoon line up behind 2-3, and I lead the way back to the redball on the trail I made earlier in the day. No mine sweeping, and in this heat, everyone who does mine sweeping is relieved for now. We get to the redball and head east with 2-3 in the lead. I drive at about 15 mph, and the breeze is heavenly. I don't want to stop when we finally arrive at our resupply site.

The resupply convoy is already here, as is one of the other platoons. As we start to fill in the empty spaces the last of the three platoons shows up and our site is complete. Fanelli and the loader put out the concertina wire and connect it to the other tracks concertina wire as I position 2-3 to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s liking. Resupply hasn't been much fun lately since we are so far from Cam-lo, and we don't get to chat with Fanelli's mamasan, Lon and her brother. I miss that.

The loader and I head for mail call while Fanelli relaxes up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. It's a long walk for mail, hot chow, and our supplies, and

it is still smoking hot and unbearably humid. When it's boo coo humid your sweat doesn't evaporate, so we just about swim in our sweat. We would kill for some ice right now. But if there were ice at the hot chow line, we would know about it by now. We wait and we wait at mail call, as there are about 150 guys in all three platoons - sometimes more, sometimes less (but usually less). We get no mail and are disappointed as are all the guys who get no mail every day.

The loader and I saunter back to 2-3. Fanelli, the loader, and I start heating up c-rats for our dinner. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns with his paper plate of hot chow and relieves Fanelli from behind the .50 Cal. We all check his plate to see today's offering of hot chow, and it confirms in our minds we made the right decision for our dinner. I let Fanelli and the loader have the tee tee cans of cheese as I continue to experiment with the peanut butter some more. I'm trying the Spiced Beef today, and it's an improvement. But it reminds me of Fanelli's mamasan's bread, or I should say the lack of her bread.

After our dinner, the loader and I sky over to the convoy to get our supplies and our two cases of c-rats. The c-rat cases weigh about 25 lbs. each. The loader and I each grab a case of c-rats, pile our supplies on top, and then hump everything back to 2-3. It doesn't sound like much, but the heat and the humidity are still intense, so you can scarcely catch your breath when exerting yourself. We are both boo coo winded before we get back to 2-3.

What I wouldn't give for a cold Coke or Tiger beer or just a cold glass of water right now. It's number one we didn't need any ammo today. The fuel truck comes over to 2-3, so I top off the fuel tank, and we are done with resupply.

As the rest of the platoon members get ready to depart, they start dousing the trash in the burn holes with diesel fuel and light it all on fire. Before we didi mau, the resupply site is a burning and smoking mess, and I can't wait to sky. Eventually Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the rest of the Second platoon to prepare to didi for our RON. 2-5 takes the lead as we head west on the redball, single file. We get going to about 15 mph, and the breeze is number one. But we don't drive far before 2-5 Tango Charlie turns off the redball. Since there is no trail, we break brush as we move through the bush to our RON.

The brush isn't too high or dense here. But as soon as it starts getting dark, this place will be number ten. We continue breaking brush for another 20 minutes or so before we arrive at our intended RON. It's a boo coo big open

area with a few trees here and there. We drive in circles flattening everything but the trees. We could probably knock some of the trees down, but for no reason as they're not really in our way, so we don't. We dismount and as carefully as children looking for treats on an Easter egg hunt, we search the area for tunnels. We find none so we proceed to set out our night defenses.

I'm sure I'm going on Ambush Patrol tonight, but I put out my trip flares, as usual, with all of them set on hair triggers. If I have to try to get through my stuff and fail, I won't be in the RON tonight when there's a highway through my night defenses. Xin loi, guys, but not you, Sarge! When I finish connecting all the claymores to the detonators, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is on the horn ordering the other track TCs to send one crewman over to 2-3 ready to go on AP.

He turns to me and says, "Wolf, you're on AP, so get ready."

2-4 is next to us in the RON, so I sky over to borrow Wack's M-16 again. Wack is also on the AP, and he is taking his M-60, so he lets me borrow his M-16. I offer to carry two belts of ammo for the M-60. The M-60 alone is a beast to carry, but on AP the M-60 will be boo coo welcome. We grab all the ammo we can carry and sky back to 2-3. The rest of the AP begins to show up. Johnson, No Jets, Big Al, and Smitty are already there. Counting myself, I know six of the ten AP members.

I guess I know more guys in the Second platoon than I realized.

It's almost dark, so I get the rest of my gear together. I have my canteen filled with warm water and my hated .45 with two loaded magazine clips for it. I have Wack's M-16 and 4 loaded magazine clips plus the two belts of 7.62 mm ammo for the M-60. I also have two grenades hanging from my shirt pockets. I don't think I've carried this kind of weight in heat like this since basic training. How, I wonder, do the grunts do this everyday? Interestingly, I doubt any grunts would trade places with us on the tanks.

We're finally ready to set off on our AP and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders me to lead the AP through my stuff.

Along with at least half the AP members, I protest. I say to him, "I can't get through my stuff. Don't you remember what happened last time? I have all my trip flares set exactly the same way. No one can get through my stuff. No one. That's the way it's supposed to be."

None of our reasons can sway his decision which only goes to prove - yet again - that you can't reason with an idiot. We protest that Charlie will know we're out there and where. But it is to no avail, as his mind, what there is of

it, is made up.

Because I half suspected this would happen, I didn't connect a trip flare to the concertina wire today. As the AP follows me out front of 2-3, it goes well, as I get everyone past the concertina wire and claymores without incident. Our red flashlights barely illuminate our way. But I manage to find the first few trip flares as we proceed.

My luck finally runs out when I take another step and set a trip flare off. Everyone quickly looks away as I run over to it and kick it to put it out. Unfortunately I set off two more as I try to extinguish the first trip flare. Well, the night defense highway is back. Xin loi, guys.

Before I'm done, not only have I lost my night vision; I have no vision, at all. In the end, the AP makes it out of the RON with me holding on to Big Al's shirt tail, as I'm virtually blind. A number ten way to start an AP. We, like all the preceding patrols, elect to carry as much ammo as possible, so we don't bring a spare battery for the horn.

Even though the rest of the patrol still has their night vision, its pitch black out, and we have to feel our way. How we're expected to set up an ambush when we can't see is beyond me. Our main focus is to get far enough in front of 2-3 so Our Idiot Platoon Sgt can't shoot us with the .50 Cal.

We realize that will be boo coo far, and we give it up.

In the dark, without any maps or a compass and no visible trails, we have no idea how to set up an ambush. We continue moving around as cautiously as we can. My vision is finally back, but in the pitch dark, we can't see much. After a while we finally decide to set up our ambush, and we form a small circle with nine guys facing out and one guy in the center with the horn which miraculously is still operational. For now. As the night progresses, we take turns sitting in the center for an hour with the horn, calling in the sitreps every fifteen minutes. Officers and generals, in particular, are expert at ordering others into harm’s way while they wait for your sitreps in a safe and secure area. Officers aren't the only ones known to be expert at this, as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has proven himself adept at it as well.

It's hot and the bugs have found us, so it's already number ten. We're all slathered with bug juice, but the bugs here are persistent. And if that's not enough, someone is farting to beat the band. Probably Johnson from his Ham and Egg diet. If Charlie is anywhere near, they can smell us for sure.

I'm still on the outside of our AP circle. No Jets is in the center for his hour as radioman. We're all boo coo tired since this is the third day in a row of

sending out APs. Everyone in the Second platoon has been operating on four hours of sleep at night, at most. As I wait for my turn to be radioman, I, like all the AP members of the outside circle, close my eyes for a tee tee rest.

*July 4, 1876*
*Tuesday, Independence Day*
*Big Horn Valley*

*Today passed off very quiet. Hardly knew it was fourth of July. The steamer Josephine expected daily. Mail goes this evening. Gen. Terry went with steamer to Bismarck to be in communication with telegraph to find out what he will have to do.*

*A man by the name Sandy left here to try to find Gen. Crook and command who is supposed to be on the other side of Big Horn Mountains.*

March 17, 1970
Tuesday, St. Patrick's Day
Quang Tri Province

When I finally wake up, I am completely disoriented. Where am I? How come I'm waking up by myself when I expect Fanelli to wake me? I'm laying in the grass and looking up at the sky. Where's my tent? I wonder, as I try to collect my thoughts.

All of a sudden, I realize where the hell I am, and I sit bolt upright. Everyone else is asleep. The radioman in the center of our AP is also asleep and shall remain nameless. When I wake him, he says the horn battery died during his hour of watch, and he must have fallen asleep. Even without radio contact, someone is supposed to be awake at all times, especially on AP. That no one was awake is number ten, but so far no harm done. We are lucky and know it.

It's getting light, so I know it's after 6 a.m., and it might be safe to go back to the RON. Might be safe. Maybe... maybe not. I wake the rest of the AP. We are all wet from the dew, but I think we might have gotten tee tee more sleep than the rest of the Second platoon.

Since we set up our ambush in the pitch dark, we're not completely sure where we are. We follow what we think is our trail from last night and soon we can hear the Second platoon moving about and the sound of burning C-4

for cooking their breakfasts.

There is a good reason to be tee tee nervous before we enter the RON, because patrols normally announce their return over the horn to ensure they don't get shot up. Our return is barely noticed, and even though we lost radio contact last night, it seems there was no concern about our safety, except from ourselves.

We arrive back at the Second platoon's RON in front of Double Deuce, which is dicey depending on who is sitting behind the .50 Cal. Their trip flares are a walk in the park in the daylight, and the entire AP is able to stroll through without setting any off. Might want to do something about that Charlie Brown. Xin loi.

Once inside the RON, all the members of the AP disperse to their assigned tracks. When I arrive back at 2-3, Fanelli and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. are having their morning shave, and the loader is trying to nap under the tarp as he had last shift on guard behind the .50 Cal. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. wants a sitrep from me on last night's AP. I tell him we saw and heard nothing, and eventually the horn battery died. Since no one came to rescue us, we waited for first light, and here we are.

No need to tell him what a nice nap the AP had compared to the four hours the rest of Second platoon got. However, the AP's sleeping arrangements were a tee tee bit more dangerous and exposed. Speaking of which, I want to put on some dry clothes, so I climb up on 2-3 and open my personal belonging thermo chest to get some dry clothes. When I open the lid, my calendar is laying on top. I'm not anywhere near short enough to start marking off days. But since every day here is same-same, if you don't have a calendar, you can't tell one day from the next. I can't help noticing that today is St. Patrick's Day. I'm part Irish. It will be easy to wear something green today. What would be hard is to wear something that is not green, and I have something. I still have three brand new white t-shirts. It's not even 8 a.m., and it is hot and likely to get hotter. I peel off my wet OD t-shirt and put on one of my white t-shirts. In the morning sun it is dazzling.

That can be a number ten thing if there are snipers about, and that's the first thing Fanelli says when I jump down off of 2-3. I tell him I thought about that, but I'm hoping the sniper would be smart enough to know I'm not an officer.

He laughs and says, "You hope."

Anyway, I'm not going to let Fanelli ruin my fun yet. I walk to the front of

2-3, slide open the hatch, and grab my palm frond hat. I put it on, and my St. Patrick's Day outfit is complete. Fanelli and the loader both have a laugh at my outfit. I can tell our Idiot Platoon Sgt disapproves. I have forgotten how much cooler white t-shirts are in the hot sun compared with dark colored shirts.

I finally start heating some water for my morning java, and once it's made I'm extra careful not to spill any coffee on my shirt. I add a pecan roll to my breakfast as usual.

After my breakfast, I notice that three days in a row with four hours sleep is catching up on the Second platoon. No one is moving too fast. It doesn't help that the tropical sun is already beating down. But thanks to my white t-shirt and my palm frond hat, I feel cooler than anyone else both in temperature and style.

I decide to saunter around the RON and spread a tee tee bit of St. Patrick's Day cheer to my fellow platoon members, Irish or not. It sure looks like everyone is Irish, as they are all wearing green today as they are everyday.

The first person I encounter is Smitty on Double Deuce, and although he claims no Irish heritage, he thinks St. Patrick's Day in number one. Especially the beer drinking part. He seems a tee tee bit wistful when talking about beer since he has been out of Tiger beer for a while. He's envious of my white t-shirt but also questions the wisdom of wearing it out in the open. Charlie Brown returns from taking Snoopy out for his morning constitutional, outside of the concertina wire, so we don't have to step in any dog crap. If you step in dog crap with your jungle boots, you might as well throw them away, as the sole of the jungle boots cannot be completely cleaned. I continue on my way, and I stop in the center of the RON at the medic track to show Doc how my palm frond hat came out.

He thinks it a job well done, and it turns out Doc is Irish.

"Isn't everyone?" he asks.

"I don't think Fanelli is, even though he is wearing green," I say.

I continue across the RON to 2-4 to catch up with Wack. Wack must be Irish, as he is always wearing green. We joke with Sgt Green, one of the three Brothers in the Second platoon, that with the last name Green, he must also be Irish.

"Fucking aye, I'm Irish!" he jokes back.

I'll take that as a roger and leave it at that.

Everyone is envious of my white t-shirt in the intense heat which will only

increase as the day wears on. Wack and I are in a boo coo good mood, because we got a little extra sleep last night, and because we know we won't have to go on AP tonight. So, in honor of St. Patrick's Day, we saunter around the RON and spread some more Irish joy before we break camp.

We make it over to 2-6, and before I can answer their questions as to where I got my white t-shirt, we hear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt over 2-6's horn ordering the second platoon to prepare to break camp. So Wack and I have to take our leave, our St. Patrick's Day fun over already.

I get back to 2-3 and busy myself bringing in the claymores and the trip flares that are left from last night and stow everything. Then I climb into the driver's compartment and start the engine. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the rest of the Second platoon to uncircle and line up behind 2-3, and then I drive to the edge of the RON. Fanelli gets down off of 2-3 and starts mine sweeping our way on the trail we made yesterday. It took us about a half hour to drive to our RON without mine sweeping, so it should take us over an hour to get to the redball at a walking pace. It's slow going in the heat, so no breeze to cool me off as I drive. At least someone I trust is doing the mine sweeping. Xin loi, Fanelli.

We are driving down the trail we made yesterday, and at this pace we are boo coo sitting ducks. We hate that. As hot as I am, I know Fanelli is even hotter. He's walking in the sun with the minesweeper, which gets boo coo heavy after a while. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally takes pity on Fanelli and has 2-4 come to the front. Since Wack is well rested, he volunteers to mine sweep. That's number one for us as so far today our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has had the two guys I trust the most mine sweep our way back to the redball. St. Patrick must be looking out for the Second platoon today.

We make it to the redball without incident and our Idiot Platoon Sgt. confers with 2-5 Tango Charlie as to the closest river crossing that the P.C.s can make. They discuss a couple of options, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. settles on one so as to continue to explore his new domain. We sky east on the redball for a couple of kliks, and then we turn on to a dirt trail heading north towards the Cam-lo River. Double Deuce leads the way on the trail with Smitty mine sweeping. 2-3 is right behind Double Deuce, a P.C., so our track widths are different and don't line up. So if Smitty misses a land mine - and even if Double Deuce misses it - I could still hit it. I hate that!

Hitting a land mine is number ten, but hitting one going slow, which we are, is number ten thousand! We finally get to the Cam-lo River, and it looks

so inviting in the heat of the day as the sun shimmers off the cool blue water.

If Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is trying to make everyone in the Second platoon hate him, he is going about it in an expert fashion.

He has me cross the river first, so we can cover the rest of the platoon as they cross. The Cam-lo river is about 2 to 3 feet deep here, which is about the deepest we care to cross without putting up the flotation system on the tanks. If the tanks have to deploy the flotation system, the P.C.s wouldn't be able to cross. We've never tried our flotation system, because part of it has already been removed as it would totally block my view even when not deployed. It is, after all, the army. Who would expect them to get that right. We're told it was a contractual Snafu. The contract with the tank manufacturer clearly stated the tank had to float and be able to maneuver in water. Unfortunately there was no mention in the contract that the driver had to actually be able to see where they were going at any time. Xin loi, Drivers!

The hardest part of this river crossing is the steep embankment of the trail on the opposite side. It looks like it goes straight up. After a couple of the tracks drip water all over it, the last tracks to cross will have a much harder time making it to the top. When I get to the top of the embankment, I do a neutral steer and spin half way around to face the river so we can cover the rest of the platoon.

2-6 waits on the south side of the river while the last of the P.C.s make it to the top of the embankment. The last two P.C.s make it to the top, but with great difficulty with the deteriorating trail conditions. I call Zack, the driver on 2-6, over the horn to tell him that as soon as he gets 2-6 out of the water, he should floor the accelerator or he might not make it to the top. This would be embarrassing for a tank driver, as all the P.C.s made it to the top. 2-6 makes it to the top of the river bank without much difficulty.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has 2-6 go to the front of the platoon and start to lead the way. Big Al is mine sweeping in front of 2-6, and it's now the hottest part of the day for the next couple of hours. Everyone and everything seeks out some shade to wait for the intense heat to subside. Everyone except us. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is apparently unaware of heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

We're proceeding at a walking pace behind 2-6 when Steve, the TC on 2-6, calls Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. over the horn to report seeing two civilians just up ahead of us on the trail. As we approach, they don't try to flee. It appears to be two old men collecting firewood.

No one in the Second platoon really speaks Vietnamese, and these two guys speak no English, so the only thing we can get across to them is that it's number ten for them to be here. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn to Higher. We are told to stay in place and hold the civilians until the ARVNs come to get them. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has the Second platoon spread out in a line spaced at 50 to 75 foot intervals with the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times.

We are all out in the open. The brush isn't very dense, so we're not complete sitting ducks. But we are right out in the sun. Fanelli, the loader, and I are all taking refuge from the sun in the side shade of 2-3, which is just a sliver of shade this time of day.

We finally take pity on Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., and we leave our refuge to put the poncho over the .50 Cal. for some shade up on the turret. Actually it's not that we take pity on Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. We put the poncho up for shade, because we know we will all eventually be sitting behind the .50 Cal. at some point. Fanelli, who has waited for the ARVNs before, says they don't come in a hurry.

We are in the middle of nowhere and how the ARVNs are getting here is unknown. And so we wait. Something we are all well practiced and expert at. First I climb into my driver's compartment for some shade and a comfortable seat. I try to catch up on my journal entries. I do make some, but it's too hot just sitting inside 2-3 so I finally get out. I relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from behind the 50 Cal., and it's actually the best place right now, as there's a tee tee breeze. The shade of the poncho is also number one. I can look around from my perch on top of the turret and can see boo coo far in all directions.

No ARVNs yet. Fanelli, the loader, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. have their c-rat lunches, and then the loader relieves me from my post in the shade behind the 50 Cal. I heat up my c-rat lunch as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. skys over to the medic's track where we are holding the civilians. Doc doesn't really speak Vietnamese, but he can communicate with the locals as well as Fanelli. He is pretty sure these guys aren't dangerous, but it's not our call. Xin loi, old guys!

From my position on top of 2-3, I see a couple of jeeps approaching us from the front. Where they came from, we can only guess. But it's the ARVNs we're waiting for, so we turn the civilians over to them, and they didi.

We had to wait quite a while for the ARVNs to show, and it's late

afternoon now. Our river crossing won't take as long as most of the tracks will probably just slide down the bank into the river, whether they want to or not. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has the Second platoon turn around in place, and we sky with 2-3 in the lead. Since we just drove on this trail, we are not mine sweeping as we backtrack to the river crossing.

We're not able to go very fast since the trail is rough. It's really hot inside and out. We're not complete sitting ducks, but because we're in the lead, I have my hated .45 loaded and sitting on my lap. I point it at my .50 Cal. ammo box in case it goes off unexpectedly. It is such a piece of junk that if it went off, it really wouldn't be unexpectedly. That's why I have it pointed at the ammo box. I expect it to go off, and I don't want it to ricochet around and maybe hit the main gun ammo that's stacked and stored on both sides of me. I would hate that!

We arrive at the top of the river embankment we have to drive down to cross the river. I ask Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. if he wants me to continue and cross the river, and he gives me a roger. The tank has an automatic transmission, and I usually drive around with it in "D" for "Drive" but this embankment is boo coo steep. I don't want to go too fast, but I don't want to go too slow and have the track lose its grip and start sliding down out of control. First gear will be too slow, and I'll be more prone to sliding. So I put it in second gear, and I head down. A tee tee bit faster than I had intended, but 2-3 is under control at all times and not sliding.

It will be a tee tee bit harder for the P.C.s because their track is narrower than the tanks track. They also carry a boo coo amount of .50 Cal. and M-60 ammo. I manage to slow 2-3 down enough that we enter the river smoothly with no impact and no water washing up the front of the hull and into the driver's compartment.

It's so hot today, I wouldn't mind the river water coming into the driver's compartment but the batteries are under the turret floor, and they don't work well, if at all, when submerged in water.

I drive 2-3 straight across the Cam-lo River, and then I turn around carefully on the rocky river bank. We guard the rest of the Second platoon as they cross the river one by one. As expected, a couple of the P.C. tracks break loose on the steep grade, but they all regain control before entering the river. Every track makes it back across and we all line up behind 2-5.

2-5 Tango Charlie then leads the way back to the redball. As we drive there is some horn chatter and someone is joking with Smitty that because it's

St. Patrick's Day, there might be green beer at the hot chow today. That's a boo coo big joke because it could be Christmas and there wouldn't be any beer at the hot chow - green or otherwise - and we all know that.

We just hope there's some ice at resupply, but we know better than to hope too much. When we get to the redball 2-5 Tango keeps the lead and heads east. We are boo coo far from Cam-lo. But of course Fanelli can't help but hope we resupply close to Cam-lo so he can get some Ramen. But after about 2 kliks on the redball, 2-5 Tango Charlie pulls off the redball into an open area, and one of the other platoons as well as the resupply convoy is already there.

We pull in and I circle around at Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s direction to a parking spot to his liking. I see something I've never seen before. Obviously, I'm not the only one because whatever it is, it’s drawing a crowd.

As soon as I get 2-3's engine shutdown, we all sky over to join the growing crowd. What the heck is that thing, I wonder? Fanelli and the loader and I all walk around it. It is basically a deuce and a half with a flat bed in the rear. On the flat bed is a framework with a chair in the center and mounted on the framework are four .50 Cals.

"It's called the Quad-Fifty," says Fanelli.

He has heard of them, but it the first time any of us have ever seen one. When this thing gets going, I can see where you would need two or more guys humping ammo besides the gunner to keep it going.

We decide to check out mail call, and my St. Patrick's Day luck continues as I get another letter from my friend Annette. She must be a glutton for punishment, I think, as I remember what Fanelli and I did to her last letter. Fanelli, who gets no mail, wants me to open and read Annette's letter now so we can have some laughs. But I want to save it for later. Just getting mail is so number one, you don't even need to read it to feel good. Xin loi, Fanelli.

We're not expecting green beer or Irish stew, but for some reason, we sky over to the hot chow. All three platoons are here at resupply (although not everyone is at hot chow). But enough guys are here who haven't seen my white t-shirt, and it's causing almost as big a stir as the Quad-Fifty. The Quad-Fifty makes me think a Mad Minute is likely to happen soon with that thing around.

Despite it being St. Patrick's Day, the hot chow is horrid as usual. Fanelli, the loader, and I didi mau back to 2-3 for a c-rat dinner. We relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from behind the .50 Cal. so he can go to the hot chow for dinner.

More c-rats for us if he eats the hot chow. We deal with our supplies and stow everything.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns with his hot chow dinner. It is a horrid looking mess made worse by being served on paper plates. Fanelli is not alone in his desire to score some Ramen, as I am growing boo coo weary of c-rats three times a day. Ramen would be a boo coo welcome change. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., after conferring with 2-5 Tango Charlie, orders the Second platoon to prepare to sky to our RON.

Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and tie it to the side of 2-3 while I climb into the driver's compartment and sit down on my palm frond hat. How did that happen, I wonder? I don't remember leaving it on my seat. It's getting pretty dried out and tee tee tired looking but was still functional. Someone I know has never taken a shine to my hat, so it's possible he put it there as a joke. Very funny, Fanelli, I think. I can always make another one, so I toss my sad and somewhat crushed hat out the driver's hatch onto the ground. I don't say anything to Fanelli as he and the loader approach, but I think I see Fanelli smile when he sees the remnants of my hat on the ground.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. allows 2-5 Tango Charlie to lead the way again as he heads west on the redball. West is away from Cam-lo, so Fanelli and I don't have to waste time getting our hopes up of getting somewhere near Cam-lo anytime soon. The Quad-Fifty went with one of the other platoons when we left the resupply site. Maybe we'll see it again, maybe not.

We follow 2-5 Tango Charlie on the redball for about 4 or 5 kliks before we turn south and head into the bush on a dirt trail. 2-5 Tango Charlie has one of his side gunners dismount and mine sweep. I'm glad 2-5 Tango Charlie and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. don't try to press our St. Patrick's Day luck by not mine sweeping. We're driving through some boo coo dense brush, so we're already pressing our luck.

When we arrive at an open area large enough to accommodate the Second platoon, we flatten everything in sight. Then most of us dismount and search the area thoroughly. Mostly we're looking for tunnels, but we're also looking for anything unusual or interesting.

Fanelli and the loader and I are doing our part of the search, and we're not far apart when I see a boonie hat on the ground. With the loss of my palm frond hat fresh on my mind, and before Fanelli can say, "Don't pick that up!" I pick it up.

Fanelli is almost beside himself as he tells me what an idiot I am for picking up the boonie hat. He is right. I am an idiot. This really is my lucky day, as I just lost my palm frond hat, and I now have a replacement, one that Fanelli won't tease me about. Maybe. I'm actually lucky twice. The finding of the hat first, and secondly and more importantly, it wasn't booby trapped. Thank you, St. Patrick! It's actually nicer than the boonie hat I gave to Faustino. That one was O.D. and almost new. My found boonie hat is camo and already well broken in, so I won't look like an FNG when I wear it. When I look inside, I see someone's name on the inside. It says "Brooks" on the sweat band. Damn! I might have to give this back, I think. Well, at least it wasn't booby trapped.

We finish going over every square inch of our RON, and we find no tunnels, so we proceed to put out our night defenses. Before it gets dark I get on the horn to announce that I have found Brooks' boonie hat, and if he wants it back, he needs to come over to 2-3 with a couple of cans of pound cake. I don't know all the guys in the Second platoon yet, but Fanelli knows most of the guys, and he doesn't know a Brooks. So far so good.

As I put out my trip flares and claymores I watch to see if anyone shows up at 2-3 for the boonie hat. There are a couple of FNGs in the Second platoon that Fanelli doesn't know, but it would be unlikely that an FNG would have a well broken in boonie hat. Fanelli says he doesn't even know of a Brooks in the other platoons. So far my St. Patrick's Day luck is holding as no one comes to claim the boonie hat. It is mine.

Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3 while I set up my tent behind 2-3.

So far no word of any AP tonight and that would be number one as the whole Second platoon has been sleep deprived even more than usual by the APs.

Fanelli and the loader climb into the turret, and I climb into the driver's compartment, and we turn on all the red lights. It's my first chance to relax today, and so I stretch out in my driver's seat and get out the letter I got today from my friend Annette. It is another gold mine of misspelling and grammatical errors, not that I'm any sort of grammar expert. But I have some fun correcting her letter before I turn in. I save some for tomorrow when I can show it to Fanelli.

I'm able to stay awake easily as I had a good, although dangerous, sleep last night. Sometime after dark we can hear automatic weapon gunfire

somewhere nearby. We can hear over the horn that the Third platoon has the Quad-Fifty, and they're having a Mad Minute.

We would all be interested in seeing the Quad-Fifty work out sometime, just not tonight.

We decide on our guard duty shifts, and I get last as usual, so I climb out of the driver's compartment and close the hatch almost all the way. I have my found boonie hat with me as I feel my way to my tent. It will be number one to put over my face as I fall asleep. It does work better than the bug juice at keeping the bugs away from my face, but I am using both. Xin loi, bugs!

*July 22, 1876*
*Saturday*
*Near Ft. Pease*

*Broke camp this morning 6 1/2 a.m., passed Ft. Pease 3 miles below and camped about 6 miles from old camp and have a splendid camp. 7th Cav., 7th Infty., 2nd. Cav. Artillery all camped in Battalion formation.*

*Am fatigued putting up the Capt.s tent. The old fellow was up on his ear.*

*Objects seen on the hills supposed to be Sioux. Our Crows were ready in a minute and away they went but when they got to the place where we thought Indians were it proved to be four of our Ree scouts coming in.*

*Wagons were unloaded and sent back to old camp to bring forage left back from the first camp.*

March 18, 1970
Wednesday
Quang Tri Province

The loader wakes me 4 a.m. for my stint on guard. It never really cooled off much last night, so I just slept laying on top of my sleeping bag with my lucky find boonie hat covering my face. The boonie hat could use a tee tee bit of freshening up, as it smells a tee tee bit like mildew. Not too surprising as it appears it was laying on the ground for a while and had to have been rained on. That aside, it works number one at keeping the bugs from getting on my face.

I slept in my white t-shirt, but it would probably be number ten to walk around in it until it gets light, so I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and drop half

way into the TC's hatch. I can see some stars and the silhouettes of the rest of the tracks in the Second platoon as I look around the RON.

My white t-shirt is only noticeably cooler in the sunlight, so it's no real help in this pre-dawn heat. I keep myself busy looking in front of 2-3 while I call in my sitreps every 15 minutes. Even though I'm hot and sweaty, I still crave a hot cup of java but I have to wait until first light. 6 a.m. finally arrives, and it's day break at last. I sigh with relief now that The Scary Time is over.

Down to the ground I jump with my canteen cup and some C-4. We still have some river water in our water jug, and it makes number one coffee compared to our water buffalo water. I heat my water up and mix in the c-rat coffee and creamer. Before I get my first sip, there's a bug in it. Just like old times, I think to myself.

My burning C-4 and the noise of the rest of the Second platoon moving around wakes Fanelli, the loader, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. I climb back up on the turret with my c-rat pecan roll and my canteen cup of coffee and sit behind the .50 Cal. hoping to catch any tee tee bit of breeze that might blow. Both Fanelli and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. take care of their sartorial duties as the loader again has to decide which c-rat meal he hates the least to heat up for his breakfast.

After his shave Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. decides to illuminate us as to his reason for sending out Ambush Patrols at night.

"There are too many cherries here," he says. "And some guys are just too boo coo lax."

I'm assuming he's referring to the crew on Double Deuce. But he doesn't really explain how the APs correct his concern about our Cherry Disease.

There is a reason for the fact that the Second platoon has so many cherries, myself included. It's not because boo coo of the Second platoon members ETS'd and got sent back to the Real World. No, the reason the Second platoon has so many cherries is because last year they were in the Ashau Valley where many of them were killed or wounded. We, the cherries, are the replacements. Xin loi, Sarge!

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. in being so intent on curing us of our Cherry Disease, that he doesn't see it's just another situation in which the cure is often more fatal than the disease. Xin loi, Cherries!

After Our Idiot Platoon Sgt's discourse, I realize there is no chance we will become friends, ever. While I suspected he was an idiot before, now I know

he is.

It's so hot already, it's hard to imagine it will get even hotter as the day wears on. I feel so inspired by Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s tee tee pep talk that I hardly know how to act, as Wack likes to say. Xin loi, Wack.

As to his assertion that we, in the Second platoon, are too lax I hope he is not talking about me. There may be lax troops in the Second platoon but he is the platoon Sgt. and he's doing nothing to correct that.

To not dwell on the negative, I busy myself bringing in the claymores and trip flares. Maybe I am too lax, I think, as I set off two trip flares when I attempt to bring them in. But that's always good for a laugh for Fanelli and the loader. Putting out and bringing in the concertina wire is really my job as driver. But Fanelli and the loader usually do it at resupply because Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is so particular as to where 2-3 is parked. Then at night, I spend extra time setting all my trip flares on hair triggers. So now, Fanelli and the loader put the concertina wire out especially after my encounter with the concertina wire. I have boo coo respect for it now that I've been tangled in it and needed both Fanelli and the loader to extricate me. Maybe I am too lax. I'll have to watch myself.

It seems like a slow start for the Second platoon today. The heat has really started to get to us, but Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has only been here a short time, and he is still feeling fresh. I expect another day in the tropical sun seeking shade wherever we can find it or making it if we have to.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has the Second platoon uncircle and line up behind 2-3 as we proceed to the edge of the RON. He has the loader dismount and start mine sweeping our way to the redball. Where we go from there and what we are going to do when we get to where we're going, we don't know. They never feel it necessary to tell us anything. It takes about 30 minutes to make it to the redball. We stay at road’s edge and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. announces over the horn that we are waiting for the First and Third platoons.

We don't wait long, and the two platoons arrive heading west on the redball. We can see the Quad-Fifty is with them as the First and Third platoon roll by. When the last track passes, I pull 2-3 out onto the redball and the rest of the Second platoon follows. It's a tee tee bit dusty, but not too bad. The breeze I get in the driver's compartment is number one, and I could drive all day like this. But I know that won't happen.

Although we drive for long periods this morning at a steady 15 to 20 mph, we do stop now and then, and that's number ten in this heat. Later in the

morning we start to hear the choppers, and it's not too long before we start to see them as well. Must be something going on. But we still know nothing. The chopper activity is north of us and a tee tee bit to the west - about where the Ho Chi Minh trail enters South Viet Nam from North Vietnam. A number ten place to be no matter which side you're on. Because all three platoons are strung out single file on the red ball, it is a boo coo long convoy of more than 30 vehicles. Most of the time when we stop we can't see why. But since something is obviously going on, we try to keep the horn chatter to a minimum.

We keep moving, then stopping on the redball, heading west. No specific mission and no specific destination. We drive, we stop, we drive, we stop. The driving part for me is number one because of the breeze, but it's past 2:00 p.m., and I'm getting boo coo hungry as we haven't stopped anywhere long enough to heat up some c-rats even with C-4. I'm almost ready to eat one of the c-rat meals that I keep in the driver's compartment cold when we get orders to stop and space out for a lunch break.

After we space the tanks and P.C.s out I shut the engine down and climb out into the blazing sun. I almost forget my boonie hat. The sun quickly refreshes my memory as I reach back in and grab my hat. My t-shirt is fairly clean and very white and with my hat the sun is bearable for short periods. I look through the open case of c-rats, and I'm at the point where I hate them all, so my decision is based solely on which one I hate the least. It makes it too hard, as I'm really hungry, so I just close my eyes and grab one. I do manage to score a tee tee can of c-rat cheese for some minor improvement to my c-rat lunch.

Our water is warm but it's river water still and tastes considerably better than water buffalo water or the lovely bomb crater water. I'm only joking about the bomb crater water, as we would never drink it. They are sometimes filled with the most tantalizing shades of aqua blue water. We know they're full of number ten chemicals and someone would only drink it if they were trying to kill themselves. If you're trying to kill yourself, you will find many opportunities to do so here in the Nam.

We're at a high ridge on the redball, and we can see several kliks in most directions. We know we're close to the Z because we can see bomb craters in all directions, many of which are filled with water with their various shades of blue.

After our lunch break, we proceed further west before the three platoons

start to separate. The Second platoon pulls off onto a dirt trail to the south, right into an area of bomb craters. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has Double Deuce go to the front of our column and lead us through the bomb craters. Charlie Brown has Smitty dismount and mine sweep our way through.

Everything is number ten about this place. We can still hear the chopper activity, but we can't see them now. It's around 2:30 p.m., and it's scorching hot. There is no shade, and we are driving at walking speed so no breeze. Twice now a P.C. almost slid down into one of the bomb craters. It's also getting late, and we still have to resupply, and then set up our RON.

2-5 Tango Charlie has concerns about the P.C.'s lack of good traction and is also mindful of the time to start for resupply. He suggests to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. that we might want to sky for resupply soon, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. agrees, for once.

We didn't go far off of the redball, but it is barely a trail and boo coo unstable in places. In some places the lead track is driving on a very narrow ridge between two bomb craters. In the soft disturbed earth, the track vehicles bringing up the rear sink down so much that the hulls are dragging on the ground.

It's a boo coo number ten place to be, but it's so hot out in the open only Superman could attack us in this heat, I hope. Since we don't mine sweep, we make it back to the redball in about 10 minutes. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me take the lead of the platoon convoy heading east on the redball toward Cam-lo. I immediately get 2-3 up to 15 to 20 mph for some cooling breeze. We are in the lead, so the air coming at me is dust free and (more importantly) diesel exhaust free. It's just the Second platoon on the redball, so there is no stop and go; it's all go. We drive for about an hour heading east toward Cam-lo, but we are still at least 5 kliks west of Cam-lo when I can see the resupply convoy off the side of the redball.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me circle around the convoy, leaving room for the other two platoons. I adjust 2-3's position to suit Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s taste, and then shut the engine down. My boonie hat's going to get a workout in this sun. No teasing about it from Fanelli.

We need to top off 2-3's fuel tank, but we don't have much ordered for resupply, so Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. mans the .50 Cal. while Fanelli, the loader and I go to mail call. It's a disappointing wait in the heat as none of us get any mail. But we do have a brief chat with Wack, Zack, Big Al, and Steve. Just watching the other lucky guys who get mail is a good reminder that the Real

World is still there and waiting for us, should we be one of the lucky ones to survive the Nam.

We head back to 2-3 and on the way I remember Annette's letter. When we get back, in hopes of improving our dinner, I read Annette's letter to Fanelli and the loader. It is a mistake because when one of us starts laughing, all of us do, and we keep choking on our food. Instead of improving our dinner, it's making it dangerous to eat. Just like the last time, Fanelli finds a few more grammatical errors in Annette's letter, and I correct those as well. We feel it a job well done, and we congratulate ourselves. Later, I'll write Annette a letter and return hers again. Xin loi, Annette!

When the other platoons arrive, the Quad-Fifty is with them. Boo coo impressive weapon. With all four of the .50 Cal. gun barrels pointing to the sky, it's quite evident this thing is a boo coo pee bringer. I would never want to be downrange while it is working out. As it has no outer cover the framework and mechanisms are all visible. Almost looks like something out of a Sci-fi movie. The Quad-Fifty gunner needs to count on that firepower, as it has no bullet shield for his head. Xin loi, Gunner!

It only takes a few minutes to unpack and stow the supplies we ordered. The fuel truck arrives, and I top off the fuel tank. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. can be seen talking to the driver on the Quad-Fifty, giving us hope that it will be with us at our RON. He returns to 2-3 and announces to us and the rest of the Second platoon to prepare to sky to our RON.

"Hey, Sarge, is the Quad-Fifty coming with us?" I ask Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

"That's a roger," he replies.

There might be an interesting Mad Minute tonight if I can make it inside my driver's compartment before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. fires off the main gun this time!

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. and 2-5 Tango Charlie confer over the horn as to our RON location. They're not supposed to discuss information like that over the horn. But the Lifers are idiots. And there I go again, repeating myself.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., confident in the fact that he knows the way to our RON, announces to the Second platoon to follow 2-3 as we all uncircle and pull onto the redball, heading west. And again the breeze is number one at 15 mph, as it is still smokin' hot in the sun. In the shade it's just plain hot, but on the road there is no shade. So it's number one that we drive about 15 kliks before Our Idiot platoon Sgt. has me turn south off onto a dirt trail.

We'll have to mine sweep, because if we break brush it's doubtful the Quad-Fifty (and the deuce and a half support truck for it) can make it very far into the bush. The trail is bad as it is, and the Quad-Fifty support truck barely makes it through a couple of really bad spots.

Fanelli is out front mine sweeping, so at least somebody I trust is doing it. Xin loi, Fanelli! I don't expect we will be going boo coo far into the bush, as I can tell the trail is deteriorating rapidly.

We don't go more than a half a klik off of the redball before we start circling around to create an open area for our RON. There's quite a few small trees that pose no problems. We run them over anyway, mostly for fun. Most of us dismount, and we search the area carefully for tunnels. If there's one thing that everyone in the Second platoon agrees upon, it's the search for tunnels is the most important thing we do every day. Even the smallest curiosity is given boo coo scrutiny by several members of the platoon before it is dismissed as nothing of concern. This evening we find nothing, so we put out our night defenses.

The Quad-Fifty is parked between two P.C.s and the support truck is parked close behind it. I take that as a number one idea. I'm sure the quad-fifty has an enormous appetite for .50 Cal. Ammo. The closer the ammo is, the better for the guys humping ammo for it. It's set up so that I can actually see it while standing at the side of 2-3. Maybe when the Mad Minute starts I'll be able to see the Quad-Fifty in action.

I finish with the trip flares and I run the claymore detonator wire to the detonators while Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3. I set up my tent and put my stretcher inside. After two days of wear, my white t-shirt is looking quite the fright especially after putting out trip flares. It's covered in mud, grease, and sweat, but it was worth it.

It's not quite dark, so I climb into the driver's compartment and turn on the red lights. I write a letter to Annette while we wait for it to get dark and the start of the Mad Minute. It's dark, but we're still holding off on the Mad Minute because the Quad-Fifty crew is still stacking the ammo for it. I knew that thing was an ammo eater.

While I wait, I take the chalk and write some names on the canister rounds that I'm going to hand to the loader during the Mad Minute. The main gun ammo is painted flat black, so the chalk works number one for writing stuff on them. I write "Wad Cutter" on one and another gets "Widow Maker" written on it. On a third one I write "Xin loi, Chieu Hoi." which means: Sorry

about that, Chieu Hoi!

Finally everyone, including the Quad-Fifty, is ready, so before I climb out of the driver's compartment I advise Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to wait for me to tell him I'm back inside the driver's compartment before he fires off the main gun.

I climb out and quickly knock down the RPG screen and spring right back inside. I hardly trust Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. I get my commo helmet on and close the hatch before I give Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. the all clear. He then orders the Mad Minute to commence.

I'm holding on to my steering bar and trying to look out my side vision block to watch the Quad-Fifty in action. I had forgotten about writing on the main gun rounds that I'm handing to the loader during the Mad Minute until I hear the loader and Fanelli laughing over the intercom.

They especially liked "Wad Cutter" because, as Fanelli says, "That's what the can round does. It cuts everything down in front of you." It definitely improves the field of view in front of us.

Between the firing and re-loading on the main gun, I am able to see the Quad-Fifty through my side vision block. I already know the .50 Cal is an awesome weapon, only surpassed by the tank's main gun. But the Quad-Fifty comes boo coo close to being equal to the tank's main gun. It is an ammo eater though. Like the tanks, it needs a crew to operate it. They have no armor and everyone, including the gunner, is right out in the open. A number ten place to be in a real firefight.

The Mad Minute ends as abruptly as it started. I wait a tee tee bit until I feel it's safe to climb out and reset the RPG screen. I really need to pound the stakes back in, so I climb back on 2-3 to get the sledge hammer. I stick my head in the turret to get one of them to help me with the RPG screen. They both start laughing again about "Wad Cutter" and "Xin loi" on the main gun ammo. The loader and Fanelli both come out to help with the RPG screen now that its full dark and The Scary Time. With the three of us, we make short work of it. I climb back into my seat to relax, but I leave my hatch open.

The reason I have my hatch open, and the reason both Fanelli and the loader got out of 2-3 to help me, is for fresh air. Since all four of us eat c-rats, now even Fanelli is farting. The inside of 2-3 smells like a men's locker room where all the toilets have backed up and overflowed with raw sewage.

I have one vial of menthol oil left, and that's been my only salvation at

times like this. At about 10 p.m. I climb out of the driver's compartment and close my hatch almost all the way. I make my way, mostly by feel, to my tent.

The air outside of 2-3 is hot and heavy with the smell of damp, humid jungle. Compared to the stench inside 2-3, the night air smells number one. I loosen the laces on my jungle boots a tee tee bit and put my boonie hat over my bug juice slathered face, and I try to fall asleep. As always the bugs have other plans for me but my boonie hat keeps them off my face like a mini-mosquito net. Sort of.

*June 22, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Division*

*This morning we were awakened by the bugle sounding in the cavalry camp who started out ahead of us. We marched 22 miles today.*

*A battery of Gatling guns were sent from the other side last night. Commanded by Lieut. Low of 20th Inft. They also had fifteen pack mules with them.*

*Day pleasant. Camped on the river bank.*

March 19, 1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m., and I make my way up to the turret of 2-3. No AP last night, so anything out front that moves will be shot first and questions, if any, will be asked later.

Nothing moves in front of 2-3 while I stand my two hours of guard. Then I can see tee tee light, and I know it's 6 a.m. but I stay behind the .50 Cal. just to let it get a tee tee bit more light before I leave my post for a canteen cup of hot java.

I finally can see the bright flare of burning C-4 around the RON of the Second platoon, and I decide to join them. I fill my canteen cup with water and light the C-4 and in less than a minute the water is boiling. Then I put the instant c-rat coffee and the creamer in, give it a stir, and then try to decide which side of the cup has the fewest bugs. Because we're all eating c-rats I

usually take the pecan roll and let the other guys fight over the pound cake. Of the c-rat fruit selection, I have to take what we have instead of always having my choice and some to trade as well.

I've been back in the field now for about two weeks, and I haven't shaved yet. I must say my beard is magnificent, that is, compared to the other boys here in the Nam. I'm quite sure Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. does not approve, but there's not much he can do about it. He's already sending just about everyone on APs and LPs at night, and there's no worse punishment than that.

It's hot already today, so I take stock of my white, well, my sort of white t-shirt. It's starting to look boo coo grubby. But around here compared to what? I decide to give it another day of wear, especially since the dirtier it gets the less likely a sniper will decide to use my t-shirt for target practice, I hope. I have two more brand new white t-shirts, but I want to save them. For what? I don't know.

I'm sitting up on the turret, finishing my canteen cup of coffee and sitting behind the .50 Cal. only because I'm hoping for some tee tee breeze in the sweltering heat of the morning. Higher calls 2-3 on the horn to talk to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. They inform him that a ROK General is going to visit our RON in about 30 minutes or so. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. seems as cheerful as I've seen him since his arrival. He finishes his shave and has a quick c-rat breakfast and is ready to meet the ROK General.

That's number one because the ROK General soon arrives. But it becomes evident almost immediately that this is not the friendly visit Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. had anticipated. The ROK General is brusque and immediately gets down to business. He's taller than Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. by several inches and seems to tower over him. The ROK's uniform is a tee tee bit lighter shade of green than ours but as well tailored as Fanelli's, maybe better. Xin loi, Fanelli! His insignias are not as ostentatious as our Generals, but he definitely has the visual bearing of a General. The Koreans are our allies in this war, and this General’s troops are actually nearby, apparently too nearby.

The ROK General and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. walk to the other side of the RON. 2-5 Tango Charlie comes over to 2-3 while Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. and the ROK General are gone. He tells us that in all the excitement of having the Quad-Fifty with us at our Mad Minute, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. forgot about the No Fire Zone of the ROK encampment and didn't inform the crews about it. That's number ten for the ROKs. It turns out one of the ROKs got shot in the head by a .50 Cal., and it blew half his head off. No surprise for me as the

.50 Cal. could easily blow boo coo more than that off with no problem.

The Quad-Fifty and we, the crew of 2-3, are in the clear on this one, as we are both almost 180 degrees opposite the ROK encampment.

It's turning out to be a number ten day for Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. as he is dressed down by the ROK General who speaks fluent English.

None of the crews on the offending side of the RON had been informed of any No Fire Zone, and they all said so. It's not looking too good for Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. But it's number one for him that he's in the U.S. Army and not a ROK. If he was a ROK, they probably would have had a firing squad right here. Instead, the ROK General leaves in a huff. But he tells Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. that he hasn't heard the last of this. That makes me glad I'm just a PFC with no important responsibilities.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is starting to worry me boo coo. Another soldier killed by friendly fire. While Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is getting his talking to from the ROK General the rest of the Second platoon busy ourselves with the aftermath of every Mad Minute, meaning we have to clean all the guns while we listen. Xin loi, Sarge!

Fanelli also does an inventory of how much ammo we shot off last night and adds that to our resupply order. More work for us from the Mad Minute. Now at resupply we have ammo to unpack, stow, and then burn all the packing material.

It is about 10 a.m. and it's already sweltering. We have tee tee shade. We are ready and anxious to move out when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gives the order to prepare to didi. I bring in my claymores and the trip flares. No mishaps today, so Fanelli and the loader don't get any laughs at my expense. Xin loi, guys.

They bring in the concertina wire and take down the RPG screen and tie everything to the side of 2-3. I stow my stuff and then climb into the driver's compartment. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has 2-6 lead the way back to the redball with Big Al mine sweeping our way. Even though the ROK General's jeep just drove up and down our trail, it doesn't count as good enough mine sweeping for us.

We're fairly close to the redball, mostly because of the Quad-Fifty and its support deuce and a half having a rough go on the trail to our RON. All I want to do is to get cruising on the redball at about 15 mph so I can get some cooling breeze. I don't even care if 2-3 isn't in the lead, and I have to breath diesel exhaust. But we sit at the side of the redball and wait for Our Idiot

Platoon Sgt. and 2-5 Tango Charlie to discuss our itinerary over the horn. That's boo coo number ten besides being against Regs. I hope Charlie isn't listening.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders 2-6 to head east on the redball. Zack is driving 2-6 and they sky east on the redball with the rest of the Second platoon following. We get going about 15 mph and the breeze is number one even with the diesel exhaust.

My first dream comes true, and so as long as I'm dreaming, how about we go to the Cam-lo River (so I can have a swim). In the end that's what we do. After driving 4 or 5 kliks on the redball, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has 2-6 turn north onto a dirt trail that leads to the Cam-lo River. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has 2-5 Tango Charlie take the lead on the trail, and he has one of his side gunners dismount and mine sweep our way.

This isn't the best trail to the river, as the bush here is boo coo dense in places. While not the best trail, it is the shortest distance to the river from the redball. Now we have to hope Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. will take pity on us in this tropical sun and let us have a swim. The last few times we just crossed the river coming and going and we had no swim. We hate that! Today we are hopeful. We make it to the river and Out Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to spread out on the river bank at 50 to 75 foot intervals with the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times, including the Quad-Fifty.

The sun is high in the sky and brutal, so the first thing we do is rig our poncho over the .50 Cal. for some shade. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. takes a shift behind the .50 Cal. as he expects to being doing boo coo explaining to Higher over the horn. He seems a tee tee bit nervous after his dressing down by the ROK General. Probably we're only here because he's trying to stay out of further trouble. For anyone trying to stay out of trouble, the Nam is a number ten place to be.

Fanelli, the loader, and I busy ourselves getting our things together for a bath and a swim. I can hardly believe our good fortune. To not press our luck, we are careful to not be directly in front of 2-3 or Double Deuce. Xin loi, Charlie Brown. Nothing personal, but no one wants to be downrange whenever Smitty or Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is sitting behind the .50 Cal.

When I get to the water’s edge, I just strip down to my birthday suit, throw my clothes in a heap, and wade in. The Cam-lo River is only 3 to 4 feet deep in the middle here, but it's boo coo wide, almost 100 feet or more. It's fast flowing and ice cold. It feels sublime in the intense heat of the tropical sun.

Most of the guys in the Second platoon are also wading in the river, and as I look up and down the river I can't help but notice how we all have a farmer's tan. That is, our arms and faces are tan, but the rest of our bodies are pure white, with the exception of our three Brothers, Johnson, No Jets, and Sgt. Green. I didn't realize how much I need this until I actually get into the water. I have felt too boo coo hot for days on end with only a few short drives on the redball for a tee tee cool down. The river feels number one. Mindful of possible number ten things in the river water, I try to not get any in my mouth.

Normally our Dear Platoon Sgt. of the past would have or would be sending out a River Patrol, but Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is giving no such indications. That only has me worried because of his fondness for night time Ambush Patrols. I hate that!

No River Patrol, and so Fanelli and I debate whether to fill our water container with river water. We know it's dicey. But in the end we decide on river water, as it tastes number one compared to the water buffalo water. We put a couple of drops of iodine in, just in case. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. informs us that we will be here for the rest of the afternoon. After my swim I decide to have some lunch, followed by laundry, and then another swim or bath, if there's time.

First things, first, though. I attend to my lunch. I get to open a new case of c-rats, but it's hardly any consolation. I now hate everything except the pecan roll, which I have for my breakfast every day. So let's see.... As I open the case, my choices are: Beef with slices of potatoes or Beef with spiced sauce or Beefsteak. Pretty much got beef covered. The Beefsteak is not really steak, but it is beef, I think.

Next, we have Chicken, boned and Turkey, boned. I can hardly tell them apart by looks or taste.

Beans and meatballs and Spaghetti with beef, and then there’s the Pork slices or Ham slices, if you call things half the thickness of a hockey puck a slice. Pretty much taste like a hockey puck too. (In all fairness, having never tasted a hockey puck, it may well taste better than c-rats.)

Also, we have Beans and Franks, and I think you can start to understand why we fart all the time.

And let's not forget the Ham and Lima beans, which has a number ten reputation, only surpassed by our last choice, the infamous Ham and Eggs.

So there you have it, our meal choices. That along with the hot chow is

what we live on, although many of us forgo the hot chow often. The c-rats, if nothing else, are definitely high calorie, as most of us gain boo coo weight from the c-rat diet. After making a mental note of where the Ham and Egg and the Ham and Lima beans are located in the open case, I just close my eyes and pick one. It's punishment enough to be here in the Nam without having to suffer eating the Ham and Eggs or the Ham and Lima beans. The dogs won't even eat them.

I heat my blind lunch choice (Beans and meatballs), and then I relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from his post behind the .50 Cal. No real breeze but the shade from the poncho feels number one. I can look up and down the river and watch most of the Second platoon wading or romping in it. As I watch the members of the Second platoon in the river, they look more like schoolboys on a swimming and picnic outing than soldiers at war. I can hear them laughing and see them splashing one another. War is weird.

Fanelli and the loader heat up their lunch choices, and then they both offer to relieve me from behind the .50 Cal. only because it's the best shade we have. I accept and leave them to fight over it.

I'm going to have a bath and then wash some clothes. I climb down from the bustle rack with my bar of soap and some of my dirty clothes, and then I head back to the river. But first a tee tee swim before I make my way to the shallows to lather up and then another swim to rinse off. I swim and float around as long as the cold water will allow. When the cold water finally gets to me, I make my way to shore to stand dripping wet and naked in the tropical sun. I am warmed up almost immediately, and before I know it I'm too hot already. I squat down in the shallow water at the river’s edge and get my dirty clothes wet and then I use my bar of soap to lather them up some. I try a tee tee bit of the rock pounding method the locals use to wash clothes being boo coo careful not to smash any of my buttons. I also wash my now dirty white t-shirt, and then I rinse everything in the river. And now that I'm hot again I go for another swim.

Every time I jump in to escape the intense heat, I say to myself that I'm never coming back out. But the Cam-lo River is so cold, it soon corrects my thinking. I finally have all I can take, so I make my way to shore and drip dry in the sun.

I gave my found boonie hat a tee tee bit of freshening up in the river. In the time it took for my last swim, it is already dry and on my head. I go shirtless for a while and just put on my jungle fatigue pants rolled up to the

knee and my socks and boots. I walk back to 2-3 and hang my wet laundry on the main gun barrel and some of the gear tied to the side of 2-3. I'm going shirtless until one of my t-shirts dries.

I'm saving my last two new white t-shirts, but for what I don't know. I hunker down in the narrow strip of side shade of 2-3 with the loader. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. goes off to confer with 2-5 Tango Charlie. Probably trying to get his story straight for Higher about last night's mishap with the ROKs.

With my farmer's tan, I have to be careful not to get sunburned as we have no sunscreen here. We have to seek shade or wear clothes and hats. The demise of my palm frond hat makes me appreciate my good fortune at finding my boonie hat now that monsoon is over. I almost miss monsoon. Almost.

I move my wet laundry around to keep it in the sun, and it dries rapidly. For instance, one of my O.D. t-shirts is dry before I am sunburned, which is number one.

Fanelli has his transistor radio out, and it's blaring our only radio station. I've been keeping my commo helmet on and my hatch closed during the Mad Minutes, so my hearing is almost back to normal. Almost. The radio station is playing one of our favorite songs, and I can even hear it, sort of. That's really number one, because I've had to walk around almost deaf for days. All my clothes dry quickly in the tropical sun, so I fold them up and stow them in my thermo chest. I'm set for a couple of weeks now. But I hope it won't be that long before we get back to the river.

There's a constant string of Second platoon members checking out the Quad-Fifty as the afternoon slowly drags on in the hot tropical sun. The loader relieves Fanelli from behind the .50 Cal. so we also saunter over to the Quad-Fifty. It's just as much of a beast up close as it is from a distance. There's a framework consisting of the gunner's seat and the mounts for the four .50 Cals, and it's attached to the rear bed of a deuce and a half. The gunner's seat is right in the middle of the four .50 Cals. It has to be incredibly loud sitting there, because I know how loud one .50 Cal. Is, and I'm not anywhere near as close.

The Quad-Fifty crew seem quite used to the circus like atmosphere the Quad-Fifty generates. The crew obligingly answers all our questions, and I am shocked to find out the Quad-Fifty is a WWII era weapon. But when I think about my hated .45 and my Grease Gun, it seems less surprising. War is weird! We finally get enough of the Quad-Fifty, so Fanelli and I sky up to 2-

3 to get back in the side shade and out of the sun.

It's getting late, and as much as I hate leaving the river, I hate setting up at night in the dark boo coo more. If we don't get going that's what we'll be doing tonight. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. Returns and orders rest of the Second platoon to prepare to sky to resupply. He has me back around and drive over to the trail we came here on.

We don't mine sweep, so we get to the redball in short order. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me head east on the redball. We drive east for about 3 kliks before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me pull into an open area where we have resupplied at before.

The resupply convoy arrives, followed in rapid succession by the arrival of the First and Third platoons. Everyone gets their concertina wire set out. Why? We still don't know, as we are too far for the villagers from Cam-lo to come to our resupply site. We just follow orders, no matter how dumb.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. sits behind the .50 Cal. while Fanelli, the loader and I go to mail call. When we arrive at mail call, several of Fanelli's friends from the other platoons are asking about the ROK General and the Mad Minute mishap. The Second platoon is being blamed for shooting up the First platoon and now the shooting up of the ROK encampment.

In the first incident, most of us feel the First platoon LT was at fault for trying to get back to his platoon in the dark without being able to call in over the horn first.

As for the ROK incident, that's totally owned by Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., as he failed to notify anyone about the No Fire Zone. Still, none of this helps with the Second platoon’s reputation as dog robbers. We hate that!

Not being interested in the hot chow (but also to escape the teasing), we didi mau to 2-3 and relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from behind the .50 Cal. I climb up on the turret while Fanelli and the loader unpack and stow the ammo we ordered. After refueling, I get into the driver's compartment and the loader starts to hand me some can rounds to replace the ones we also shot off last night. Their clean flat black exteriors seem to crying out to be written on with my chalk.

After stowing the main gun ammo, I climb out of the driver's compartment just as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns with his paper plate full of the hot chow. I wonder how can he eat that stuff? I'm wondering how can I eat this stuff as I once again have to decide which c-rat meal I hate the least for dinner.

No new c-rat cooking tricks from Fanelli. Our food is so number ten, we

only eat because we have to or we'll starve. Once again I just close my eyes and eat what I pick. I hate that!

After we finish our dinner, I splash diesel fuel on all the cardboard and trash in the burn hole between 2-3 and Double Deuce and light it on fire. Several of the other burn holes have been lit, and the resupply site is taking on an eerie look and the burning trash smells foul. Not quite as number ten as the burning shit back at base camp, but close.

The Quad-Fifty skys up with the First platoon and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn to order the Second platoon to prepare to didi to our RON. We expect the First platoon to have a Mad Minute tonight since the Quad-Fifty is with them. So we in the Second platoon hope that Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. knows exactly where the First platoon is, and just importantly, where the Second platoon (us) is exactly. We don't want to end up like the ROKs and get shot up by the .50 Cal. or even worse, the Quad-Fifty.

2-5 Tango Charlie hangs loose at the redball's edge while someone brings the mine sweeping equipment up to the front. He has one of his side gunners dismount and mine sweep at a walking pace through the bush for about 30 minutes. We get to an open area that is surrounded by dense brush, so not a number one place to set up our RON. Not completely number ten, but close. All the tracks drive in circles flattening everything, and then we position the tanks and P.C.s and most of us dismount to look for tunnels and anything of interest or concern.

I have given myself a good talking to about picking stuff up off the ground when I should know better. We scour the area for tunnels, and we find none which is number one. No found hats today either.

I attend to putting out my trip flares backed by the claymores. Fanelli and the loader already have the concertina wire out and the RPG screen set up. They tie the tarp, that now reeks of cleaning solvent, to the side of 2-3 while I set up my tent directly behind the track on one side of 2-3. The opposite side tonight, as I want to be as far away from the solvent reeking tarp as I can get, but still behind something bullet proof. I put my stretcher and my sleeping bag inside my tent and I'm ready for The Scary Time. Sort of. I'm never really ready for The Scary Time but it gets dark and scary no matter. When I was a child I was afraid of the dark, but I eventually grew out of it. I'm 20 years old now, and I'm afraid of the dark again.

Fanelli and the loader climb into the turret as it is just starting to get dark and I climb into the driver's compartment. We have the red interior lights on

and I stretch out in my driver's seat for a tee tee nap before bed. I'm just closing my eyes to rest them and reflect on the day's activities. No, I don't want to think about today, so I try to think of something else.

As I look at my personal belonging box, for some reason I think about the letters from my friend Annette that we had so much fun with. What a good sport she is to keep writing to me after such abuse. As I think this, I suddenly realize what an idiot I am. I'm still thinking about mail delivery in Real World terms and not of mail delivery in the Nam. I realize now that Annette sent the second letter before she received the corrected letter I sent back to her. I've known Annette since she was three years old, and she will not be a good sport about it, I know. That will be the last letter I get from Annette. Xin loi, Wolf!

With that heavy thought on my mind, I climb out of the driver's compartment and close my hatch almost all the way and climb up on the turret of 2-3. I stick my head into the loader's hatch. It smells worse than any outhouse imaginable. Fanelli, the loader, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. have all been farting in the turret non-stop, and the air in there is pretty lethal. I just confirm that I have last shift on guard as usual, and then I get my head out into the fresh night air.

It's completely dark and the sun has been down for a couple of hours or more. But the heat never gives up now. At least I don't have to walk around in the dark in my white t-shirt, as I changed back into one of my O.D. t-shirts after doing laundry today.

I make my way back to my tent, climb in, and lay down. I loosen my boot laces a tee tee bit, and then I lay back and put my boonie hat over my bug juice slathered face and wait for sleep to come hopefully before the bugs come. Not likely, as the bugs have been waiting for me, as always. I hate that!

*July 20, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Near Ft. Pease*

*Morning dawned clear and warm and it was so all day.*
*An old citizen said to me, "Why did you enlist?"*
*I told him to be a soldier.*
*"Well then", said he, "you took that all in when you enlisted and it need*

*not happen so again unless you want too." I think so too.*

*Alarm last night but was false. The Crows that went across the river came back and reported two Sioux.*

March 20, 1970
Friday
Quang Tri Province

The loader wakes me a 4 a.m. for my turn at guard. We hate guard duty like sin but even more so when we have to give up some of our sleep to do it. It never cooled down last night, and it's boo coo warm right now. It was number one to cool down in the river yesterday, but we can't count on that again. This is not summer camp. Xin loi, guys!

I'm up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. as I gaze into the darkness. It's not pitch dark, but there's no full moon, either. I can barely make out the silhouettes of the other tracks, but I can hear all the guards' sitreps and they're all negative, including mine. That's number one when it's still dark and The Scary Time.

I got boo coo more sleep than 4 hours last night, but the romp in the cold river water along with the hot tropical sun really sucked the energy out of me. I can't wait to have some coffee. But wait, I must.

I have to figure out a way to heat up some water in the dark so I can have some coffee as soon as I get up. The heat tabs might work if I can shield the flame. The C-4 burns so brightly, shielding it wouldn't be possible. The main problem with the heat tabs is that after cooking with C-4, I can no longer stand the fumes of the burning heat tabs. The heat tabs fumes burn your eyes and the smell quickly obliterates any appetite or craving for coffee. I'll have to think about this more when I'm fully awake.

No AP last night and a day spent at the Cam-lo River yesterday makes me think another AP is likely soon. Because of my beard, I expect to be sent on AP again sometime soon, since Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. appears to be sending us on the APs for being, in his opinion, too lax. Finally I start to see the first hints of daylight. As always, I sigh with relief as I make it through another night and The Scary Time in the Nam.

I try to wait for it to get fairly light. When I see other members of the Second platoon lighting their C-4, I climb down and start heating water for my coffee. As I light the C-4 with a match from the condiment pouch of a c-

rat meal box, I have to laugh as I read the caution on the bottom of the matchbook cover. It says: Close cover before striking. If the manufacturer of the matches knew we were lighting plastic explosives with them, I'm sure their lawyers would have a boo coo more stringent warning than closing the cover before striking.

Fanelli, the loader, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. all get up as the noise level picks up significantly when it gets light. I'm not the only one who makes an audible sigh at first light. We don't blow a ram's horn or anything, but if we had one, I'm sure someone would blow it. Maybe even me. Maybe.

At the rear of 2-3, Fanelli heats water for his morning shave while the loader prepares his c-rat breakfast. As no one but me likes the c-rat pecan roll, I can count on two a day, and I usually have at least one with my morning coffee. I don't know how the rest of the guys eat the c-rat meals for breakfast, as they are number ten for lunch and dinner every day.

After my breakfast, I brush and floss my teeth. There are no dentists with us in the field so I try to take care of my teeth almost like the way that Fanelli shaves. I make sure I floss my teeth before I drain the water out of 2-3's fuel filters or my mouth tastes like diesel fuel for most of the day. I only had to forget once, well maybe twice. When I remember to floss my teeth, the result is no toothaches like Wack's. Xin loi, Wack.

Johnson stops by 2-3 for our Ham and Eggs, and we are always to happy to oblige him as we hate to see the Ham and Eggs go to waste. Especially when we get to watch someone actually eat them. He makes the Ham and Eggs look boo coo tasty, and I've even seen him eat two cans in a row, cold. Almost makes me want to try them out myself. Maybe, I think, the army has improved it since the last time I was forced to eat it. Right! The next time the only c-rat meal we have left is Ham and Eggs, I'll try it again. But I hope that day never comes.

Monsoon may be over, but the weather is just as monotonous. During monsoon it rained almost every day. So often it might as well have been every day. Now the monotony of rain has changed to near unbearable heat. When the sun is out it's brutal punishment for anyone foolish enough to stand out in it bareheaded and not in at least partial shade. I have to drink my coffee early in the morning before it gets smokin' hot. I can't think about ice or cold beverages as it is too painful. It was cruel for them to give us ice once.

As usual, no one except Johnson comes over to 2-3 for a visit now that we have a platoon Sgt. again. And an Idiot Platoon Sgt. at that. No one wants to

get sent on the next night AP. He is new, and they don't want him to learn their names. I'm not sure he even knows my first name. Like our last platoon Sgt., he often refers to me as "Driver", as if I'm his chauffeur. Now that I think about it, he's sort of right. I guess "Driver" is better than "boy." Though at 20 years of age, I'm technically still a boy. But a boy with a boo coo manly beard, at least.

When referred to as "boy" here in the Nam, we often reply, "Boy?! Boy?! Now, I know you said Leroy, because there are no boys here. If you see a boy here you better send him back to the Real World!"

After draining the fuel filters of the accumulated condensation, I walk around 2-3 and examine all the track blocks and end connectors, and I mark a couple of end connectors I want to keep an eye on for replacement when it's more convenient. 2-3 is two weeks newer than 2-6 and 2-9, and while that doesn't sound like much, here in the Nam, it is. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns from conferring with 2-5 Tango Charlie about our day's activities. But that's only a guess, as he tells us nothing except to prepare to break camp.

I bring in my claymores and then my trip flares. I must be on a roll as I get all my trip flares in without setting any off. It helps that it's light out and not raining when I bring everything in. Fanelli and the loader are disappointed, I think, as they always appreciate a laugh. And all the better if it's at my expense. Laughs are in short supply here in the Nam, so we like them all, even when it's at our own expense.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has the Second platoon uncircle and line up behind Double Deuce, as he has Charlie Brown take the lead on the way back to the redball. When we get to the outer edge of our RON Charlie Brown has Smitty dismount and start mine sweeping our way.

There's something quite appropriate, I think, about the TC on the screw-up track being nicknamed after a never-can-do-right comic strip character. It's a tee tee bit ironic that the nickname is actually his real name. I'm not sure that counts as a nickname. Xin loi, Charlie Brown. There are a few others whose nicknames or radio call signs are our real names, and we sometimes use them over the horn, although it's against Regs. Wack is Wack's last name, and most of the guys call me Wolf which is my last name. Johnson is Johnson's last name. Since "Johnson" is also the slang for a large penis, most guys don't mind being called "Johnson" (even in polite company, of which there is none here in the Nam). Zack is a nickname, and I don't know his real name. Big Al's real name is Albert, I think, and No Jets got his nickname before I

learned his real name. Everyone calls Fanelli 2-3 Golf or Fanelli. This makes me realize that even though Fanelli and I have been together almost 24 hours a day for almost 2 months, I don't know his first name. I don't think he knows my first name, either. But probably no one in the Second platoon (except maybe Faustino) knows my first name. I'm sure that most of the guys assume Wack and Wolf are nicknames, especially because we use them over the horn.

Smitty mine sweeping makes me want to be as far back in the procession as I can be without losing sight of the track I'm following. It takes about 30 minutes to get to the redball. Charlie Brown sits at road's edge waiting for a sitrep from Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. as to which way to go. The order comes and Charlie Brown heads west with the rest of the Second platoon following single file.

It's so hot and dusty on the dirt trail that as soon as I have 2-3 going 15 mph, the breeze is so number one that I don't care about the smell of diesel exhaust. Sort of. I could drive all day at this speed in this heat and not mind. I don't expect that to happen, and it doesn't as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has Double Deuce pull off the redball after less than 30 minutes of driving. At this point Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has Steve, the TC on 2-6, take the lead and to start breaking brush as we make our way into the bush. Zack is the driver on 2-6. As a fellow driver, I know he is not happy about leading the way and breaking brush if only because we have to get our .45's and set them on our laps in case we need it in a hurry. We hate that!

Even though we are not mine sweeping, our progress is slow because we keep coming to something impassable. So then we have to get on the existing trail and mine sweep until we can break brush again. The tracks on the tanks and P.C.s are not exactly kind to the ground we drive over. When we have driven through an area, it almost looks like it has been plowed. If Charlie wants to find us, all he has to do is follow our trail of havoc. Another reason why the APs make no logical sense (to most of us), is Charlie knows where we are at night. We practically dare them to attack us all day and night. Why Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. wants to weaken our defenses at night is beyond us.

When we break brush here, it is some boo coo number ten vegetation, including my personal favorite, bamboo. It is 8 to 10 feet tall in most places. It is so dense, we can only see a few feet in front of ourselves.

Even though we are under the jungle canopy and in partial shade most of the time, it's still boo coo hot. The only number one thing is we are not

directly out in the tropical sun.

We take turns leading the platoon through the bush and soon - too soon - it is my turn to lead. I put my hated .45 on my lap, pointed at my .50 Cal. ammo box, just in case.

When I'm driving in the lead through the dense brush, all I can think about is the tiger we saw a couple of months ago. A tiger would surely hear us as we approached, and would sky in the opposite direction. At least that's what I hope. Of course Charlie could also pop up with an AK and shoot me before I can put my hand on my hated .45. I really hate thinking like this.

One of my recurring nightmares here in the Nam is to end up facing off with Charlie, who is armed with an AK while I have my hated .45. In my nightmare, my hated .45 just clicks when I pull the trigger. But in real life it wants to go off if I look at it too hard. I hate that!

It's just about noon, and no one has told us exactly what we're doing except looking for trouble, I guess. We drive for another half hour with 2-3 in the lead until we arrive at an area that's clear enough for the Second platoon to spread out defensively (sort of). At least compared to being sitting ducks, or more accurately, the slow moving ducks we have been all morning.

It's so hot I'm barely hungry. But if I don't eat now, I might not be able to eat until resupply. It's noticeably quiet in the air today with minimal chopper activity. We can hear a few Huey loaches flying by in the distance, but no Slicks flying back and forth and no Cobra gunships working out an area. It's so hot today only Superman and idiots would be out and about. Xin loi, Superman. At least you're not an idiot like us. We at least have the excuse that we are being forced into idiocy against our will and better judgment.

I manage to score one of the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese for adding to my c-rat lunch. Since we all eat c-rats now, the competition for the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese is as fierce as the tropical sun.

We take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. as all the tracks have been ordered to man their .50 Cal. at all times. Considering our current location, most of us would make sure the .50 Cal. is manned at all times whether ordered to or not.

No one comes to visit 2-3, so Fanelli and the loader and I saunter over to 2-6 to chat with Steve, Zack, and Big Al. The heat makes everyone cranky and surly. But in a short while, we're all laughing and joking thanks to our Body Bag humor mentality and our universal hate for the army. Someone is on the horn announcing an Attitude Check. The crew on 2-6 are all fighting

over the horn microphone to reply to the Attitude Check.

In the end, Big Al comes up with the microphone and says over the horn as loud as possible, "Fuck it!" I would say that could just about sum up our attitudes on a daily basis.

We're fairly confident there will be an AP tonight and some of us will be on it. We hate that! We can hear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. order the Second platoon to prepare to move out over the horn, so we didi mau to 2-3.

I climb into the driver's compartment and Fanelli and the loader climb up on the turret. Fanelli is half in the loader's hatch and the loader is sitting on top of all the gear in the bustle rack. It is boo coo too hot to be inside the turret today even with the ventilator fan on. The ventilator fan can barely clear the turret of all the farts, so it can only deal with the interior heat a tee tee bit.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has Sgt. Green on 2-4 lead the Second platoon as we continue breaking brush. Why? We don't know. To where? We also don't know. Higher must be hoping that if they make us drive around like sitting ducks often enough we will eventually be attacked. Or perhaps as we drive aimlessly around looking for trouble that we just might happen upon Charlie, so we can have a firefight and cure most of the Second platoon of the dreaded Cherry Disease.

This would be a number ten place to stumble upon Charlie, as we can't see more than a couple of feet in front of us.

We continue exploring Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s new domain for the rest of the afternoon. No tigers and no Charlie. That's number one with me.

It will be boo coo faster to return to the redball if we can stay on the trail we made. I don't want to get lost at some unmarked trail crossing by taking a wrong turn. If that happens, it's anybody's guess how long it takes us to find the redball.

It would be number one if Our Idiot Platoon Sgt would start listening to Fanelli instead of 2-5 Tango Charlie. And about more than just our location. But that's not likely to happen. Fanelli is a Spec 4, and Lifers would rather die than to take advice from anyone of a lower rank. The thing is, dying is a distinct possibility here in the Nam. We hate that!

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me lead the Second platoon back to the redball. There are no signs at the trail crossings. After ten tracked vehicles have driven down a trail when we return the trail can look quite different. Fortunately for me, Fanelli is directing me over the intercom, so I don't

always have to rely on Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. for directions. Several times I have no idea which way to turn. But as always, I take Fanelli's directions, so when we finally arrive at the redball I'm not really surprised. Now, if Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. had been giving me directions and we didn't get lost, that would surprise me.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me head east on the redball towards Cam-lo. No matter how far we drive, it won't be far enough for me. Driving at 15 mph is the only cool down any of us get.

We drive several kliks, and after about 30 minutes, Fanelli can't help himself hoping we will supply near Cam-lo. Ramen. He would sell his mamasan for some Ramen. Well, maybe not his mamasan, as she is his only supplier of Ramen. But he would surely sell me or the loader for some Ramen. And no doubt we would all sell Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. for Ramen. Heck, I'd sell Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. for one cold Tiger beer. Now that I think about it, I'd give Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. away for free, and I might even throw in a couple of pound cakes to seal the deal.

We don't even get close to Cam-lo when we see the First and Third platoons and the resupply convoy off the side of the redball. So we pull off and plug into the empty parking spaces left in the boo coo big circle that has been established.

I hate the c-rats so much that after mail call, I sometimes find myself thinking I might check out the hot chow. I must be delirious in this heat.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. hasn't been here long enough to get mail, so he stays on 2-3 behind the .50 Cal. while Fanelli, the loader, and I go to mail call.

"Hey Fanelli, it's my 21st birthday in about two weeks," I say. "Maybe I'll get some birthday cards or better yet, a goodie box at mail call.

"Yeah, if you make it," replies Fanelli. He is always such an optimist. Especially in regards as to whether I will make it to my 21st birthday. Xin loi, Wolf!

"Fanelli!"

"What?" says Fanelli.

"Fuck you!" I reply.

Today we are all decidedly out of luck, as we get no mail, not even any brochures from Denmark.

Was I really considering checking out the hot chow? I think to myself for a moment. No way! So I sky back to 2-3 with Fanelli and the loader, and we relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. so he can go to the hot chow line.

We have supplies to get and stow on 2-3, so the loader mans the .50 Cal. while Fanelli and I set off for our supplies. It takes us two trips to get everything. It's a good thing we didn't have a Mad Minute last night or now we would be humping ammo as well.

The fuel truck comes by and I fill the tank on 2-3, and I hardly get any diesel fuel on me. Hardly any, but some. I hate that! Especially just before I'm planning to eat. Once again I have to decide which c-rat meal I hate the least, and it almost hurts my head to have to think this hard in this heat when I'm this tired. I close my eyes and just grab one.

My choice being made (Spaghetti with beef ) and my fate sealed, I open the can with my

P-38 and heat it with some C-4 and eat. No locals show up at resupply and we are not surprised as we are boo coo far from Cam lo, the closest village. It would be more likely for us to be visited by some NVA as we are probably closer to North Viet Nam than we are to Cam-lo. Maybe that's why we put out the concertina wire. But if it is, we should be putting up the RPG screen which is boo coo more important in a firefight.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns with today’s offering at the hot chow line. I made the right decision to avoid the hot chow, as I can see what a ghastly mess it is. But he has his paper plate piled high with whatever they're calling it today. I've never seen anything edible that color of green. In the Nam most of us are expert on the color green as there is every shade of it imaginable here. In all fairness there is something brown on his plate. But what it is, I have no idea. It could be dog shit for all I know. And from what I know about the hot chow, dog shit would probably be better. For Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., eating the hot chow is all part of bein' in the army and playin' soldier. Xin loi, Sarge!

We stay at the resupply site for another 30 minutes or so and then Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to prepare to sky to our RON. I climb into the driver's compartment on 2-3 while Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and tie it to the side of 2-3.

2-5 Tango Charlie confers with Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. about our RON over the horn again, even though it’s against Regs. But as I've pointed out already, it's no secret where we are each night. Just follow the swath of flattened vegetation right to our RON or listen for all the noise we make, even at night.

I have a good view of the resupply site as we vacate it. What a stinking, burning mess. There are at least 20 burn holes belching black acrid smoke

that smells almost like diesel exhaust but a tee tee bit worse.

2-3 is at the very rear of the Second platoon as we follow 2-5 Tango Charlie west on the redball. We only go a couple of kliks before we turn onto an existing trail.

It takes about 30 minutes to get to our RON. We drive in circles to flatten everything and then dismount to search for tunnels. We search the area like a man lost in the desert and dying of thirst searches for water. No tunnels being found, we begin to set out our night defenses. I put out my claymores and then set out all the trip flares. I am just getting ready to set up my tent when our idiot platoon Sgt. informs me that I won't be needing it, as he is sending me on the AP tonight. As always here in the Nam things, just seem to go from bad to boo coo worse. He announces over the horn for the rest of the TCs to send one man each over to 2-3 for an AP. He also informs me he wants me to lead the AP out through my trip flares. I know it is no use to argue with him about this. He is an idiot, so trying to reason with him would be futile.

I walk over to 2-4 to see if Wack will let me borrow his M-16. It turns out Wack is also on the AP. He intends to bring his M-60 again and lends me his M-16. While I am happy Wack is coming, I don't say so. Xin loi, Wack. Instead I offer to carry two belts of ammo for the M-60. I didi back to 2-3 with Wack's M-16 and start to get my AP gear together. First I get my hated .45, its holster, and the two magazine clips I have for it. A tee tee handful of loose .45 Cal. ammo, which I put in one of my button flapped pants pocket. I have two grenades hanging from my two front shirt pockets, my canteen full of water, and two full magazine clips for Wack's M-16. I grab a big handful of loose M-16 ammo and put that in another of my button flapped pockets. My pants are getting too heavy, so to stop them from falling down, I have to tighten the pull straps at the waist of my jungle fatigue pants.

I decide to wear my boonie hat instead of my steel helmet, as I now consider it my Lucky Hat. Because I won't have to lug my heavy steel helmet, I decide to actually wear my flak jacket. I've been here in the Nam for about two and a half months, and I have never yet worn my flak jacket. It's too hot to wear in the daylight. Plus, in the daylight, you could be mistaken for an LT or any officer by a sniper. Since it's dark now, I think I will be safe from snipers.

And one last thing: I grab a can of pound cake for a tee tee late night snack while I'm awake on guard for the AP. Because there are ten of us on the AP

we only have to stand guard for one hour each. Unless of course if we actually ambush someone, which would be unlikely. The reason is: I know I cannot get the AP through my trip flares. So if we are being watched the AP will be observed leaving the RON. Charlie will know where the AP is and unless they decide to attack us first they will probably just avoid us. That would be number one with me and that is my hope.

The AP members start to show up at 2-3 just before 7 p.m. Zack from 2-6 comes on the AP this time (instead of Big Al). Johnson arrives, and the FNG from Double Deuce who shot up the First platoon comes this time (instead of Smitty). At least we know the FNG from Double Deuce isn't shy about pulling the trigger. Just don't get in front of him is all I'm thinking.

I don't know the rest of the AP members yet, and in the dark tonight we won't be able to chat. With my grenades hanging from my pockets, I hang my canteen on my web belt. Then I fill my ammo pouches with the magazine clips for Wack's M-16 and my hated .45. Finally I put on my flak jacket and my lucky boonie hat and I am ready.

My gear is so heavy it feels like I'm dragging a boat anchor with every step I take. Don't let me forget to mention, it is still hot as it never cools down at night anymore. I'm already sweating, mainly because I have on my fatigue shirt besides my flak jacket. We usually just wear t-shirts, but I need the pocket loops on my fatigue shirt to hang the grenades from.

2-5 Tango Charlie shows up for the AP, and as he's the highest ranking member, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. puts him in charge. It's a tee tee bit past 7 p.m. when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders me to lead the AP through my trip flares. Fanelli and the loader are excited, because they know what is about to happen. Lately I've been on top of my game when bringing in or setting out my trip flares, so Fanelli and the loader haven't had any entertainment from me. That's about to change.

I thought Fanelli would be going on AP tonight, so I even have a trip flare connected to the concertina wire, and that's the first one I set off. From there on, it is a comedy of errors, because after the first trip flare I lose my night vision. I just stumble from one set off trip flare to the next, setting them all off. This side of the RON is lit up like a baseball park having a night game. The only sound I can hear is Fanelli and the loader laughing. It won't be so funny in a couple of hours. Charlie has to be watching, so this is number ten for the AP and the Second platoon. Especially for the crew on 2-3. Xin loi, guys!

Fanelli and the loader get a boo coo good laugh, and that's number one because tonight might be extra scary for them. I set off every trip flare I set out. While Fanelli and the loader think the trip flare fiasco is funny, for now, the members of the AP do not. The AP has been exposed, and the smart and prudent thing to do is cancel the AP. But, of course, this is the army. Anyone smart and prudent wouldn't be here in the first place. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. and 2-5 Tango Charlie do not cancel the AP. If I had doubts about 2-5 Tango Charlie being an idiot, I don't any more. As the AP didis, I am holding on to Wack's shirt tail, as I can see nothing.

Our goal is to get far enough away from the RON that we are out of range of the .50 Cal. It's a good goal but one that can't be satisfied, as the .50 Cal. can shoot a mile or more. We hope to find something to hide behind or in. A bomb crater with no water in it would be number one, but we find none.

We're not even 15 minutes into our AP when our only horn battery dies. 2-5 Tango Charlie, being in charge, decides we should go back for another battery. When we get close to the RON, we all realize what a serious situation we have here. No horn means we can't notify them we're coming back, and they wouldn't expect us back so soon. No one, including 2-5 Tango Charlie, wants to be the one to announce our return. 2-5 Tango Charlie wants to re-enter the RON in front of 2-3, because I'm pretty sure there are no trip flares left there.

I'm more than a tee tee bit nervous, because I know Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is behind the .50 Cal. right now, and I don't trust him. In the end, although we are trying to re-enter the RON in front of 2-3, we are stumbling around in the dark. We end up in front of 2-4 and I set off one of their trip flares.

I immediately stand up and say, "Don't shoot! It's Wolf!" as thoughts of the incident with the First platoon being shot up runs through my mind. Sgt. Green is behind the .50 Cal. on 2-4, and he doesn't shoot us which is number one.

Out Idiot Platoon Sgt. shows up at 2-4 to see what's going on. The AP has been outed twice tonight, but that's still not enough for Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. He just gives us another horn battery and sends us back out against all our protests, including 2-5 Tango Charlie. Maybe he's not as boo coo big an idiot as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. after all. Maybe.

Since there are no trip flares left in front of 2-3, it is decided to leave the RON the same way we did the first time. It turns out to *really* be the same way. I am wrong and there is one trip flare left that, of course, I set off. After

I put it out, I have lost my night vision again and am nearly blind. I have to hold on to Wack's shirt tail again as we leave the RON. This AP has started out number ten, and we aren't even halfway to our destination yet. That is, if we even have a destination.

We have no map, no compass, and we are wandering around in the dark 2 or 3 kliks south of the Z. This is a number ten thing to be doing in a number ten place at a number ten time, The Scary Time. This time our horn battery lasts.

We somehow manage to locate a tee tee ridge that we can lay down behind and set up our ambush. We are so worried about being shot up by our own platoon, that we have ourselves positioned so the ridge is between us and the Second platoon. The problem is the Z is behind us, so Charlie will also be coming from behind us. There is no good solution to our dilemma. All we can hope for is luck and daylight.

The AP is situated in a single line. It's about 8 p.m. when we start to call in our sitreps every 15 minutes.

So far trading my flak jacket for my steel helmet has been a good choice. I have taken off my flak jacket and laid it on the ground. While not as comfortable as my sleeping bag and stretcher, it is boo coo better than sleeping directly on the ground.

It's still really hot, so I'm glad I brought water. I nap for a while until It's my turn for guard. In between sitreps, I open my can of pound cake for a tee tee midnight snack. The horn battery makes it through my shift of guard, and I pass the horn to Wack as I wake him for his turn. I put my boonie hat over my face and let myself fall asleep, knowing that someone I trust is sitting next to me, awake and watching for trouble. Xin loi, Wack!

*August 7, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Rosebud River*

*Had a very easy guard last night but today had the hardest I ever have had. We had post (this afternoon) and the day so hot a person nearly roasted. It is true a wind was blowing but was so hot and sultry it done no good. We move tomorrow. Courier came in from Gen. Crooks camp but I do not know what news he brought in.*

*Moonlight tonight beautiful.*

March 21, 1970
Saturday, First day of Spring (Back in the Real World, at least)
Quang Tri Province

Wack wakes me at 6 a.m. as each member of the AP is awakened by the guy next to him. The horn battery died sometime after 4 a.m., but everyone did their one hour shift at guard. This time someone was awake at all times.

At our position on the backside of a small ridge, we are not completely covered overhead, so we all got soaked from the heavy morning dew that is typical here in the Nam. The whole AP sighs with relief when realizing we made it through another night in the Nam. Not to mention a night in a number ten place and in a number ten situation.

We all get that burst of energy that comes with the first tee tee bit of sunlight, and we'll need it. Since we didn't have to shoot anyone up last night, we have boo coo ammo to hump back to the RON.

I drank all my water and ate my pound cake, so I lightened up my load a tee tee bit. We sit around for a while waking up and watching it get light. No reason to start back to the RON until it's full light. That way we can see our way rather than having to stumble around in the dark like last night. The AP works out to be almost number one for us in the end. Although we are all soaking wet from sleeping out in the open, we all got about eight hours sleep. The rest of the Second platoon only got four hours sleep at best. Xin loi, guys.

At 6:30 it's full light, and we gather up all our gear and ammo and sky back to the RON. It's a boo coo lot easier going back compared to making our way last night.

Back in the real world, the first days of spring would be when you really start to notice the day getting longer and the nights getting shorter. It would be boo coo number one for the nights to get shorter here in the Nam. Also unlike the spring time back in the Real World, it's quiet here in the Nam in the morning. No birds or frogs or anything making noise except some bugs of which there is no shortage. We're pretty sure we're going the right way, and soon we can hear the sounds of the Second platoon waking up in the morning.

When we arrive at the outer edge of the RON, we decide to walk to the front of 2-3, finally confident there are no trip flares left. Also, since it's light,

we feel safe from being shot with the .50 Cal. by Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. Why? I don't know. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. asks 2-5 Tango Charlie for a sitrep about anything that happened after the horn battery died. He tells him the truth, which is, we saw and heard nothing all night.

After a good night's sleep (well at least a night of eight hours of sleep), I feel energized by the morning sun. That will change soon enough, as the sun will turn merciless.

I use some C-4 to heat up some water in my canteen cup for my morning java. Fanelli is still shaving and the loader is eating his c-rat breakfast, and they are both in a foul mood since they only got to sleep four hours last night. Furthermore, they both know that one of them will be going on AP tonight. They hate that, and so do I, because that means I will only get four hours of sleep tonight.

My coffee being ready, I hunker down in the side shade of 2-3 and sip my coffee with my morning coffee klatch of dead and dying bugs who are swimming and floating around my canteen cup.

I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and go to the rear for my thermo chest on the bustle rack. I go over my shirt choices: clean O.D. t-shirt, sort of clean white t-shirt and two brand new white t-shirts. It's really getting hot already and I can tell it's going to be a scorcher today, so I put on my sort of clean white t-shirt and save the two new white t-shirts. For what? I don't know, but getting my sweaty t-shirt off and putting on a nice clean one immediately lifts my spirits. I already feel cooler even when in the sun.

Fanelli just shakes his head and says, "Wolf, you're just making yourself an easy target for a sniper."

I reply with a slight smirk on my face, "I'm feeling tee tee lucky today, Fanelli." Why? I sure don't know given my current situation.

I climb down from the turret, and I score the pecan roll out of our open case of c-rats and eat it with the last of my coffee. After my breakfast, I get Wack's M-16 and magazine clips and sky over to 2-4 to return them.

When Wack sees my white t-shirt he exclaims, "So, how ya gonna act now?!" As everyone knows, it's his favorite saying. He says it all the time, whether appropriate or not.

I reply, "How am I gonna act? I'm gonna act like I feel. Cool man, cool."

With the exception of the heat, we're both feeling number one since we both survived another AP in the Nam, and we got boo coo sleep to boot.

We're both wondering what we'll be doing today. And we can keep

wondering all day, as they never tell us anything. There's no reason for that to change today.

I chat with Wack and Sgt. Green, the TC on 2-4, and then I sky back to 2-3 to see if I can cheer Fanelli up by joking around. He's still cranky and wants no part of it. I don't know if it's sleep deprivation or Ramen withdrawal. It could be both.

But I know he's back to his old self when he complains to me, "You know how I hate it when you stay out all night." And then he pretends to pout.

Just like old times, I think.

I decide to go and clean up my trip flare mess even though we haven't been ordered to move out yet. I just want to wind up all my trip flare wire and forget about last night. It goes briskly since there aren't any trip flares left to trip. Since I'm out here, I bring in my claymores and wind up the detonator wire as well. I stow everything in a compartment on 2-3, and I'm just about ready for the day. Well, as ready as I ever am for another scorching hot day in the Nam trying to stay alive.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has been talking over the horn again with 2-5 Tango Charlie about our day’s destination. Some people just never learn. Finally we get the order to prepare to break camp. Since most of my work is done I bring in the concertina wire while Fanelli and the loader take down the RPG screen. With all the equipment and gear we have secured to the front and sides of all the tanks and P.C.s we are about as ragtag looking as you can get.

I get into the driver's compartment and wait for my orders. The Second platoon starts to uncircle and we line up behind 2-5 who leads the way to the edge of the RON. 2-5 Tango Charlie has one of his side gunners dismount and mine sweep our way to the redball.

We make it about half way back to the redball when we find the first land mine. It is so boo coo common to find land mines that we joke about them more than we worry. The mine sweepers on 2-5 get some C-4 and clear the first mine. We find several more before we get to the redball. We just went down this trail about twelve hours ago. Now we know we are being watched. We hate that!

Probably setting off all my trip flares last night clued Charlie in to our exact location. That's number ten. But we make it to the redball with no mishaps other than having to clear ten land mines.

2-5 Tango Charlie heads east on the redball with the rest of the Second platoon following. We drive for a while, and there are no complaints as we

chat and tease one another over the horn. We're not supposed to use the horn for idle chatter, but we do it anyway.

Someone gets on the horn and announces, "Attitude Check!" The Lifers particularly dislike when we have an Attitude Check over the horn, which usually happens several times a day.

All the guys in the Second platoon then start yelling and screaming as loud as they can, "Fuck it!" several times over the horn for a minute or so. It's times like this when I wish I could see Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s face. But from my position in the driver's compartment, I can't see him. Most of the time that's number one with me.

2-5 Tango Charlie turns off on a trail I recognize immediately as the trail to an area of elephant grass that we have patrolled before. Because of the land mines we found this morning, and because we're going to drive on an existing trail, 2-5 Tango Charlie has another of his side gunners dismount and mine sweep.

No hope for a trip to the Cam-lo River, as every time we've been here, we've stayed most of the day. It takes another 30 minutes or so before we encounter the elephant grass. Most infantry hate having to walk through elephant grass. We rarely dismount and walk directly through standing elephant grass. We try to only walk in the places where we have already driven and flattened the grass somewhat. Besides from getting cut on elephant grass, we have no actual desire to explore the area and would only do so if we were ordered to. It can be done, but there is only one way to walk through elephant grass. If you get tired and forget for just one moment what you are doing, the elephant grass can inflict some serious cuts. Cuts are number ten here in the Nam. And then there are the other number ten things to encounter such as tigers, elephants, Charlie, and booby traps. Definitely no reason to walk around in the elephant grass unless ordered to.

If there is a breeze, I can't feel it in my driver's compartment. The grass is so tall it blocks everything. I'm sort of shaded in my position, depending on which direction we're driving. But if there is no breeze, Fanelli, the loader, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. must be dying up on the turret out in the hot tropical sun.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. decides to break brush so we don't have to mine sweep the existing trail. He has me take over the lead of our procession, so I have my hated .45 sitting on my lap, loaded and pointing at my .50 Cal. ammo box. Now that I'm out in front without a mine sweeper, anything we

encounter is going to be right in my face. I hate that!

We really don't go any faster breaking brush, because I can't see well enough in front of me to drive any faster. While Fanelli and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. can see over the elephant grass, they can't see through it to offer me any guidance, so I'm driving slowly. Maybe even slower than when we mine sweep. I can't stop thinking about the tiger we saw, and elephants are a thought as well even though I haven't seen any yet.

We proceed through the elephant grass and finally arrive at what appears to have been a previous RON. Not one I recognize. Since there is no scorched earth, it's definitely not a previous ROK RON. It turns out to be a number one place in the middle of a number ten place. We space out the tracks in a circle and break for lunch.

It's so hot I'm barely hungry, but I'm so thirsty I have a long drink of our warm water. It rehydrates me but doesn't quench my thirst at all.

After the tracks are positioned, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times, and then he skys to 2-5 to confer with 2-5 Tango Charlie. About what, we don't know. Maybe they have decided to quit breaking Regs about discussing sensitive things like our location and destination over the horn.

We need some shade so Fanelli and I rig our poncho over the TC position on 2-3. Since I'm not really hungry I take the first shift behind the .50 Cal. while Fanelli and the loader have their c-rat lunch. I'm giving them first crack at the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese so I can sit in the shade a while. The heat is so intense I can't imagine anyone would be physically able to walk the distance to our location and then attack us. If Charlie is nearby, he will have to know we're here, because we make so much noise even when we're sitting still.

It's so hot today that as I look into the distance, the heat is visible. It makes everything shimmer and look wavy. Even though I'm under the poncho, I have my boonie hat on for double shade.

What I wouldn't give for an ice cold Tiger beer right now. The loader climbs up on the turret of 2-3 and offers to relieve me from behind the .50 Cal. In reality he just wants to sit in the shade. I decide not to hog all the shade and allow him to replace me. I'm still not hungry and the c-rats do nothing to improve my appetite. I close my eyes and pick. I hate c-rats so much I can't even think about eating them for over nine more months. It must be my lucky day as I pick the c-rat meal I hate the least. Currently, it is the

Spiced Beef. The problem though is as soon as I smell the Spiced Beef, it reminds me of bread and Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother. I miss them. I hate that!

Fanelli is hunkered down in the side shade of 2-3 half trying to take a tee tee nap. The heat of the day and the noise from the burning C-4 make the half effort a futile endeavor. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is making things even more miserable than they were before his arrival.

After lounging around in the tropical sun for about an hour it's hard to get the Second platoon going again, but we finally finish our lunches and prepare to sky. Where to? We have no idea. To do what? The answer is same-same as the last question. We just follow orders, no matter how dumb. What do you expect? The army is run by idiots.

I don't have to lead as we break brush after our lunch break, and that's number one with me. We continue driving aimlessly through the elephant grass looking for trouble. We hate that!

We spend much of the afternoon driving around, and because the grass is so tall I see nothing except the backside of Double Deuce. Snoopy has been walking around the perimeter of the deck on Double Deuce. He must really be hot with his fur coat and being right out in the tropical sun. Snoopy and the rest of the dogs in the Second platoon all look like the same mutts to us. They all have short brown fur and are about the same size. About two feet high at the shoulder with ears that always stand up and a tail about one and a half feet long. In reality they are not mutts, but a breed of dogs typically raised for food here in the Nam. Xin loi, Snoopy. After a day like this, the dogs in the platoon always look boo coo happy when we get going about 15 mph on the redball. They get right up front next to the .50 Cal., and they have their faces into the wind with their tongues hanging out, and they are in heaven.

Because we are making our own trail and our maps don't even have the existing trails marked, often we're not exactly sure where we are. Today we luck out, as we break out of the elephant grass onto a well established trail that several guys in the platoon recognize. We follow it to the redball at a walking pace as we mine sweep our way. When we get to the redball we head west away from Cam-lo. Fanelli and I don't even have to get our hopes up about getting any Ramen.

As predicted, the dogs are taking in the breeze, and I am too, as it's number one. Unfortunately we only drive about 2 kliks when we can see the First and

the Third platoon at the resupply site, so we pull off the redball and fill in the empty parking spaces left by the other platoons.

After positioning 2-3 I shut the engine down and climb into the tropical sun. No shade here, so it’s a good thing I have my boonie hat.

We want to go to mail call since none of us on 2-3 has gotten any mail lately. We’re not the only guys hoping for mail by the size of the crowd here. We're not very hopeful, so I am pleasantly surprised when they call my name, and I get a boo coo big goodie box from my parents and my youngest brother, Ken. Probably because my birthday is in about two weeks. Fanelli and the loader are as happy as me, because we usually share any goodies we get. That way we don't have to worry about getting teased by the other guys about inflatable dolls. We need to have witnesses attest to our goodie box’s contents. My goodie box is heavier than a case of c-rats, and they weigh about 25 pounds. This is my lucky day, I think. I refuse all offers of help to carry my goodie box, even though the heat makes me want to.

When we get back to 2-3, we relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from behind the .50 Cal. Fanelli and the loader get the poncho set up for some shade while I prepare to open up the box. My anticipation level would be off any measurable charts. In my 20 years, I can never remember being more excited opening a birthday present. I can hardly believe the canned food and treats it contains. Just when I thought I had hit the wall of my tolerance for c-rats and now my goodie box rescues me for a few days.

Cans of Dinty Moore stew, sardines, Vienna sausages, corned beef, and deviled ham. Even a couple of cans of Spam, my mom's favorite. There are cans of mixed nuts, peanut M&M’s, and some black licorice, my favorite. I hardly know where to start. Even in the intense tropical heat, it feels like Christmas. I finally settle on one of the cans of Dinty Moore stew. After taking out the M&Ms and the licorice, I let Fanelli and the loader rummage around and pick out anything they want.

Fanelli and I get a tee tee laugh when the loader asks, "Who would want to eat dee-viled ham?"

After we stop laughing, I point to a figure on the side of the can the loader is holding.

I ask him, "What does that look like?"

"A devil," he replies.

Exactly!" I say. "It's deviled ham, not dee-viled ham."

He decides to give it a try, as it can't be worse than c-rats even if it were

dee-viled. I can't say that I've ever eaten it before myself. After safely stowing the M&Ms and the licorice in my ammo box, I get some crackers out of the c-rat case and some C-4 to prepare my Dinty Moore stew. Being fairly adept at heating up canned food with C-4 I make short work of heating up my dinner. I crumble some crackers into my stew and I eat. It is even better than number one. I try to not inhale my dinner, but it's difficult. It is the best stew I think I've ever had.

Our Idiot Platoon returns with his paper plate of the hot chow sent to us from base camp. I'm sure he wouldn't want to waste his dinner, so I don't offer him anything from my goodie box. The hot chow looks as horrid as ever, yet he doesn't seem to mind. All just part of playin' soldier for Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

I rummage through my goodie box a tee tee bit, taking inventory and calculating that I might be able to make it for several days without having to eat c-rats. A pleasant thought. Tonight I won't have to go on AP. Another pleasant thought, tempered by the fact that I'll only get four hours of sleep tonight.

I have to move a few things around in my driver's compartment in order to fit my goodie box in. I can't leave it up on the bustle rack, as the loader would have unmonitored access to it while I am busy driving. Xin loi, guys.

While I'm in my driver's compartment I open the M&M’s and have a few. They are number one. It's the first real chocolate I've had since being in the Nam, and I didn't realize how much I had missed it. That just makes me start to think about milk and bread, but I don't let myself as I don't want to ruin my so far lucky day.

It's getting late and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally gets on the horn and orders the Second platoon to prepare to sky.

It's still hot even though the sun is low in the sky. So low that when 2-5 Tango Charlie heads west on the redball and I finally pull out, the sun hits me straight in the eyes. I hate that!

It takes me a few frantic seconds to get my red sunglasses on along with my boonie hat pulled low over my eyes so I can see ahead, sort of.

We drive about 2 kliks before 2-5 turns off the redball onto a trail that heads south. 2-5 Tango Charlie has one of his side gunners dismount and start to mine sweep our way to the RON. I didn't think we would go far on the redball and the same goes for now on this trail. It's getting late, and we need to start setting up our RON soon or we'll be doing it in the dark.

When we finally arrive at our intended RON, we drive in circles, flattening everything in the fading light. We dismount and search the area for tunnels which is probably the most important reason to be setting up our RON in the light. Trying to find tunnels in the dark is a dicey proposition at best. In the falling dark, we find no tunnels, so we start to put out our night defenses.

I don't know why I continue to set my trip flares on a hair trigger. I'm hoping Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. doesn't order an AP tonight or at least doesn't make me lead them out of the RON through my trip flares.

When Fanelli and the loader finish putting the tarp on the side of 2-3, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. informs Fanelli that he's on AP tonight. I can tell the loader is happy, but that will be short lived as he will have to go tomorrow.

Since I'll be up late tonight I climb into the driver's compartment and relax in my driver's seat while Fanelli gets his gear together. At 7:30 p.m. the members of the AP gather at the rear of 2-3. Keeping out of sight doesn't work, as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders me to lead the AP out of the RON through my trip flares. I don't even try to reason with him. I get my flashlight with the red lens and my hated .45, since I'll be at the outer edge of the RON in the dark, by myself, when the AP leaves.

My luck continues to hold for today, and for the first time ever, I manage to get the AP through all my stuff without setting off any trip flares. The happiness I feel is nothing compared to the AP’s, but theirs will be short lived where they're going.

I now have to try to get myself back to 2-3 without setting off any trip flares. In the dark, I think I have made it through, as I can see the concertina wire just ahead of me. But there is one trip flare left, and I set it off. Since it's the one closest to 2-3, I get another one from 2-3 and go back out with my flashlight to replace it.

My night vision is messed up again, so I climb into the turret with the loader and we sit around in the red interior light. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is at the TC position, monitoring the AP’s progress. It's about 8 p.m. now, and the AP should be close to where they want to set up. And that would be as far away from us they can get in 30 minutes in the dark. The AP's horn battery is still working. They sometimes fail in as little as 15 minutes, so it's a minor miracle they are still in contact. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is planning on monitoring the AP until 2 a .m. when his guard duty shift ends. Since I'm usually the last shift, we don't have to decide anything as the loader will be on guard from 2 a.m. to 4 a.m. when he wakes me for my turn.

The loader is so tired from only four hours of sleep last night, that he keeps nodding off as we chat inside the turret. We both see no reason for either of us to try to stay up until midnight with Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. so we both climb out and stagger to our respective beds. When I climb into my tent, my stretcher covered with my sleeping bag feels number one compared to sleeping on my flak jacket on the ground. I luxuriate in the comfort until the bugs force me to put my boonie hat over my face and remind me of the reality of the situation: I am 2 or 3 kliks south of the Z, and it's dark and The Scary Time. Xin loi, Wolf!

*June 23, 1876*
*Friday*
*Ft. Pease*

*Today marched 24 miles and camped within one mile of Ft Pease. We had a very hard and warm march. Made camp about four o'clock pm.*
*On guard tonight. Mosquitoes are very bad. Day very warm.*

March 22, 1970
Sunday
Quang Tri Province

The loader wakes me at 4 a.m. for my stint at guard duty. I must have slept like a log because the last thing I remember is putting my boonie hat over my face last night. The loader tells me the AP hasn't been heard from since about 1 a.m. but no gunfire either. Probably just another dead horn battery. I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and drop half way into the TC's hatch. I lean back as I position myself behind the .50 Cal.

I busy myself looking around and listening as best I can now that I can hear again. Sort of. I need to have the horn volume set at full blast to hear it.

The Sgt. of the guard calls me on the horn and says, "2-3, this is Sgt. of the Guard. What's your report? Over."

"This is 2-3 Delta, sitrep negative, over."

"Roger, 2-3 Delta, out."

Then I listen to the rest of the guards calling in their sitreps. All of which indicate that things are quiet.

Finally it's 6 a.m. and the first glints of light start to penetrate the bush that

surrounds us. I heave a boo coo big sigh of relief at making it through another night in the Nam.

I can already feel it getting even hotter as the sun rises. But I still want a cup of hot java despite the heat. I must be thoroughly hooked on caffeine now. The sound of burning C-4 is not enough to wake either the loader or Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. After I finish making my coffee I grab a pecan roll out of the case of c-rats and climb back up on the turret as I have my breakfast. The c-rat meals have absolutely no appeal to me for lunch or dinner. But I'm currently still able to tolerate the pound cake and pecan roll for breakfast along with the canned peaches.

I am sipping the last drop of my coffee when I can see the AP returning in the early morning light. They decide to walk through the trip flares in front of Double Deuce. In the light, they are able to walk right through without setting off any trip flares. They could never do that through my trip flares. Though it's an added hassle for me, it makes me smile.

The AP members break up and sky to their respective tracks once they are inside the concertina wire. Fanelli shows up and he must have lucked out like me and got some sleep on the AP. Instead of joining the loader and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. who are still asleep under the tarp, he starts to heat some water to shave. After his water is hot, he climbs up on the turret to the bustle rack and gets a clean shirt and pants out of his thermo chest.

We chat as he shaves, and he tells me what we all suspected. The horn battery died sometime after 1 a.m. We know the batteries for the starlight scope are boo coo expensive, so the horn batteries might be expensive too. We're sure not getting our money's worth with the horn batteries. Since we have started sending out APs, the horn battery has died on every one so far.

After his shave and change of clothes the Fanelli I know is back. Shaved and strack! He is The Man as far as I'm concerned. The loader and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally wake up and start their morning rituals: The loader deciding which c-rat meal to have for his breakfast and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. having his shave, maintaining a mustache that makes him look like Hitler. The loader must have seen me make some my blind choices when picking out a c-rat meal. This morning I watch him cover his eyes while he makes his meal selection. I hope he took note of the location of the Ham and Eggs before covering his eyes. For Johnson's sake at least.

Most of us feel the same way about Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. as we feel about Hitler, so there's no reason to give him a heads up. As far as mustaches go,

Bishop (one of the P.C. TCs) has a mustache that covers his whole mouth. There are only a couple of other guys with beards. I know this is bragging, but mine is the best. However, if Bishop or Fanelli decide to grow beards, I know they would put mine to shame. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. hates my beard, and that's enough reason for me to grow it.

His sartorial duties complete, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn to Higher to check on today's activities. After his talk with Higher he seems excited. He didi maus over to 2-5 to talk to 2-5 Tango Charlie. He returns shortly and orders the Second platoon to prepare to break camp over the horn.

I bring in my trip flares without incident, and then I bring in the claymores while Fanelli and the loader roll up the RPG screen and tie it and the concertina wire to the side of 2-3. I stow all the claymores and the trip flares in their compartment, and then I climb into the driver's compartment, put my commo helmet on, and start the engine.

I listen in on the horn conversations as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. informs the TCs on the rest of the tracks of our day's mission. We're going on a long road march on the redball to some place south of Dong ha. I haven't been south of Dong ha yet, but I know it's boo coo far. With the heat we are already feeling a long road march will be number one. I just hope we cruise a lot and it's not a bunch of stop and go, stop and go.

During monsoon, the armor units are severely restricted to the areas where they can operate with the widespread muddy conditions. The monsoon rains get heavier the further south you go in the Nam, so most of the armor units are concentrated in the "Northern Eye Corps" or I Corps. The Roman numeral for the number “one” being referred to as the letter capital "I", because the Lifers are idiots and apparently don't know about Roman numerals.

Fanelli and some of the other Second platoon members have been south of Dong ha before, and they are not happy now. The last time they were south of Dong ha, they all got sent into the Ashau Valley and got shot up boo coo bad. So far, no mention of the Ashau Valley this trip, so we're hopeful.

I can tell by the look on his face that something is bothering Fanelli.

"What's the matter, man?" I ask him.

Fanelli replies, "The Ashau Valley is south of Dong ha, and the last time we went there we didn't know where we had been until we got back to base camp. Well, I mean the guys who didn't get killed got back to base camp."

He then adds, "Charlie was using the white cross on the medic's track for a

bull’s-eye. Thing is, the jungle is so boo coo thick in the Ashau Valley, that Charlie had to be within a few feet of the tanks or P.C.s to shoot them with an RPG. The result being the guy firing the RPG got killed as well. Tee tee comfort for the guys in the Second platoon that were also killed."

Fanelli finishes, "That's why we stopped putting the white crosses on the medic tracks."

The Second platoon starts to uncircle and line up behind 2-6 who leads the way to the edge of the RON. Big Al dismounts and starts mine sweeping. We proceed at a walking pace and arrive at the redball after finding no mines today. We sit at the redball for a few minutes while Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. confers with Higher over the horn.

We're supposed to meet up with the First and Third platoons somewhere along the way and then travel in a convoy somewhere south of Dong ha. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me take the lead as we start out on the redball and we head towards Cam-lo. To get to where we are going, we have to drive through Cam-lo, and Fanelli is boo coo excited. Why? I don't know, because we will probably just drive straight through without stopping. Come to think of it, we have never stopped in Cam-lo, we always just drive through.

It would be a miracle if we see Fanelli's mamasan and Lon and her brother. It will just as surprising if the old guy is by the side of the road flipping everyone, except me, the bird. If he's there, I have some c-rats next to me, so I'm prepared. I'm leading the Second platoon at about 15 mph down the redball, and we haven't met up with the First or the Third platoons yet. So I'm still enjoying a diesel exhaust and dust free breeze. It's number one and we drive for about an hour before meeting the First platoon which takes over the lead. Even though I'm not in the lead anymore, the breeze is still worth it.

As we meet up with the Third platoon, the First platoon, not wanting to give up the lead, just drives past them as they sit by the side of the road. There's a tee tee bit of irate horn chatter about some perceived breach of protocol. Ever since the First platoon's AP-gone-awry situation, their LT has been confined to the rear. The First platoon is being lead by the company CO, a captain, who outranks the Third platoon's LT. As a PFC, I don't concern myself about such slights, so they'll have to work it out amongst themselves. Xin loi!

As we approach Cam-lo, there must be a slight westerly breeze blowing. Before I can even see it, my sense of smell is assaulted by the strong odors. We slow down to about 10 mph as we drive through the village. Since the

Second platoon is in the middle of the road march column, there is so much dust I can't see very far ahead. I find and put on my red sunglasses, and I raise my seat to the top position. I'm surprised to see the old guy by the side of the road, but he recognizes 2-3 and flashes me the Peace Sign first. As we pass, I toss him a full c-rat meal box.

When we drive through the rest of Cam-lo, we see no sign of Fanelli's mamasan or Lon and her brother. I didn't expect we would. I know Fanelli is disappointed, because I am. It's probably best we didn't see them, as it's unlikely Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. would let us stop and chat with them. Xin loi, Fanelli.

Even with my goodie box stash, I would still buy some Ramen if I could. After Cam-lo, the next place with a name down the redball is Dong ha, where our base camp is. Near Dong ha, the redball turns and heads south. After we pass our base camp, Fanelli and I recognize the storage depot where we picked up the New 2-3 after our land mine encounter. Still full of tanks, P.C.s, trucks and jeeps. By the look of that place, Higher is planning on a longer - rather than a shorter - war.

We drive in a southerly direction until around noon when all three platoons pull to the side of the road for a lunch break. I'm glad because I'm hungry and I have something besides c-rats to eat. It's not even my birthday yet, but I still feel a tee tee tingle of excitement as I go through my goodie box stash trying to decide on my lunch. Sardines? Maybe. Or deviled ham or corned beef. So many choices! In this situation, Wack would say, “How ya gonna act?"

I'm going to act hungry and decide on the dee-viled ham, as the loader called it. I get some c-rat crackers, and then I smear some of the deviled ham on a cracker and eat. A tee tee bit salty but number one none the less. The loader didn't complain as I recall. Now that I've tasted it, I don't think I've ever had it before. And I now know why it's referred to as *deviled*. It's hot! It's so salty, it makes me wish I had a cold Coke or Tiger beer to quench my thirst, but all we have is warm water.

I offer some crackers and deviled ham to Fanelli and the loader. They happily accept my offer, as their alternative is c-rats. We finish the deviled ham off in short order. We are having a number one time laughing and joking, and we are all smacking our lips because the deviled ham is both salty and hot. We want something refreshing to drink, but we have nothing. What next? The sardines. I open one can, and I get some more c-rat crackers.

Fanelli, the loader, and I share them as well. Sardines I definitely have had before. But I don't remember them being so number one. The sardines are such a hit with all three of us that I open two more cans, and we finish them all before we have had enough. The only downside is we are really thirsty now. All we have to drink is warm water that tastes like plastic. I have a few Cokes left, but I'm sort of off warm Coke for now. Especially after our tee tee encounter with ice which feels so long ago now that it almost seems to have been a dream.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. declines our offer to join us in our sardine feast. Instead, and probably to impress us as to how tough he is, he eats one of the c-rat meals, cold! It almost makes me shudder in disgust. Since we often witness Johnson consume two consecutive cans of the hated and reviled Ham and Eggs cold, we are unimpressed. Xin loi, Sarge.

We don't break long for lunch before we are ordered to resume our mechanized road march. We don't mind, because it's so hot. At times I am able to see some of the countryside. From the areas I've spent most of my time here in the Nam, it's quite evident there's a war going on. But here, south of Dong ha, there are a boo coo lot of small farms and terraced hillsides with farmers and water buffalo moving around in the distance. Occasionally they stand close to or even on the road. Some very picturesque areas. It amazes me how the rice paddies are terraced up some boo coo steep the hillsides. They are surrounded by raised walkways that act like a dam to hold the rice paddy water in and to separate one field from the next. As I look up on both sides of the road, it feels like I have stepped back in time with the rice paddies looking like they have been here since the beginning of time and probably have.

The only evidence of war is us rolling down the redball bristling with weapons. One errant 500 lb. bomb would be number ten in the wrong place and could easily destroy several rice paddies all at once.

There are a boo coo lot of nervous members in the Second platoon as we head south. South is where the Ashau Valley is, and none of the guys in the Second platoon who made it out last time want to go back. I think I can speak for the members of the Second platoon who weren't there when I say that we don't want to go there either. No word yet as to where we are headed any more specifically than south on the redball. We hate that.

This is the first time I've been this far south in Quang Tri Province. If we are still in Quang Tri. Too bad I don't have a map. Especially when I think of

the many hours spent on learning to read maps during my training at tank school. It's even more tropical looking here than around Cam-lo. All kinds of palm trees and very tropical looking jungle on both sides of the road in places that haven't been cleared for farming. There are boo coo vines hanging down and in tangles all over the place. Every shade of green imaginable and also flowers in many different colors. It's starting to look like what I imagine paradise would look like. This is not paradise though. It is the Nam. The jungle that is now on both sides of the road looks impenetrable and for us it probably is.

Though I don't have a map, I can tell there must be a town or city nearby, because we're starting to see civilians on motorcycles and motorbikes and even bicycles. Also we still see an occasional water buffalo being moved along by someone.

We continue for over two hours before all three platoons stop alongside the redball. The CO and the platoon Sgts confer for a tee tee while before we all turn off the redball onto a dirt trail. We're going slow, about walking speed. Although I can't see the lead of our convoy, I assume someone is mine sweeping. I can barely keep the track in front of me in sight all the time because the vegetation is so dense here. This is real jungle, and if there is anyplace I have been here in the Nam where I would expect to see a tiger, it would be right here. I hate that!

There is an occasional break in the jungle canopy, so a tee tee bit of the sky is visible at times. It's hot and humid here in the bush with no breeze. And just when you think it couldn't get any hotter, the jungle canopy opens up and lets the hot tropical sun shine through to correct our thinking. The trail is densely overgrown, enough that I have my hated .45 sitting on my lap, aimed at my .50 Cal. ammo box.

At the last jungle canopy opening, I could see the tops of some hills that appear to be the foothills of some mountains that are covered in jungle vegetation. A number ten place for us. But unless there's a road, there is no way we can get there. A comforting thought. Sort of.

As we drive through the jungle, I start to think about the time and where we currently are. I suddenly realize there will be no resupply today. It's a good thing I got my goodie box yesterday, because if there is no resupply, there will be no mail call either. We hate that!

We continue to drive into the jungle for over an hour before we arrive at a clearing that is large enough for all three platoons to set up our RON. There

are a lot of small trees and some short scrub, but other than that, it's very open. So much so that we forgo driving the tracks in circles around the site before we dismount to search for tunnels. It would have been a tee tee bit chaotic to have 30 tracks all driving around in circles at the same time. It probably would have turned into a demolition derby of sorts.

It's a boo coo huge area, three and maybe four football fields in size. There are over a hundred guys searching for tunnels, but it's still number one that it's not real late and close to The Scary Time. It really is number one that it's not late because (not surprisingly) someone finds a tunnel. Also not surprising is how many idiots there are who volunteer to go down and clear the tunnels. The volunteers first exhibit their prowess at line standing as they line up for their chance to get killed. They are jostling and goosing each other as if they were standing in line to see a movie. I guess the Lifers aren't the only idiots in the army.

Tunnels always concern Fanelli, and anything that concerns Fanelli concerns me. We are standing near the tunnel entrance, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is the first to attempt to enter the tunnel system. He's as tall as me, about 6 feet tall, so we know he can't possibly fit and he doesn't. The next two guys in the line of idiots waiting their chance at death are both too tall as well, but why waste time trying to reason with idiots, as it can't be done. The next guy in line is the same tunnel rat that cleared the last tunnel we found. After he drops into the hole that serves as the entrance, he doesn't immediately pop back up. We assume he was able to make it in. I still don't know the tunnel rat's name, and there's no reason to learn it if he continues to volunteer for dangerous missions such as this. I can tell Fanelli is nervous and therefore so am I. This RON is a huge area to clear of tunnels, so it's number one it's only about 4 p.m. We have boo coo daylight left in case we have to move and set up somewhere else.

The tunnel rat pops up and confers with Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. We move closer to see if we can hear what's up. The tunnel rat has found a fork in the tunnel, and he wants someone else to enter the tunnel to cover his back. How about that, a tunnel rat being cautious!

As Wack would say, "Now how ya gonna act?"

Once again the guys in the line of idiots are tripping over themselves at the chance to get themselves killed. Fanelli and I are now standing at the edge of a small pit that serves as the tunnel’s entrance. I offer my hated .45 to the idiot volunteering to clear the tunnel. My thinking on this being that since

they are willing to risk their life just entering the tunnel, what's a tee tee bit more risk?

Besides, as long as they don't point my hated .45 at themselves, it will prove to be more dangerous for any VC or NVA encountered. A warning that the safety on my hated .45 doesn't work seems of no concern to each volunteer as they drop into the pit to see if they can fit into the tunnel and have their chance at death today. The tunnel rats explore the tunnel system for almost an hour, coming to the surface to confer with the CO, and then back into the tunnel for more clearing.

This is a new and strange area for us, and the tunnel situation has Fanelli and me on the edge of our seats as we wait for a report on the situation. I know what Fanelli's suggestion would have been when the tunnels were first discovered. But of course no one asks our opinion, let alone takes our advice.

I saunter back to 2-3 to bring the loader up to date on what's happening, as the RON is so huge he can't hear what going on. The huge RON is part of what scares us the most. Trying to secure it all night will be boo coo hard. After filling the loader in, I sky back to the tunnel entrance to retrieve my hated .45, if and when the tunnels are finally cleared. Fanelli is still there, as are Wack and Steve from 2-6. We chat while waiting for word on the tunnel situation.

For Fanelli, no amount of tunnel clearing is good enough, and I feel the same. The tunnel rats reappear and pronounce them empty. They seem careful not to use the word "safe," which is what I want to hear. The CO orders the platoon Sgts to prepare our night positions, so we sky to 2-3. The vegetation outside of the concertina wire is fairly dense. Although it is boo coo hard to set out my trip flares, I am confident that no one, myself included, can get through my stuff, and that's the way I want it. The claymores are next, and then I string the detonator wire up to the turret of 2-3.

The loader will be happy. It's his turn for AP and while connecting the detonator wires, I could hear the CO tell Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. over the horn that he was canceling Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s plan for an AP tonight. Xin loi, Sarge! At least now we can get back to our normal level of sleep deprivation. For one night, at least.

While Fanelli and the loader deal with the tarp on the side of 2-3, I set up my tent behind the tank track. It's still light out, and I would guess it to be 5:30 p.m. or so by the amount of light left.

There was talk of a Mad Minute, but that was canceled since we won't

have time to clean our guns in the morning for some reason unknown to us. We didn't have resupply and all the tracks have our fuel tanks about half full because of the long road march today. Besides fuel, we're low on c-rats too.

But I don't care since I'm living off my goodie box for a few more days.

I'd think about walking around the RON to chat up some of my friends, but the tracks are spread boo coo far apart. Instead Fanelli and the loader and I stand and lean behind 2-3. For a treat, I get out my black licorice. No one likes it but me, so I don't have to share. It's still boo coo hot even though the sun has been behind the trees for a while. You'd hardly notice any change in the temperature. No wonder the Vietnamese wear silk PJs most of the time.

It finally gets dark, so I climb into the driver's compartment and stretch out in my seat. I check my goodie box stash for a tee tee bit of Christmas-present-like rush. I decide to have some of my peanut M&M's. I realize I'm hungry because I missed dinner with all the tunnel excitement. I look through my c-rat stash and find one I can eat cold. Well warm. Since it's dark now, and it would be number ten to light some C-4.

After a late dinner of warm c-rats, I again stretch out in my seat and try to relax and maybe have a tee tee nap. Before my nap I catch up making entries in my journal. The bugs aren't too bad inside 2-3, possibly because of all the noxious fumes expelled by us all. But outside and in my tent, they are a force to be reckoned with. I can hear pretty well again, so I can chat with Fanelli and the loader. Guard duty is just a matter of Fanelli and the loader deciding who's second and who's third shift. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has been taking first shift since he arrived, and I take last shift. I'm tired from the heat and the long drive today, so I finally take my leave about 8:30 or 9 p.m. I crawl on top of my sleeping bag, adjust my boonie hat on my face, and finally, before I fall asleep, I make sure I can put my hand on my hated .45 in the dark. I hate that!

*June 17, 1876*
*Saturday*
*Camp Reno*

*Just one year ago today I left Newport, Ky.*

*Two mounted men were seen on the other side of the river. It is not known whether they were Indians or not. Today cloudy and looks like rain. No steamer yet.*

*The quiet of the day came near being broken by some boys having a fight, but both weakened so all cooled down.*

*Very tiresome laying around with nothing to do. Nothing to do but go out to our meals and come back again and wait until next meal.*

*I heartily wish they would do what they are going to and go back to Ft. Shaw for I confess I have seen all the beauties of the Yellowstone that I wish to.*

March 23, 1970
Monday
Southern Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m. for guard duty. He tells me it's been quiet so far. That's number one, but it's still dark and The Scary Time. I get up and climb up on the turret of 2-3 to take my place behind the .50 Cal. After 15 minutes, I call in my first sitrep over the horn when my turn comes. Nothing to report and all the guards call in the same. Number one so far.

I can't see the stars so it must be overcast. This has had no apparent effect on the temperature. When Fanelli woke me I was part way under my sleeping bag and my t-shirt is saturated with sweat. So much so that I'm just about grossing myself out with my B.O. No bath in the river or time for any gun barrel showers so we just wallow and stew in our own sweat. Usually I'm anxious for it to get light so I can make some coffee and I am today. But first I want to change my clothes. The early morning just seems to drag on as I keep my look out and call in my sitreps every 15 minutes.

At the first signs of daylight some guys are already heating up breakfast with C-4. I heat my water and make my instant c-rat coffee. I am soon joined by the usual bugs landing in my coffee. I just blow them to the other side of my canteen cup as I cool my coffee a tee tee bit.

We still have the canvas shower bucket, but I need to wait and see what we're up to today before I can plan on a shower. Every morning as I watch Fanelli and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. wasting our precious water shaving, I give my beard a tee tee bit of stroking, confident that I'm the one doing the right thing: Conserving our drinking water. That line of thinking will be negated, however, should I be able to take a shower today. Xin loi.

Because we don't normally RON with the other two platoons, there is an inordinate amount of horn chatter this morning. The guys who have friends in

the other platoons catch up with each other or as usual, tease each other.

Fanelli is on the horn right now talking to one of his friends. Johnson shows up at 2-3 asking for Ham and Eggs of which we have several and are more than willing to part with. Especially if we get to watch him eat at least one. He eats one of the Ham and Eggs cold, in front of me. The best part is he makes it look like it tastes boo coo good. He's a great actor, I think, as I've tasted the Ham and Eggs and one thing's for sure: they do not taste boo coo good. If not number ten, so close it doesn't matter.

The CO calls Our Idiot platoon Sgt. over the horn to inform him that the platoons are staying at the RON this morning. He wants five guys from each platoon to come over to his track for patrol. Fanelli and I are pretty sure we won't have to go, but the loader is a tee tee bit nervous, as it's his turn for patrol in our crew.

Strategically, the patrol is a boo coo dumb thing to do. We are in a strange area, having just arrived yesterday. We know nothing about this place. The patrol will be made up of five guys from each platoon, and so they probably won't know one another. I've been in the Second platoon for over two months, and I still don't really know many of the guys here. I want to know the guys I go on patrol with a tee tee bit at least. It's number one to know who can be counted on and who can't. Especially important to know who the FNGs are, so you don't inadvertently turn your back on them. That could be number ten.

The loader lucks out, as Our Idiot platoon Sgt. picks five guys from the other crews. That will just add to the perception that we on 2-3 are dog robbers. Not only is it the loader's lucky day, but I decide it's mine also.

I rummage around in my driver's compartment for my steel helmet and take it with me to the water buffalo, which is boo coo far. I fill my helmet almost all the way, and then I slowly and carefully walk back to 2-3 so that I only spill a tee tee bit. When I get back, I set the water filled helmet in the sun to warm up a tee tee bit. It shouldn't take long, especially since the water is already quite warm. While my water heats in the sun, I start looking in the storage compartments for our canvas shower bucket. It really is my lucky day as it's right on top of everything in the second compartment I check.

I open my thermo chest for some clean clothes, and there, also on top, is one of the two brand new white t-shirts I have left. It must be a sign for something, I think. But even if not, in this heat, a white shirt will be number one.

I get my soap and the rest of my stuff and walk around to the front of 2-3 to prepare my shower. Fanelli is behind the .50 Cal. and still talking on the horn, so I get him to raise the main gun barrel a tee tee bit to better facilitate my shower. I strip down to my birthday suit. Most of us lack any sort of modesty now. I fill the canvas bucket and hang it from the main gun barrel. I step underneath, and it is number one. My hair was so dirty and greasy it looked like I smeared it with Vaseline.

As I rinse my hair and get the soap out of my eyes, I can see the loader standing in front of 2-3 with his helmet full of water. I have to work fast giving my body a quick lathering so I can rinse myself off before I run out of water. I finish my shower with a tee tee bit of water to spare. I hand the bucket to the loader while I drip dry a tee tee bit before getting dressed. I had almost forgotten how invigorating a shower is. Even a marginal shower like our canvas bucket is greatly appreciated. And to think I almost threw the shower bucket away when we were outfitting the New 2-3.

I put on my clean fatigue pants and a brand new white t-shirt. It's almost blinding to look at in the tropical sun. It really stands out in a sea of green vegetation and jungle fatigues, and along with my beard I hardly look like I'm in the army. Sort of.

When Fanelli sees my t-shirt, he just shakes his head.

"No one shot at me the last time," I say.

"We are in a boo coo different place," Fanelli replies.

It's a boo coo good point, and I hate to ignore advice from Fanelli. But it's been so hot lately and a white shirt makes a big difference. I decide to press my luck and wear it. Because our CO is with us at our RON, I decide to hang close to 2-3 rather than sauntering around the RON. Also showing off to local snipers is even more of a concern to me than the CO.

It's unlikely I would be sent to the rear and punished for technically being out of uniform, unless I was ordered to change and refused to do so. It does seem absurd that you somehow have to be in the proper uniform in order to properly dispatch the enemy.

As to the proper way to dispatch the enemy, we break Regs every time we shoot at anyone with the .50 Cal., which is not allowed under the rules of the Geneva convention. By the current rules of engagement, we cannot shoot at people with anything bigger than 7.62 mm. It's not a coincidence that the AK-47 and the M-14 both use a 7.62 mm round. Although the ammo for the AK-47 and the M-14 are different, it is said that the AK-47 will fire M-14 ammo.

I don't know if that is, true but I know the AK-47 ammo will not work with the M-14. The NVA have a .51 Cal. machine gun that is comparable to our .50 Cal., and the .51 Cal. will fire our .50 Cal. Ammo, but our .50 Cal. can't use the .51 Cal. Ammo. It's just a tee tee bit too large. That's probably not a coincidence either.

Fanelli doesn't want to miss out on a shower opportunity, so I relieve him behind the .50 Cal. Even with my white t-shirt and boonie hat on, it gets stifling hot when the sun finally clears the trees on the edge of our RON. I'll get the loader to help me put up the poncho if we stay here much longer. Usually we fight over sitting behind the .50 Cal. if we have the poncho up for shade, as it's the best shade we have.

I'm already thinking about lunch, and I don't mean a c-rat lunch. My goodie box could not have come at a better time. Because we didn't resupply yesterday, it means we didn't get anymore c-rats. With no hot chow, even more c-rats get eaten. The stuff we have left now in our c-rat stash are the meals we usually throw away, if we can't trade or give them away. If I didn't have my goodie box stash, I would have to eat Ham with Lima beans for lunch today.

As I sit behind the .50 Cal. I try to remember what I have left in my stash. I know I have some sardines, another can of Dinty Moore stew, a can of corned beef, and some tee tee cans of Vienna sausages. If we had some hot dog buns, we would be picking the tee tee pieces of hot dogs out of the c-rat meals. We miss bread more than sex. Well, maybe. Anyway, if we had some hot dog buns and some mustard, I would have already eaten the Vienna sausages.

Fanelli is taking his shower, and I toy with the idea of moving the main gun barrel from side to side a tee tee bit once he is lathered up. But as he didn't mess with me when I showered, I decide against it. The shower, as meager as it is, is number one, and I don't want to wreck it for Fanelli. He is still The Man, as far as I'm concerned.

I'm glad when the loader relieves me of my post behind the .50 Cal., since I have been thinking about food and lunch for about an hour now. It's number one to be excited about eating again, as the c-rats take all the enjoyment out of eating.

I rummage around in my goodie box and find a can of Spam. I had forgotten about that, and I don't particularly remember liking Spam. I'm in a different situation here. I decide to give it a try. I seem to remember my

mother slicing it and frying it in a pan. I don't have a pan, and once I open it I realize I won't be able to heat it in its own can. It's such a tight fit if I try to heat it, especially with C-4, it will pop right out on the ground. I decide to dump the entire contents of the can into my canteen cup with a tee tee bit of additional water so I can boil it a tee tee bit. After I heat it with C-4, I get out some of our c-rat crackers and put a slice of Spam on one. It's number one, and there's boo coo more than I can eat, as it is a big can compared to the single serving size of the c-rats. I offer some to Fanelli, who has been observing my cooking style without comment.

Fanelli is not sure if he has ever had Spam before. But anything is better than c-rats. He tries some and also pronounces it number one. I make up a couple more crackers and Spam and hand them up to the loader, who is whining about being left out up in the turret. Between the three of us, we make short work of the Spam. We declare our lunch could have only been improved by the addition of bread. An ice cold Tiger beer would also be welcome, but at this point I'd settle for a cold drink of water.

Occasionally we can overhear the patrol's sitreps over the horn as they call them in every 15 minutes. The most remarkable thing is the fact that their horn battery hasn't died yet. I finally get out our poncho and climb up on the turret, and the loader and I put it up for some shade. The loader thanks me for my help, but he's not ready to relinquish the best seat we have yet. I can wait, as I have all afternoon and nothing to do but wait.

It's blazing hot now, so Fanelli and I hunker down next to 2-3 moving almost in unison with the sun so that we are always in the shade. My white t-shirt helps out a tee tee bit, and I feel so clean from my shower. It's really number one now that I'm sweating. At least I don't smell worse than a men's locker room.

The afternoon passes slowly by in the intense tropical heat. We start to realize that if we don't move out soon, we won't have time to resupply. No resupply yesterday and so most of the tracks are already low on c-rats. If we don't have resupply that also means no hot chow. Not that I care. But everyone else does, so some of the guys are visibly anxious. And if we drive anywhere, it can't be far, as all the tracks are low on fuel.

The patrol finally returns. As is typical, the horn battery died. They found nothing and have nothing to report. Now it is so late, orders from the CO go around the RON. We are staying here for the night, and there will be no resupply.

All our night defense stuff is still in place, so we don't have to put out the claymores and the trip flares. There is a tee tee bit of complaining about being low on c-rats, and the hot chow now even has some appeal only because it's not going to happen.

There also will be no mail call, which is usually just another exercise in waiting that culminates in disappointment when we get no mail. But we all believe that *next time* we will get some mail. At least we hope so.

A quick look through our c-rats confirms that I'm going to have the Dinty Moore stew out of my goodie box for dinner. Fanelli, the loader, and Our Idiot platoon Sgt. can fight over the horrid Ham with Lima beans. After I heat my stew, I crumble some c-rat crackers into it and eat. It is number one, but I realize that soon my goodie boxes contents will be gone, and I will have to eat c-rats again like everyone else.

Luckily I am brought out of my sadness by watching Fanelli and the loader fighting over the Ham with Lima beans c-rat. You know we are in a desperate food situation when Fanelli is not only eating the Ham with Lima beans, but fighting for them.

Because we are staying in place, I find myself waiting with nothing to do. Although whatever I do won't be for long, because soon it will be The Scary Time.

I climb into the driver's compartment and write some letters to some of my friends back in the Real World. My seat is boo coo comfortable, so after I finish with my letter writing, I take my piece of chalk and write a few things on the main gun ammo. In keeping with our body bag humor I write "Wad Cutter" on one of the can rounds of main gun ammo. That's Fanelli's current favorite. Then on another one, I draw the interlocking ovals that denotes radioactivity. I also write the words "Radioactive Nuclear Warhead." Another favorite of mine is "Xin loi, Chieu hoi." After I finish having my fun with the chalk, it is dark out, so I stay in my seat with the red interior lights on chatting with Fanelli and the loader. Even though the sun is down, it is still boo coo hot and humid but we don't have to seek shade as you must during daylight.

Orders come over the horn to be prepared for a Mad Minute in five minutes. I get out of the driver's compartment to push down the RPG screen. Before I get out, I grab the my Grease Gun. Rather than chance Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. firing off the main gun before I get completely back in, I decide to remain outside of 2-3 and test fire the Grease Gun.

I position myself between 2-3 and the P.C. next to us. The Mad Minute starts and I (along with the rest of the three platoons) fire blindly into the darkness. The tracer rounds show only a tee tee bit of what's really being fired. With all three platoons firing everything they have, it's 360 degrees of visible havoc from the M-60s, .50 Cals and canister rounds from the main guns. It is an awesome show of firepower.

That would not include my Grease Gun, which has an anemic rate of fire. You can almost follow the .45 Cal. round as it leaves the 6 inch long barrel. The breach block is so massive that it induces a back and forth movement that cannot be dampened. You feel like you are spitting bullets rather than shooting them. It is a pathetic weapon, surpassed in that category only by my hated .45.

I really can't believe with all the sophisticated weaponry here in the Nam, that I for some reason have been issued WWII era guns of dubious worth. War is weird.

I suspected the Grease Gun would be of no real use. Now I know it with certainty. That knowledge came at a higher price than I had anticipated. The main guns going off and all the .50 Cals. being fired were extremely loud from where I chose to stand, and now my ears are ringing like alarm bells going off. I can't hear anything again.

Fanelli and the loader get out of 2-3 and walk over to me after the Mad Minute, and I can see their lips moving but I can't hear them. Since I assume they are asking about the Grease Gun's performance, I motion a thumbs down while pointing at it. I can see they're laughing, but I can't hear them at all.

At least I know that I have last shift on guard duty, so with my ears ringing again, I make my way to my tent and I crawl in. I put my boonie hat over my face and let the ringing in my ears and the ever present bugs lull me to sleep. Just like old times.

*June 7, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Camp Yellowstone River*

*Day pleasant. Left the valley about noon and crossed the hills. Camped on the river at 7 o'clock p.m. All pretty tired.*

*I'm on guard tonight. 21 miles today. Pleasant.*

March 24, 1970
Tuesday
Southern Quang Tri Province

The loader wakes at 4 a.m., and it's his shaking me that finally wakes me up. When I crawl out of my tent, I can see his lips moving if I get up close in the starlight, but I can't hear him. The ringing in my ears has stopped, but I still can't hear. I assume whatever the loader is trying to tell me is unimportant and requires no answer, as I give him none, and he doesn't wait for one. At least the artificial quiet helps me sleep a tee tee bit better.

It's not pitch dark as I climb up on 2-3 and take my position behind the .50 Cal.

I think about our day ahead. It should interesting as we are low on c-rats, fuel, and ammo. We have to clean all the weapons before we break camp, and we are boo coo far from base camp and a good hour or more from the redball if we mine sweep.

I'm thinking about a hot cup of coffee, but that will have to wait. I busy myself keeping an eye out for anything in the jungle around us and calling in my sitreps every 15 minutes. It hardly cooled off at all last night, so the air is heavy with heat and humidity and my t-shirt is plastered to me with sweat. It's still fairly clean and bright white, so I'm not planning on moving around until it's light out. Calling in the sitreps takes a long time as about 30 guards have to call in, but it's a tee tee bit comforting that no one reports any signs of activity outside the RON.

Daybreak finally arrives, and I feel it safe enough to expose myself in my white t-shirt, so I climb down off the turret with my canteen cup and a chunk of C-4. We have nearly depleted both cases of c-rats and there are no pound cakes or pecan rolls left. We usually shun the things that are left in the two open c-rat cases. I think I might have to resort to something left in my goodie box for breakfast.

After I finish drinking my coffee, I walk over to the driver's compartment and pull out what's left of my goodie box. I guess it's time to find out what the Vienna sausages are all about. I grab two cans since they are pretty small. Fanelli and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. are heating water for their morning shave while the loader displays a forlorn look as he shifts through the meager offerings left in our c-rat stash.

I open one of the cans of Vienna sausages to determine if they might be

improved by heating. They look like short hot dogs. And they taste just like hot dogs, so I decide to eat them cold out of the can, as heating them would just be a waste of C-4. As I eat, I think, Vienna sausage is just a marketing label. If it said on the can “Short Hot Dogs in a Can”, no one in their right mind would buy any. But put “Vienna Sausages” on the label, and people will eat them with toothpicks and declare them number one. If we had some mustard and hot dog buns, it would be number one. But we don't, so it's not.

I offer a Vienna Sausage to the loader, and he reluctantly accepts one. He takes a tee tee hesitant bite and says, "Tastes like a hot dog."

Fanelli accepts one and says, "Yeah, tastes like a hot dog."

So we are all in agreement on that point. Fanelli and the loader give up sifting through the

c-rat stash, but I have a second look and score a can of peaches they both missed or didn't want. Either way, it's mine now. I smile.

After our meager breakfast, Fanelli unties the tarp from the side of 2-3 and spreads it on the ground in preparation for cleaning all our guns. My hearing is slowly returning, but in order to hear anyone I have to get really close to the speaker. Closer than most people would find comfortable. Xin loi, guys.

I climb up on the turret of 2-3, disconnect the .50 Cal. from its mount, and hand it down to Fanelli. He and the loader carry it to the tarp and start to disassemble it. We are well practiced at disassembling and cleaning the .50 Cal., so it goes quickly. When we’re finished with that, I drop into the turret and disconnect the coax from its mount and hand it to the loader through the loader’s hatch before I climb out.

While the loader and Fanelli clean the coax, I top off the coax ammo box. After they finish cleaning the coax, the loader takes my place in the turret. Fanelli hands him the coax to be remounted. I tell the loader to stay in the turret, and I’ll hand him some main gun ammo to make up for what was fired during the Mad Minute last night. After I get in, I start to hand him the main gun rounds that I wrote on with chalk yesterday. Even though I can barely hear, I can hear the loader laughing in the turret. Body bag humor is what gets us through the day here in the Nam.

Fanelli and the loader start cleaning the main gun while I start draining the water out of 2-3's fuel filters and then I give all the track blocks a visual inspection. With my chalk I mark the damaged ones. If we stay here again today, I probably will replace some track blocks, though it's doubtful we'll be staying here much longer.

Soon after we finish cleaning, orders come from the CO to prepare to break camp. I bring in the trip flares and the claymores and take down my tent. But I roll it up and tie it by itself to the side of 2-3 instead of with the tarp. I don't want my tent to reek of cleaning solvent and gun oil again. It's number one that we're leaving here after two days, as all the crap from three platoons of guys and all the dogs is starting to create a boo coo big stink in the tropical heat. Although we are supposed to bury all our crap, sometimes we do and sometimes we don't. From the stench, I'm guessing most guys have not been burying their crap lately. I can't wait to breathe some fresh air.

When we're ready to didi, I climb into the driver's compartment and start the engine. Our CO with the First platoon leads our convoy out of the RON. It's such dense jungle that we follow the trail we came on two days ago. 2-3 is so far back from the front of the convoy that we only know what's going on up front by listening to the horn. My hearing is barely back, so I have the volume on my commo helmet set on full blast to hear. It must be going well because there is no talk of clearing mines and no horn chatter indicating any problems.

The heat is oppressive as we proceed at barely a walking pace. The sun makes itself known every time we get into the smallest opening in the jungle canopy. Even with the heat, most of us are glad to be on the move, despite that we are in a number ten place to be going so slow. But we are going to have to resupply today, or we're just about going to starve. All the crews are nearly out of c-rats. There are reports of that some guys, other than Johnson, have been seen eating Ham and Eggs. That's about as close to starvation as I want to get, and that's where I'd be if it weren't for my goodie box. And it is almost gone.

Although the air here in the jungle is heavy with the heat and humidity, it smells boo coo better than our RON. Especially after we lit all our trash splashed with copious amounts of diesel fuel. When we left, it was a burning, stinking, smoking mess. When three platoons of armored vehicles are working in an area, we make our presence known whether we want to or not. A blind man could follow our trail.

We drive for over an hour before we are finally back at the redball. I'm starting to wonder what we're going to do, as 2-3 is low on fuel. So low that we can't make it back to Dong ha without refueling. I can see we are at the redball, but 2-3 is still about 10 to12 vehicles back from the ones turning onto the redball. It seems like they're taking an inordinate amount of time, but this

*is* the army, and we are expert at waiting. Especially for no particular reason. This time, for once, there is a reason to go slow.

2-3 is not the only track low on fuel, so there are several fuel trucks here. As each track pulls forward, someone fills the fuel tank, and then we pull forward so the track behind can be refueled. It's number one for all the fuel tanks to be full. But now I'm worried we won't resupply today. Perhaps Higher is thinking that by withholding our only food source for a while, our appetite for c-rats might be re-invigorated. If it works, it will be only a short term fix, as we'll be sick of c-rats quick enough.

After all the tracks are fueled, we start driving north on the redball towards Dong ha. That was a long drive for the three platoons of A Troop to camp out in the jungle for two days and send out one patrol. I would guess this to be one costly tee tee camp out, considering all the fuel used and the ammo wasted during the Mad Minute last night.

It's so hot sitting out in the sun that I'm extremely happy when we finally get moving, even though it's only 5 mph for almost the first half an hour. It takes a while for all 30 tracks to get properly spaced out and up to speed. After two days in the jungle with no breeze at all, this is heaven. I can hear Fanelli talking to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. over the intercom about whether resupply is going to happen. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. says he doesn't know yet, and that makes us all nervous.

We drive mostly non-stop for over two hours. Although we are all hungry for lunch, we are reveling in the cool breeze as we drive 15 to 20 mph. We finally stop about 1:30 p.m. to let the drivers check out their tracks and to have some lunch, even though most of the crews are just about out of c-rats. We're almost out, but we have more left than the other track crews because we've been eating from my goodie box. After I give 2-3 a walk around and find nothing of concern, I join Fanelli and the loader as they try to muster the courage needed to eat the only things we have left for lunch. The loader is actually going to have to eat the Ham and Eggs because Fanelli and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. grabbed the best two of the last three c-rat meals left. Xin loi, loader.

I grab a can of sardines out of my goodie box, and along with some c-rat crackers, I have a number one lunch. For some reason, I never realized how tasty sardines are and my lunch could have only been improved by one or two Tiger beers. Ice cold, preferably. It's the hottest part of the day right now, and the only shade we have is a tee tee sliver of side shade from 2-3. We

have to move around with it like we're playing musical chairs. The heat is almost unbearable. Along with the extreme humidity, which won't let our sweat evaporate, it makes every breath you take a labor.

We are still boo coo far from our base camp at Dong ha and our regular area of operation, if that's our destination. But we don't know that. As we hunker down in the side shade of 2-3 no one, myself included, is in a joking mood. Hard life, a soldier's and today is proof of that. And it's only half over. This is the number one part of the day. The Scary Time will be here soon enough. Here in the Nam it just seems to always be going from bad to worse. We wait, something we are all quite expert at, for our orders to move out. We all want to get going because of the heat. We think it will be number one to get moving again so we can catch some breeze.

Because we are all stopped, the relative quiet is very noticeable. Even for someone like me who keeps losing my hearing from all the loud explosions and gunfire. From where we are, I cannot see or hear any chopper activity, and that's very rare. The three platoons are strung out single file on the redball, and we're spaced out at about 50 feet apart. Because the road winds a tee tee bit, I can only see three tracks ahead of us and two tracks behind us. Where we currently are is number one in that we can see boo coo far in all directions. No one can sneak up on us, but I can't speak for the rest of the platoon's location. Although we have a good view of our surroundings, this is the time of day that the tropical sun displays its awesome power, so we cower from it.

As we wait in our tee tee sliver of shade, orders finally come over the horn to prepare to move out. Relief at last, sort of. Once again, because there are so many vehicles in our convoy, it takes almost 30 minutes of stop and go, stop and go and barely going 5 mph before we finally get cruising again at 15 to 20 mph. The breeze is number one, but we are still nervous about what we are up to. Finally the CO announces over the horn that we are going to meet resupply somewhere between Dong ha and Cam-lo later this afternoon. To say we are relieved would be quite an understatement.

I even overhear a couple of platoon members over the horn wondering what the hot chow might be. Whatever it might be it will be horrible. But I'll admit I have a tee tee bit of renewed interest in it for tonight.

Driving a tank is not like driving a sports car. It is very demanding, physically. But on a day like today, I wouldn't trade with any of the crew members, as I am getting a boo coo cooling breeze. I would drive until I

drop, if I have to.

We continue to drive for several hours. Finally we pass the storage depot where Fanelli and I picked up the New 2-3, so I know we are getting close to Dong ha. We see a sign for some military complexes that says - MACV - which stands for Military Assistance Command Vietnam.

Our troop (Troop A) is part of the Ninth Infantry. In military-speak, we are *attached* to the Fifth Mechanized Division. Because the Ninth Infantry's arm patch logo looks a tee tee bit like a flower, we are referred to as *Flower Power*. That's not really the rough and tough image we want to project. It makes us sound like a bunch of pansies. We hate that!

We finally pass our base camp at Dong ha, and most of us are glad we don't stop there as we continue heading north on the redball. To stop and spend the night at base camp would surely mean some guys would be put on perimeter bunker guard for the night. We really hate that!

We drive several kliks past base camp when the platoons start to pull off the redball into a large open area big enough for all three platoons to resupply. It takes a while for all 30 tracks to get in position. The side gunners jump off and start to dig their burn hole/foxhole while the P.C. drivers put out the concertina wire. We're not that close to Cam-lo, and no one expects any locals to show up at our resupply, but we put out the concertina wire anyway.

Fanelli and the loader and I can't decide what to do first after we set up. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is ensconced behind the .50 Cal. at the TC position and is talking on the horn. We decide to abuse ourselves first by going to mail call. We haven't had mail call for two days, so we're hoping at least one of us will get mail. We meet up with Wack and the crew of 2-6, and we all exercise our great skill at waiting for our names to be called or not.

We are all feeling hopeful, as many guys are getting mail. With three day's mail being distributed, statistically, the odds of us getting mail must be increased, I think. Several in our small group get some mail, including me. I get an early birthday card and letter from my best friend Jerry. My twenty-first birthday is less than two weeks away, and if I make it back to the Real World, I'll be able to vote and legally drink. *If* I make it back. Right now I just want to make it to my birthday. I open the birthday card, but I save the letter for later.

Now what are we going to do? We have a boo coo amount of ammo to pick up. We need, and I mean *need*, our two cases of c-rats. But we are all somehow feeling lucky and decide to check out the hot chow. Our reasons

are several: one, some guys are still chatting with their friends, especially from the other platoons, and they can continue to chat as we walk over to the hot chow and display yet another of our acquired skills, that of line standing. You need to be expert at line standing when doing it for hot chow. I liken it to standing in line to do something unpleasant, such as slopping the hogs and then cleaning up after them. The hog slop would probably be an improvement compared to what they will feed us today. Another reason we all decide to chance the hot chow is to make our base supply of c-rats last a tee tee bit longer after our little scare of just about running out of something we hate but need to survive. We hate that! The hot chow is almost always the same, but the degree of horridness does change daily. Some kind of meat vaguely resembling beef, rehydrated dehydrated potatoes, and some gray vegetable that once was green I think. The meat, sometimes referred to as water buffalo, which it surely is not, and sometimes called mystery meat, which it definitely is.

My streak of luck was going so well, but it had to end sometime. With the day's hot chow offering, my luck is played out. We all hang out a tee tee bit pushing the "food" around on our paper plates with the plastic forks. It's not hard to make jokes about army food, and the hot chow a gold mine for anyone wanting to make comments about slopping the hogs. You just have to be careful you don't choke to death laughing with your mouth full.

After having our fair share of abuse, we head to the resupply trucks to start humping our ammo and c-rats over to 2-3. Since it's a three platoon resupply site, it's bigger than two football fields side by side. Carrying all of our supplies and ammo a boo coo long way in the heat and humidity is probably one of the most physically demanding tasks we do. I must say the two cases of c-rats never looked so good. Between the three of us, we almost fight over who gets to carry them back to 2-3. Almost, as we have boo coo supplies and ammo to hump over to 2-3. But we want to get the c-rats over to 2-3, so we can eat something we hate less than the hot chow. We relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from behind the .50 Cal. so he can go have some of the hot chow. I have witnessed him actually eat it, so apparently it's not lethal. Or maybe he's not human. That makes me wonder: Where do Lifers come from?

All three of us decide to have a c-rat dinner to fortify ourselves before hauling the rest of our supplies and ammo over to 2-3. It is one of the most number one c-rat dinners I can remember having. We also didn't do one of the first things we usually do when we open a new case of c-rats, which is to

throw the Ham and Eggs and the Ham and Lima beans into the burn hole. We might need them.

After our modest repast we saunter back to the resupply trucks and start humping our ammo over to 2-3. The .50 Cal and the coax ammo just gets stacked around in the bustle rack, but the main gun ammo has to be unpacked, unwrapped, and stowed in place, and then all the packaging and wrappings have to be burned. It's good timing on the part of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., as he returns with his hot chow dinner just as we finish dealing with all the supplies and ammo. The timing doesn't really matter, as I haven't seen him help with any of the chores we perform, ever.

We are close to Cam-lo again, so both Fanelli and myself are in high hopes that one day soon we will resupply near Cam-lo.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is up at the TC position on 2-3 so he can handle any calls over the horn. Fanelli and the loader are both exhausted from our long drive today in the hot sun. Even though they were in the breeze when we were moving, they were still directly out in the sun most of the day.

We are somewhere between Dong ha and Cam-lo, so we're wondering where we will set up our RON tonight. Although I had both some shade and breeze today, I am tired of driving and hope we RON some place nearby.

I don't think we will be setting up tonight with the other two platoons, because the Third platoon has already brought in their concertina wire and are lining up behind their LT. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally gets the hint that it's time to didi, and he tosses his paper plate and some leftover dinner into the burn hole next to 2-3. Then he gets on the horn to order the Second platoon to prepare to sky for our RON.

I start the engine and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me pull out of our spot and has the rest of the Second platoon line up behind us. He orders me to head to the redball and drive towards Cam-lo. We drive about 2 kliks before he has me turn off at a dirt trail. The loader dismounts to mine sweep, but we have to wait for someone to bring the mine sweeper up to the front of our column.

The vegetation here is more of what we're used to. It's not super dense jungle like where we were the last couple of days. Although the vegetation is very short and sparse, it's not without danger. Charlie can still hide from us, especially if they have some tunnels which they seem to be fond of around here.

We continue at a walking pace following the loader until we get to a good

sized opening. First things first though, we drive around in circles flattening everything, and then we go over the entire area looking for tunnels like a sourdough miner looks for gold. We find none, so orders are given to set out our night defenses.

I'm exhausted, but I muster my energy and set out my trip flares and the claymores. The tarp Fanelli and the loader are tying to 2-3 still reeks of cleaning solvent, so I set my tent up on the opposite side. I put my stretcher and sleeping bag inside, and I'm as ready for The Scary Time as I'll be. We still have a tee tee bit of daylight left, so Fanelli and the loader and I stand behind 2-3 in the shade and joke around. We hope some of our friends might have also finished early and will stop by for a chat. But that's not likely because each P.C. crew has to dig two foxholes, so it takes them longer to set up at night. Secondly, being the platoon Sgt.'s crew, we are perceived as dog robbers. And thirdly, no one will stop by in fear of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. assigning them to some nasty detail such as AP or LP.

The three of us joke around until it's dark, and then we all climb into 2-3. My hearing has been slowly coming back, so if I concentrate I can communicate with Fanelli and the loader from the driver's compartment. If I don't concentrate, I can hear them talking, but I can't make out what is being said.

I decide to read the letter I got from my friend Jerry. He already wished me an early happy birthday with a card, and the letter is to keep me up to date with the happenings back in the Real World. Jerry bought an old school bus and is currently outfitting it into a camper of sorts. I am envious, to say the least. I would give just about anything to be back in the Real World, let alone preparing to go on a number one adventure where you are not being shot at. It's a boo coo long letter, so I save some for later, more because I'm envious than anything else.

After climbing out of the driver’s compartment, I stick my head inside the loader's hatch, which is always dangerous to do when inhaling. I verify that I have last shift on guard which I do. That the c-rats are back can be evidenced by the visible cloud of farts inside the turret. It might have just been a mist of gun oil, but I doubt it. I make my way to the rear of 2-3 and I climb onto my sleeping bag covered stretcher. I roll onto my back and put my boonie hat over my bug juice slathered face, and before I know it I'm deep asleep. Well, sort of. As deep as we ever allow ourselves to sleep here in the Nam.

*June 11, 1876*
*Sunday*
*Camp Squaw Creek.*

*Today left camp and took back trail. Roads are heavy with mud on account of the late rains. Streams much swollen. Crossed Squaw Creek and camped at bottom of a steep hill which we will have to go up tomorrow.*

*The cavalry passed and are about 8 miles ahead of us. Two of Co., A and K made or fixed up a road. Had some showers of rain this afternoon.*

*Had another tooth pulled and feel considerable better. The steward remarked that I was out of luck with my teeth. I thought so myself. Water, so muddy, we can scarcely drink it.*

March 25, 1970
Wednesday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m. for my stint at guard. Nothing of interest to tell me, and that's number one for the last couple of hours of The Scary Time. I hope it stays that way for me until it gets light.

I slept as well as can be expected given the circumstances, which are a hot and humid environment and bugs that apparently don't know about insect repellents.

I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and assume my position behind the .50 Cal. I look around the RON, only being able to see the silhouettes of the other tracks in the Second platoon. I can barely make out the other platoon members on guard behind the .50 Cal. doing the same thing as me, trying to stay awake.

When my turn comes I call in a negative sitrep to the Sgt. of the Guard, just like everyone else. Still number one so far.

I still haven't figured out a way to heat up water undetected when it's dark, so I have to wait. I could heat up some water inside the turret using heat tabs. But that would be boo coo dangerous as the main gun ammo is extremely flammable, and that's not to even mention the fumes from the heat tabs which I suspect are toxic. Out in the open air, the heat tabs can easily ruin what little appetite we have left from living on a c-rat diet. In an enclosed space such as the tank turret, it would be number ten.

Just thinking about the smell of the heat tabs fumes makes me nauseous. Enough that I think I can and will wait for it to get light. When it finally starts to get light I climb down from the turret. I'm just about ready to put the instant c-rat coffee and creamer into my canteen cup when Fanelli and the loader, awakened by the burning C-4 no doubt, both get up. They are followed by Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

Both Fanelli and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., as usual, get right to heating up water to shave. What a waste of water, which would make a number one cup of java.

The loader wastes no time digging into the freshly opened case of c-rats for his breakfast choice. That sort of exuberance about c-rats won't last long, but I know exactly how he feels.

I have a few things left in my goodie box that I would prefer to eat, but I think I'll save some of my goodie box stash just in case. So I follow the loader.

The pecan roll is available, so along with my coffee, that is my breakfast. Then I grab a can of c-rat peaches, and I climb up on the turret to get a tee tee bit of breeze. I open the can of peaches with my P-38 and spoon the peach slices into my mouth, letting the juices just run into my beard. My beard is probably the best beard I have ever grown, and I expect some sort of retaliation from Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. soon.

Some may think that beards make you hotter in a hot climate, but a little known fact is that if you can keep your beard wet, it has a very cooling effect on your face. Here in the Nam, the trick is keeping it wet. It isn’t entirely possible, but wetting it occasionally is. When I rinse my face and beard to rinse the peach juice out, I just leave my beard soaking wet. It feels boo coo good in the omnipresent heat. How long ago was monsoon? I've been so hot and miserable with the heat and humidity that I can hardly remember being cold and wet during monsoon. I didn't even see all of monsoon like Fanelli and Wack.

If I make it a year here in the Nam, I will see monsoon again. Not a pleasant thought. As usual, things just go from bad to worse here in the Nam.

The Second platoon members finish their breakfasts and attend to their morning chores. Mine is draining the accumulated condensation from the fuel tanks. It is probably the most important thing I must do without fail. If the water separator in the fuel filter gets full of water, it will let water get into the engine’s combustion chamber. This would be number ten, as it would likely

result in a blown engine, and Higher would eventually know it's your fault. They hate that!

You can get in boo coo trouble for causing a $200,000 engine to blow up by what would be considered “dereliction of duty”. So every day I drain the fuel filters on 2-3, and I always try to remember to brush and floss my teeth first. Otherwise it's two unsavory tasks instead of one. Having forgotten once or twice, I had to resort to chewing the Chicklets gum that comes in every c-rat meal box. All that did was make the diesel fuel taste a tee tee bit like peppermint. Not really enough to help much.

When it appears that everyone has their chores for the morning completed, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn to order the Second platoon to prepare to break camp. I bring in the trip flares and the claymores and wind up the detonator wire while Fanelli and the loader take down the RPG screen and bring in the concertina wire. I take down my tent and roll my stretcher up in it and tie it to the opposite side of 2-3 that Fanelli ties the rolled up tarp, which still smells a tee tee bit like gun oil and solvent. Fanelli makes a pouty face and complains that it's harder to secure the tarp without the stretcher and tent. I tell him that's too bad. My tent has finally aired out from its last encounter with the tarp reeking of solvent, and I intend to keep it that way.

I climb into the driver's compartment, put on my commo helmet, and wait for my orders. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has Double Deuce back out and lead the way out to the trail we came in on last night. He orders me and the rest of the platoon to follow Double Deuce back to the redball.

When Double Deuce gets to the edge of the RON, Charlie Brown has Smitty start to mine sweep our way. This day is not starting out very well, as Smitty would be the last person, no wait, the second to last person I want mine sweeping for me. Especially when I'm the next track back.

The last person I want to trust mine sweeping for me is Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. I've never seen him do it, and it's not exactly a mindless task, which I think is all he is capable of.

It's not so much that I would care if he blew himself up through his own stupidity, it's just that I don't want to be that close if he did. If you set off a land mine meant for a tank or P.C., you will be Fubar as we say here.

It's as if the loader is reading my mind. When he takes the minesweeper up to Smitty, the loader stays up front with him just to sort of keep an eye on him. That's number one with me as we proceed through the morning heat at a walking pace.

We didn't go far off of the redball last night, so it doesn't take boo coo long to get back to it. When we get to the redball, Charlie Brown hangs loose while we all wait for Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to decide which direction we are going. He's on the horn with Higher, and so we wait. Something we are all expert at here in the Nam.

Finally, orders come to head towards Cam-lo which has virtually everyone excited. It's shadeless and smoking hot on the redball, but we are driving at a steady 15 to 20 mph, and the breeze hitting me in the face is number one. Not only do we drive towards Cam-lo, we drive up to and through it. I think Fanelli might die from being so close to a Ramen score only to miss it. Our drive through Cam-lo is so unheralded that the old man who is always by the side of the road giving everyone (except me) the bird isn't even here. Good thing, because I didn't know where we were headed until just before we didi, and I don't have any c-rats in the driver's compartment today.

Cam-lo's village aroma is even more intense in the heat, and it lingers with us for quite a while after we have left the village. I need to remember if we ever resupply by Cam-lo to get some more menthol oil from Smitty's Tiger Beer Boy.

We continue heading west on the redball. The redball runs east and west here instead of north and south like it does near Dong ha. We're sort of back in our normal field of operations. But for some reason, I don't get that “glad to be home” feeling. We're boo coo closer to the Z here, not that I consider anywhere in the Nam to be a safe place. But this is a boo coo scary place when it gets dark, and it stays dark for 12 hours.

It's getting noticeably greener here despite the high temperatures. It's not jungle, but in places the vegetation is boo coo dense. Most of our normal area of operation is covered in short green scrub. The plants that thrive here apparently only require sun and occasional water which is what they get now that it's the dry season. I guess that's it as far as seasons go here, the dry season and monsoon. It's a wonder why anyone would want to live here. It can be breathtakingly beautiful, but most of the time the weather is insufferable.

Any hope we had of resupply by Cam-lo is quickly fading with every klik we travel west. We're still not past the furthest point west I have been, but if we keep going much longer we will pass it. In fact, we do pass it, so now we are in uncharted territory for me. Fanelli has been here, but not Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

I've been hungry for a while, so I know it's well past noon. That's what it takes for me to get hungry enough to eat c-rats. We are finally ordered by Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to stop and spread out at 50 foot intervals to break for lunch. We stopped in a boo coo number ten place, as we are right out in the tropical sun and we are once again sitting ducks. At least this time we know who made this decision: Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

He seems content to remain behind the .50 Cal. out in the sun while Fanelli, the loader and I busy ourselves fixing our c-rat lunch. We still have a good selection of the c-rat meals we hate the least, so we all get our favorite. I'm still saving the remains of my goodie box for emergencies. Hopefully I might have something left should I actually make it to my birthday. I can't help thinking that I don't want my last thoughts when dying to be: I knew I should have eaten the sardines!

The three of us hunker down in the sliver of side shade next to 2-3. I'm almost tempted to crawl under 2-3 for some real shade. The loader finishes his lunch and climbs up on the turret to relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from behind the .50 Cal. I mention to Fanelli that I think it was number one this morning when the loader assisted Smitty as he mine swept without anyone asking or ordering him to.

I say, "You know, Fanelli, I'm thinking maybe we can start letting the loader fill the coax ammo box. With some supervision of course."

Fanelli cautiously agrees and says, "Definitely with boo coo supervision."

We both watch in amusement as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is trying to heat up some c-rats with heat tabs. Higher must be complaining again about our use of C-4 to cook with. Maybe they're more worried about our safety than the cost of the C-4 but I doubt it. If they were worried about our safety we wouldn't be here.

Fanelli tries to extract from Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. what our mission might be today but without any success. We probably have a mission to just drive around looking for trouble in a place known for trouble and stopping in places where we are sitting ducks. War is weird, but scary weird.

You want to think that because you have had long and expensive training that the army wouldn't waste that by casually exposing us to danger for no good purpose. Think again. We are blithely sent into dangerous situations by idiots whose main motive is often retribution for some slight, real or imagined.

At first we don't mind the shortness of our lunch break because of the

breeze we get from driving. But we don't travel for more than a klik with 2-3 in the lead when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me slow down and eventually turn south off of the redball and into the bush, breaking brush.

I have to get my hated .45 and reluctantly load it and - even more reluctantly - chamber a round. I put it on safe. Why, I don't know. Habit, I guess. I lay my hated .45 on my lap and point it at my .50 Cal. ammo box. If a bullet were to ricochet around in the driver's compartment, it would be number ten. It's fairly confined and full of ammo, and me. It would almost certainly hit me. If it doesn't and hits the main gun ammo, that would easily explode, which would be considerably worse. Something like number ten thousand.

I wait a few minutes for the rest of the Second platoon to catch up to us before we disappear into the bush. The last track arrives and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me proceed into the bush. I hate that! The vegetation, while not jungle, is still boo coo dense. I can't see more than 2 feet in front of me and that 2 feet is just the distance from me in the driver's compartment to the front edge of the tank that is pushing down everything in front of us.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. guides me around from his position up on the turret where I assume he can see more than me. It's hot and stiflingly humid in the bush, so I don't know why they call it the dry season. Probably they call it dry because it doesn't rain like during monsoon. But dry, it is not, as I'm soaked with sweat. The only good thing is I'm not out in the sun. I don't know how Fanelli and the loader stand being out in the sun up on the turret. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is up there too, but I don't concern myself much about him.

We get into some boo coo thick and dense vegetation with a lot of bamboo mixed in. It's some number ten stuff from the aspect that sharp branches are poking into the driver's compartment. I hate that!

I drop my seat and close my driver's hatch before I get my eyes poked out. I can barely see my way out the three vision blocks, and sometimes I can't see anything. In those cases, I have to rely solely on directions from Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. I really hate that!

So far this has not been a good day. When it started, I had to count on Smitty. Now I have to rely on Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to keep me from driving off a cliff or into some unseen bomb crater. At least with the hatch closed, I don't have to worry about a tiger jumping into the driver's compartment with me, so I have unloaded my hated .45 for the time being.

It's starting to get unbearably hot in the driver's compartment with the

hatch closed all the way. There is a vent fan in the turret, and I'm sure it's on and running, but if I don't have the hatch open at least a tee tee bit there is no air circulation in the driver's compartment.

Just when I think I can't take the heat a moment longer, we break out of the bamboo thicket, and I can open my hatch. It feels so cool and refreshing when I first open the hatch, but that doesn't last more than a few seconds. I'm dripping wet with sweat now, but at least I can leave the hatch open as we proceed.

Now that we're out of the bamboo, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has 2-4 come to the front to break brush. That doesn't last long, as we get into some rough going again. Not more bamboo but a tee tee more than the P.C.s can handle, so Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has 2-6 come to the front to break brush for the Second platoon. Since I'm not in the lead I leave my hated .45 unloaded (for my own safety more than anything).

After at least another hour of driving through the bush, we break into another opening big enough to space out. We take a break in the sweltering heat. I am just about dying of thirst, so as soon as I shut the engine down, I jump out of the driver's compartment and climb up on the turret to get my canteen cup and go right to our water container. The water is boo coo warm, almost hot, but it is wet. I half drink, half pour it on my face and beard, and it almost quenches my thirst. Almost, but not, because the water is warm and tastes like the plastic container. The only pleasure is letting it splash down my chin and beard, and it even feels number one to get my t-shirt wet also. It seems I'm not the only one who is thirsty, as the whole crew on 2-3 is standing around our water container with our canteen cups, chugging down ghastly warm water, as if it were ice cold beer. What I wouldn't give for an ice cold Tiger beer right now!

It's payday in less than a week, but we didn't resupply close enough to Cam-lo to have the locals stop by, so I can't count on that. Besides Tiger beer without any ice would be a waste on me. Since it's not likely that we will ever see ice again, I have to stop thinking about it. That's easy because we don't break for long, and it's back in the driver's compartment for me. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to prepare to didi.

I put on my commo helmet and start the engine and I wait. Something I am quite expert at. Fanelli gets on the intercom to tell me to hang loose as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has jumped off of 2-3 and is chatting with 2-5 Tango Charlie about something. He's soon back and we follow 2-6 at a faster pace

than when we have to mine sweep, but it's not much faster. There is often a lot of stopping and backing up and going around obstacles when breaking brush.

Snoopy, Charlie Brown's dog, has the run of the deck on Double Deuce as we drive through the bush. The dogs of the Second platoon are amazingly surefooted and agile, as they often run around on top of the P.C.s when we're moving.

Someone is on the horn trying to tease Charlie Brown.

"Double Deuce Tango Charlie, this is 2-9 Golf, over."

"Two Niner Golf, this is Charlie Brown, over."

"Man, Charlie Brown, I cannot believe how you spoil that mutt of yours. You probably even buy dog food for him, over."

This time Charlie Brown plays along and says, "That's a roger, Two Niner Golf. And it was a good thing too, because when everyone else was just about out of c-rats, we didn't have to resort to eating the Ham and Eggs like some of the other crews. At least we had dog food to eat, over."

We can hear some laughter over the horn and then 2-9 Golf finishes, although he's still laughing a tee tee bit, "Fuck you, Charlie Brown, out!" I guess Two Niner Golf must have been observed partaking of the dreaded Ham and Eggs. Xin loi, Two Niner Golf.

Charlie Brown might not be joking about eating the dog food either. I know I would at least have a try at the dog food, as I already know how horrible the Ham and Eggs are.

Eggs, real eggs. I haven't seen or eaten a real egg in so long I can't even remember how long it's been. I don't even like eggs that much, but for some reason now I really miss them. I can't start thinking about the things I miss, or I'll be at it the rest of the day. It will only make me feel boo coo worse than I already feel about my current circumstances.

We can't explore Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s domain much longer unless we aren't going to have resupply today. He wouldn't tell us if we asked, so we don't. We will know soon enough, and we do. He orders every track to do a neutral steer in place, so the entire Second platoon is now facing the direction from which we came. I can't see which track is in the lead now, because 2-3 is near the rear of our reversed procession.

We start heading back to the redball. Because we don't have to break brush or mine sweep, we arrive in short order without mishap, incident, or getting lost.

I'm hoping to resupply somewhere near Cam-lo, as is Fanelli and a lot of other guys in the Second platoon. Though right now, I'm just happy we're having resupply, because it means food and maybe mail.

Before I disappoint myself and really start hoping for resupply near Cam-lo, I can see the lead tracks in our convoy start to pull off the redball. Then I see the resupply convoy off to the side in an area we have resupplied at in the past. We need so much room for all three platoons to set up, there are only a few places near the redball where it is possible without first having to clear an area of vegetation and more importantly, tunnels.

The other platoons are here, so we plug our vehicles into the spaces left between the already parked tracks. I position 2-3 to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s liking, and then I shut down the engine. Fanelli and the loader are already out front connecting our section of concertina wire up to the rest of it. No Ramen today, but there's still mail call so at least something to look forward to.

At mail call, we practice our well polished skill at waiting, especially waiting for your name to be called. At least we are waiting for our name to be called for a number one reason such as getting mail, as opposed to a number ten reason such as AP. Since I've just gotten my goodie box, I don't expect any, so I'm not disappointed when I get none. Neither Fanelli or the loader get any mail. Other than the x-rated brochures from Denmark, I don't recall them getting much mail. They do mail call alphabetically, and since my name is near the end I have to wait till just about the entire mail call. At least I get to feel hopeful about getting mail longer than most guys.

Mail call being over and a disappointment, we catch up with the crew of 2-6 and Wack. Zack and Big Al don't get to tease me about digging a foxhole anymore, but whenever 2-6 is next to or close to 2-4, they still like to give Wack the benefit of their combined expert advice on the finer points of using an entrenching tool. Always careful and mindful not to actually do any of the digging themselves. Xin loi, Wack.

The three tanks of the Second platoon are usually evenly separated around our RON, so the tanks are never next to each other. We don't often get to chat with the crew of 2-6 except over the horn. It is interesting to watch the musical chair effect on the other track crews when we set up our RON.

None of the other crews want to be next to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. But in reality, two P.C.s, one on each side, will have to be next to us. The P.C. crews are always trying to tell where 2-3 is going to park so they can get as far away as possible. I can't blame them, as I would do the same. But I can't

get away from Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. The worse part, though, is being treated like a dog robber. As if we want to crew for Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

We all decide to avoid the hot chow again tonight. We didn't order that much for resupply, so Fanelli and the loader and I are able to carry our two cases of c-rats and the rest of our supplies in one trip.

We relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from his position behind the .50 Cal. Our c-rat stash is getting rebuilt and all three of us are able to score one of the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese to slightly improve our dinner. Slightly, ever so slightly.

I'm glad Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. went for the hot chow, as I hate smelling the heat tab fumes when he heats up his c-rats. It’s a tee tee bit ironic that he bothers with the heat tabs, because he uses C-4 to heat up his water to shave. He returns with the day’s hot chow offering, which is barely recognizable as food. He seems unconcerned, as he scoffs it down with a tee tee plastic fork. It must be something he learned at NCO school.

Finished with resupply, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me lead the way to and west on the redball. The sun is low in the sky now and shining right in my eyes. I hate that! I have to fumble around in my .50 Cal. ammo box for a few seconds before I can find my red sunglasses.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me stop on the redball. We wait for the rest of the Second platoon to catch up and then 2-6 leads the way into the bush. Not quite jungle here, but it's not the short scrub we drive through most of the time either. It's a mix of small trees, bushes, and my personal favorite, bamboo. A real number ten place.

We only proceed for less than a klik when we arrive at our intended RON. It's been used as a RON before, because I can see some of the foxholes from the previous camp. We still drive around a tee tee bit to flatten anything vertical, and then most of us then most of us dismount and search the area.

Some of the tracks are more concerned about taking advantage of the existing foxholes than anything else. We haven't been searching for long when the shout of "Tunnel!" goes out. Tunnels! We hate that! Fanelli and I walk over to the tunnel. This one is quite different from the ones we have found in the past. This is a small vertical shaft, maybe 12 inches by 16 inches. It must have been dumb luck to find this one. The cover was a rectangular patch of sod about 12 inches thick, and our guy found it because he stepped on it and it sank down a tee tee bit.

As always, the idiots are lining up and falling all over themselves to clear

the tunnel. It's getting to be late in the evening for having to deal with this, and both Fanelli and I are concerned. The c-rat diet has bulked me up to about 185 lbs,. so there is no way I can fit in the tunnel opening, I'm glad to say. But there are several idiots willing to clear the tunnels. This entry is different than the last few we have encountered. The tunnel goes in both directions but has the smallest entry opening I have ever seen.

Because the tunnel itself is only a few feet underground, one of the mortar crew uses his shovel to make the entry a tee tee bit larger. Large enough for me to get in, so I take a couple of steps backward lest I be mistaken for one of the idiots. Though now that I can see into it, the tunnel itself is still too small for someone my size.

About six platoon members are offering to go in and clear the tunnels. Two guys are chosen, one being the Tunnel Rat I recognize from previous tunnel clearing. I still haven't learned his name, so I won't have to forget it when he pushes his luck too far. The current plan is for both tunnel rats to enter and go in opposite directions to cover each other from behind. Sort of.

From the safety of the entry, several others watch the tunnel for any additional activity while the tunnels rats are clearing it. That would include Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., myself, and Fanelli. We hate tunnels, and it's already getting late and close to dark and The Scary Time. One of the tunnel rats returns to the entrance because he has encountered a fork. He wants someone to come and cover him as he explores one of the forks. So cautious for an idiot tunnel rat, that I hardly know how to act. Xin loi, Wack, for stealing your line. Xin loi, Tunnel Rat, for being such an idiot. One of the waiting volunteers follows down the entry hole as we watch.

Fanelli and I are not the only ones in the Second platoon who are concerned when we find tunnels. Charlie is such a consummate and skilled tunnel builder that we are never 100% sure that a system has been completely cleared. Tonight, in order to ease the fears of many of us, they decide to blow up the tunnels with C-4 and collapse it as much as possible. In the end, we have what look like sinkholes all over the RON. It will be number ten to try to walk around the RON in the dark. But it's already number ten to walk around anywhere here in the dark, even inside the RON.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to start setting out our night defenses. I start putting out my trip flares first in what tee tee light is left, and then I put out the claymores and string the detonator wire over to the turret on 2-3. Fanelli and the loader put the concertina wire out and set up the

RPG screen.

When we finish, we overhear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. talking to one of the TCs over the horn requesting a crewman to be sent over for an LP tonight. As soon as he is off the horn, he informs the loader he is also on the LP. About an hour past dark No Jets shows up at 2-3 for his LP orders.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. tells the loader and No Jets that he wants them to go outside the RON in front of 2-3 and sit out there all night with the horn and to call in sitreps every 15 minutes. It's The Scary Time now and even scarier outside of the RON. More importantly, they will be directly down range of the .50 Cal. and the main gun with the knowledge that for some period of time it will be Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. who is behind the .50 Cal. A boo coo scary thought.

I already know what is coming next, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. wastes no time as he informs me I have to lead the LP out through my trip flares. An impossibility, but no sense arguing with an idiot. I already feel bad that I'm going to blow what tee tee cover the LP has. After blowing up sections of the tunnel system, it's no secret where we are.

I decide to get it over with and lead the way with my red flashlight. We get as far as the edge of the concertina wire, and I set off a trip flare almost immediately. Because it's not an AP, I let the trip flare burn and we use the light to get through the rest of the trip flares without further incident. No Jets and the loader are going to have to sit in the dark outside of the RON with tee tee or no night vision for at least 30 minutes. Xin loi, guys.

I reposition two of the claymores so they don't point at the loader and No Jets before the trip flare finally burns out. That's the first time I let one burn itself out, and they last a fairly long time. After the trip flare goes out I am totally night blind and have to feel my way back to 2-3. Then I climb into the turret to join Fanelli inside with the red lights on so I can get my night vision back. We have only the three of us for guard duty, but I prefer that to being on LP and having to sit down range of the .50 Cal. and the main gun all night.

Fanelli and I chat away the evening, careful not to talk about tunnels as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. busies himself playing soldier, sitting behind the .50 Cal. and occasionally talking over the horn, mostly to the LP. The LP is lightly armed with a .45 and an M-16, so they took two spare radio batteries with them. They may be able to stay in contact all night, if they are lucky.

I should stay up till midnight to get my fair share of abuse and sleep deprivation, but at about 11:00 p.m. I finally call it a night. I can see a tee tee

bit as I half feel and half see my way to my tent. It never noticeably cooled off except that after sunset you don't have to look for shade. It's hot and stuffy inside my tent, but it only seems to bother me and not the hoard of bugs that swirl and buzz about as I try to sleep.

*August 3, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Rosebud River*

*I move across the river today, that is our Regiment. Will be on guard where we went on top of bluffs to watch.*
*Lieut. Coolidge and a man of R Co. had a fight on the boat coming over.*
*Each man ordered to have 6 rounds of ammunition and each two blankets and a change of clothes and an overcoat. One wagon allowed to each Co. Boats crossing the rest of the command over.*
*Corporal Smith discharged yesterday. Day pleasant.*

March 26,1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m. and tells me the LP is still in radio contact, so the extra batteries are working so far. I climb up on the turret of 2-3 while Fanelli goes under the tarp to sleep. I drop halfway into the TC hatch and take my position behind the .50 Cal.

I feel the best as I ever have during my stint at guard knowing that the loader and No Jets are sitting directly in front of 2-3 and still in radio contact, so if we are attacked I should know first. Well third, after the loader and No Jets. Xin loi, guys.

The rest of the Second platoon members on guard start calling in their sitreps, and I hear the loader call in his, and it's negative. That's number one for me, but it is especially number one for the loader and No Jets. I call in my sitrep along with everyone else, and so far so good. Just another hour and 45 minutes before it starts getting light and The Scary Time ends. It's almost pitch dark out. I can't see any stars, so I assume it's overcast. I can just see a tee tee bit, not enough to be of much help if something happens.

Another 15 minutes goes by and another series of all the guards saying

"Sitrep negative" to the Sgt. of the Guard. Even the LP has a negative sitrep, and that's number one.

I have finally solved my morning coffee dilemma. When I was checking out the PX at base camp, I noticed that they sold thermos bottles. At the time I wondered who would want one of those. Now I know. *I* want one. I can boil some water at the end of the day and put it in the thermos. In the morning I can make some instant c-rat coffee with it in my canteen cup. Now I just have to get to the rear. Or if someone I know is going to base camp, I might be able to get them to buy me a thermos at the PX. I feel better already, even though today I will have to wait till light for my morning cup of java.

After several more series of sitreps, it is finally 6 a.m. and the official end of guard duty. We still have to keep a look out, considering our location. Before I see anyone light any C-4, I can make out No Jets and the loader returning from their night outside the RON. I can tell it's No Jets leading the way, because I can just make out the two grenades hanging from his shirt pockets that he walks around with all the time. They're boo coo heavy and get in your way all the time that way. I'm sure he does it to act tough. He's not the only one. Several of the guys do something to make it look like they are tough, even though most of us are still boys. Sometimes I take one of the Hav-a-Tampa cigars that come in the sundry pack and break most of the cigar off of the built-in wooden mouth piece. Then I burn it a tee tee bit so it looks like it has been smoked, and I walk or drive around with the cigar stub in the corner of my mouth. Just trying to look tough. But we're really just boys, sent here to do The Man's job.

No Jets doesn't hang around to wait for Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to arise, so it will be up to the loader to fill him in on the events for the LP. The loader looks tired, and he's wet from the morning dew. But now that it's getting light, and he made it through another night in the Nam his thoughts quickly turn to food as he starts rummaging around through a c-rat case for his breakfast.

Fanelli is soon up, quickly followed by Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. Who, instead of heating water for his morning shave, first queries the loader about the nights events. The loader tells him between mouthfuls of c-rats that they heard nothing. So there is nothing to report. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. seems satisfied he didn't miss anything and attends to his morning shave while giving me a tee tee scowl as I stroke my beard when he passes.

Fanelli finishes his shave and is looking strack again, so he now looks

through the c-rats for his breakfast. I still have some coffee left to drink, so I climb up on the turret and position myself behind the .50 Cal. while everyone finishes their breakfast.

I'm hoping for a tee tee breeze up here. This morning there are a few puffs of moving air now and then, but no real breeze to speak of. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. relieves me from behind the .50 Cal. so he can get on the horn and get filled in on our day's activities from Higher.

The clouds clear quickly and soon we are seeking the side shade of 2-3. Orders are given to prepare to move out so I bring in the trip flares and the claymores. I pack up my tent and stretcher, and I let Fanelli roll them up in the tarp again.

We are less than a klik from the redball, but it takes almost an hour to get there with the mine sweeping. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has 2-5 Tango Charlie lead the Second platoon west on the redball.

We don't know where we are going but we are heading away from Cam-lo, so that is number ten. We drive west for at least an hour before we slow down and then pull off onto a dirt trail into short green scrub on some low rolling hills. No shade to speak of, and it's like an oven out in the sun. Sometimes I'm in the shade of the main gun barrel, but when we change driving directions I can end up in the sun. I hate that! We're going at a walking pace as we mine sweep, so I can wear my boonie hat without any concern of it blowing off my head and getting lost. When we get to the top of a hill or ridge, we can see boo coo far in all directions. The blue sky and the green rolling hills seem to meet at the horizon. It looks like a tropical fairyland off in the distance with all the different hues of green and the crisp and clear blue sky. It is so disappointing when we actually drive to an area we have observed from afar. While it looked like fairyland, it was in reality the same green scrub we had just left. After all this is the Nam. It is not fairyland.

We drive around looking for trouble until about noon where we space out as best we can across a ridge and have lunch. I have some things left in my goodie box, so I decide to have some sardines with some c-rat crackers. Back in the Real World I remember my grandfather eating sardines often. My brother and I would lean over his shoulder as he ate sardines. We would give each other horrified looks when he offered us one. I realize now that they are quite number one. I score the can of c-rat peaches for my lunch dessert. A number one lunch for me, even if we do have to hunker down in the side shade of 2-3 to stay out of the sun. The sun is almost overhead so the side

shade is just a sliver. We are in a miserable number ten place. No one complains that our lunch break is too short when we are ordered to move out.

The general terrain is rolling hills, and the trails we're driving on are boo coo rough and rocky. Since we're going slow, throwing a track is not much of a concern. Except one of the tanks backed up a tee tee bit and no one was watching. The track scooped up a couple of big rocks and when the rocks got to the drive sprocket, the track just rolled right off the drive sprocket. Not in a number ten place but not in a number one place either.

Often there are times when it seems we just drive around until one of the track vehicles gets stuck. Then we spend some time getting said vehicle unstuck. It also seems it's usually one of the tanks that throws a track, so it helps maintain our reputation as dog robbers. I get out of the hardest part of the process, that of breaking open the track that came off, because they want to use 2-3 to pull the track in question out straight. I don't have to stand out in the hot tropical sun to help. Fanelli hooks one of the tow cables we carry around on the front of 2-3 to the track and directs me with hand and voice signals.

Once everything is hooked and ready to go, Fanelli says to me, "Okay pull forward some....More, more, come on a tee tee bit more." He moves to the back to have a look and then he returns to the front of 2-3. "We're close," he says. "Ready. OK, tee tee more."

He makes a fist with his left hand while motioning me forward with his right hand. That means he wants me to pull forward, but to the left. "Come on, a tee tee bit more,...tee tee more. That's it, come on, come on. Okay, stop!"

He goes back to have a look and confer with the tank crew. He returns again and says, "Okay, almost there. Less than tee tee, about one cunt hair more."

"Ready? Okay, come straight forward." I move forward an almost imperceptible distance even though I only vaguely remember cunt hair.

Fanelli yells, "Halt!"

He unhooks the cable from the end of the track that is off and reconnects it to the disabled tank and has me start pulling the other tank forward onto the track that's now laid out straight on the ground. The tank can drive itself back on, but it's easier to keep it going straight with a tow. He goes to the rear once more to check on the situation, and when he returns he says I can shut the engine down.

I take my time getting out of the driver's compartment, because the hardest part is yet to come, that of pulling the end of the track up to and part way over the drive sprocket.

While we are working on the track, the tank's crew gets out their transistor radio. As we work we listen to the only radio station we have. The first song we hear them play is my current favorite, the one by B.B. King. I still think the name of it is “My Grill is Gone”, and it just makes me think of BBQ. Here in the Nam they cut 55 gallon oil drums in half to use in the outhouses at the base camps. Back in the Real World in Detroit they cut the 55 gallon oil drums in half, but they are cut lengthwise and turned into BBQ grills. In the summer many vacant lots are turned into outdoor BBQ pits. Many of them specialize in ribs and chicken and the aromas wafting around the neighborhoods are irresistible. I have to stop thinking about BBQ before I cry.

Things go as well as can be expected working out in the tropical sun during the heat of the day. It takes almost two full hours to get the track back on and reconnected.

We move out and a short distance away, we can see the resupply convoy heading toward us. Orders are given to drive around in circles and flatten everything. We are just finished with our preparations when the deuce and a halfs make it to our site.

We're not that far from the redball apparently, but we can't see it from here. They have mail call first and again I get no mail. But I have a good time joking around with the other guys in the Second platoon as we all display how expert at waiting we are.

After mail call, none of us on 2-3 are interested in the hot chow, so we get in the short line at the deuce and a halfs for our supplies that Fanelli ordered this morning. Just two cases of c-rats and a few other supplies.

We relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. from behind the .50 Cal. so he can check out the hot chow while we are back to choosing the c-rat meals with our eyes closed. I have c-rats myself to make the remnants of my goodie box last as long as possible. I still have some black licorice, but I missed chocolate so much the M&Ms are long gone. They were number one while they lasted and stood up remarkably well to the tropical heat.

Normally when we're this close to Cam-lo, we fantasize about Ramen or bread. But lately we don't bring it up for fear of jinxing our resupply location. Not that we're close to Cam-lo now, but we have been relatively close lately.

We think Higher is trying to keep us from “fraternizing” with the locals and that's why we are not resupplying close to Cam-lo anymore.

We all have our selected c-rat meal heated up and are eating when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns with his paper plate of today's hot chow. I can tell just by the smell that we made the correct decision to have c-rats. I'm trying to not look at it, as the c-rats are near number ten themselves, but I catch a glimpse anyway. The standing joke here about the meat at hot chow is that it’s “mystery meat”, and it's almost not even a joke anymore because on most days it truly is a mystery meat.

I used to work in a restaurant before I got drafted and have seen boo coo cuts of all kinds of meat. I have never seen anything resembling the meat on Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s plate today. Whatever it is, he snarfs it down. When he eats he sort of reminds me of Snoopy, Charlie Brown's dog. But of course Snoopy doesn't have a mustache that makes him look like Hitler.

The sun is low in the sky but still a force to be reckoned with, so we are in a tight huddle in the best side shade of the day. We fart almost non-stop so we don't want to be that close to one another. But the tropical sun corrects our thinking should we stray too from the shade.

We spent a boo coo lot of time on the thrown track this morning, and now it's about time to didi and set up our RON. Over all we didn't accomplish much today. It's number one we don't get paid by our accomplishments, as we would be paid nothing on most days. Or worse, be charged for all the havoc and damage we cause.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally orders us to prepare to sky. He has me lead the Second platoon back to the redball without mine sweeping since the resupply deuce and a halfs just left, and we have heard no explosions yet. Once at the redball Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me head west. So much for Cam-lo. Xin loi, Fanelli. I get 2-3 going about 20 mph as soon as I feel the rest of the Second platoon is on the redball. I say feel because I can't see behind me at all, so I wait a while before I start driving fast. I know, I know, driving fast? Believe me after driving around boo coo most of the time at a walking speed or even 5 to 10 mph, when I get going 20 mph it feels fast. I know we won't be going very far, so I enjoy the breeze while I can. We drive about 3 kliks from our resupply point when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me halt and wait for the rest of the Second platoon to catch up.

While we wait he has Fanelli dismount and get the mine sweeping equipment from 2-5. When the rest of the Second platoon has caught up, Our

Idiot Platoon Sgt. has Fanelli mine sweep our way along an existing trail for about half a klik into the bush. Our prospective RON is fairly open, but there's a boo coo amount of vegetation we need to knock down. After doing so, most everyone dismounts to search for tunnels. After last night we practice it as if we have been reborn. The tunnel entrance we found yesterday was an eye opener for a lot of us. It was just dumb luck it was found, which makes us all keenly aware of how well they can be hidden. A scary thought just before The Scary Time. I hate that!

We find no tunnels. But it's hard to sigh with relief as we go about setting out our night defenses. I put out the trip flares, still setting them on a hair trigger, and then I back them up with the claymores.

Fanelli and the loader have already put out the concertina wire and set up the RPG screen and are unrolling the tarp. My tent and stretcher both roll out, and they smell a tee tee bit like cleaning solvent and oil. I should have waited a couple more days, but it's too late now.

Fanelli and the loader are standing behind 2-3 in the fading light, and so I join them as we chat in the fresh air before confining ourselves inside 2-3 with the red lights on to get our night vision. Our RON is set up in some boo coo dense bush. It's not really jungle but just as thick. We drove around and flattened everything about 30 to 40 feet in front of all the tanks and P.C.s. But from where we stopped, it's thick brush and a number ten place. As we stand around behind 2-3 in the last tee tee bit of light, Johnson shows up. I just assume he wants our Ham and Egg c-rats, but I notice he has his M-16 and a couple of frags hanging from his shirt pockets. He tells us he is reporting to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. for an LP.

Upon hearing Johnson's arrival, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. climbs down from the turret and says to me, "Oh yeah. Wolf, you're going out on LP with Johnson. Get your gear and then you two can go set up your LP in front of 2-3 when it gets totally dark."

I expected to be sent on LP, but in all the excitement today it slipped my mind. It's so dark before I get my LP gear together I decide against walking over to 2-4 to borrow Wack's M-16. I guess that since I'll be right in front of 2-3 that maybe my hated .45 will be adequate. Maybe. The scariest part for me is being downrange of the .50 Cal. and the main gun with Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. behind them. I hate that! It's too scary to even think about, so my thoughts turn to getting us through my trip flares. I know I can't do it in the dark but Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. makes me try anyway.

I, like Johnson, have two frags hanging from my shirt pockets. I have my lucky boonie hat on and my flak jacket. I also have my hated .45 and two full magazines for it, my canteen full of water, and a can of pound cake. If I had to pick one thing from a case of c-rats for my last meal it would be the pound cake. Johnson carries the horn as we leave the RON as I'm trying to find my trip flare wires with my red flashlight. It will be a miracle if we can get through without mishap. We both carry an extra horn battery, so altogether we have three, and we hope that is enough. We hope for a boo coo lot this evening.

The LP consists of just Johnson and myself, so I'm really taking my time trying to find the trip flares. I re-position the claymores so they won't be aimed at us, I hope. It's hard to tell where I have them aimed in the dark, and we are not at our post yet, so I'm not exactly sure where that will be. We proceed slowly with me leading and Johnson bringing up the rear with the horn. I guess miracles happen or there wouldn't be the word “miracle”. Further proof is that I manage to get both Johnson and myself through all my trip flares without setting any off. Rather than feeling number one about it, I have a new resolve to set my trip flares on even more of a hair trigger. If that is possible.

In the dark we inch our way into the bush just outside the area we flattened during our RON set up. But not too far in. We don't want to be sitting right out in the open as sitting down range of the .50 Cal. and the main gun is boo coo bad enough. Johnson brought a blanket with him, and I thought it was to sit on as I planned to do with my flak jacket. Wrong! Johnson is a cigarette smoker. During the night when it's his turn to be on guard for two hours, he mostly sits under his blanket smoking cigarettes. I guess it's alright, as it's so pitch dark tonight so that even after we have our night vision we can't see anything. We're just supposed to be listening anyway. But I'm still a tee tee bit apprehensive about it. Of course I'm boo coo apprehensive about being out here on LP, period! Although you can smell cigarette smoke from quite a distance, that is not a primary concern. Johnson practically lives on Ham and Egg c-rats and farts constantly. They are the kind of farts that make your eyes burn and water. If they could be put in a container, you could probably strip off paint with it.

I get no sleep during my two hours off because of the stench. I have run out of menthol oil just when I need it the most.

Johnson and I are sitting back to back on the ground with our sides facing

the RON on one side and the Z on the other. We are on our second spare horn battery, but it's about 2 a.m., so we are hopeful the batteries will last all night. The blanket wasn't a bad idea because it's keeping the dew off of Johnson while I'm a tee tee bit wet already. Occasionally when I'm not on guard I doze off for a few minutes only to breathe in one of Johnson's Ham and Egg fueled farts. When it goes up my nose, it wakes me right up and not in a good way.

It's number ten out here, but at least we are still in horn contact. Every 15 minutes we call in our sitreps. It's tee tee past 4 a.m. and it's my turn to be awake, but I haven't really slept at all when it's my turn to rest. As I sit on the ground listening, I start to hear something. That's number ten no matter what it is: Charlie, tiger, or a lost Ambush Patrol.

I can't call out, "Who is it making that noise?"

The noise continues to get louder.

Enough that it wakes Johnson. "What is it?" he whispers to me.

"I don't know," I whisper back.

We both listen as if our lives depended on it, which they do. The noise continues to get louder, but it doesn't stop Johnson from continuing to fart. The brush around us is being moved and rustled about. Tigers can't be this noisy and still be effective hunters, I think. But in my head I'm still thinking, TIGER!

The noise is getting boo coo loud, and we can hear that whatever is out there sounds like it's walking slowly around us, stalking us. It is too scary and Johnson is farting non-stop now or maybe he crapped his pants or it could be me.

I get on the horn, "2-3, 2-3, this is the LP, over."

"LP, this is 2-3 Golf, over."

"Fanelli! Oh man I'm glad it's you," I say.

"What's up? Over," asks Fanelli.

"Something is stalking us out here. We're straight out front of 2-3 about 50 yards. Turn the spotlight on us," I reply.

It takes Fanelli a few seconds to turn the spotlight on and aim it towards us.

"Whatever it is, Fanelli, give us a chance to shoot it first before using the .50 Cal.," I implore him.

We're sitting on the ground back to back still when Fanelli shines the spotlight on us. We see there is a wild boar standing about ten feet in front of me. He freezes in the spotlight like a deer in the headlights of an oncoming

car. He is huge and his eyes are glowing red in the spotlight. He has some mean looking tusks I don't want to tangle with. I've had my hated .45 ready all night, so all I have to do is flip the safety off, point, and shoot. I probably needn't bother with the safety, but the wild boar is boo coo close, and I really want it to fire when I pull the trigger.

In the movies when something is shot with a Colt .45, whatever or whoever it is flies backwards several feet. That's what I'm expecting when I shoot the boar.

As soon as Fanelli shines the spotlight on the boar, I shoot at his head. At first I'm not sure I hit him, because he doesn't move back even one inch. Suddenly he drops down to the ground, and his body thrashes around. Definitely not like in the movies.

I finally stand up and for good measure, I shoot him a couple more times. Just to make sure he is dead. Johnson wants to get in on it, so he shoots the boar several times with his M-16 just to really be sure he is dead. It looks like it's safe to get closer and have a good look at him. He must weigh at least 200, maybe 250 lbs. His legs are thin, but his hooves look boo coo sharp. The tusks look like short sabers. I'm sure if a tiger attacked a boar, the tiger would surely win the contest. However, the tiger would be at risk of serious injury, as the boar is solid muscle. Its head, armed with razor sharp tusks, is connected to the body with a neck so thick it just looks like it goes from head to body with no neck at all.

"Man, look at those mountain oysters," says Johnson.

"Mountain oysters?" I ask.

"Balls, man! You know, his nuts," responds Johnson.

In all the excitement, I hadn't noticed but his testicles are as big as a six-pack of Cokes. If his tusks aren't enough to convince anyone this is a boar and not a sow, there would be no doubt after one look at his scrotum.

I get back on the horn, "2-3, 2-3, this is the LP, over."

"LP, this is 2-3 Golf, over."

"Fanelli, we're OK. It's a wild boar, well a dead wild boar now, over," I say.

"A what? Say again, LP. Did you say wild boar? Over," says Fanelli.

"Roger, Fanelli, a wild boar. He's bacon now though, over," I say

"Roger, LP. You're lucky it wasn't a visit by Charlie, over," says Fanelli.

"We're lucky it wasn't a boo coo lot of things," I say. "Man, this boar makes me think of barbecue. Is there anyone in the platoon that knows how

to barbecue? Over," I ask.

"That's a negative, LP. No barbecue chefs that I know of, over," responds Fanelli.

"Come on, Fanelli. Don't you have any tee tee tricks left in your bag for something to do with this thing? Over," I ask again.

"Xin loi, Wolf. It would take a case of C-4 to cook him, and Sarge ain't gonna allow that, over," says Fanelli.

"OK. You're no help. We're comin' back in. Man, Fanelli, don't let anyone shoot us! Over," I say.

"Roger on that, LP. I've got the .50 Cal. aimed at the stars. Out," responds Fanelli.

We're about 50 yards out in front of 2-3 and just inside the bush, so I'm pretty sure Fanelli can't see much and probably couldn't see the boar very clearly if at all. While the spotlight is still on, Johnson and I use it to pick our way through all my trip flares, and we get through without setting any off. The gunfire wakes up several of the Second platoon members, including Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

It seems pointless to stay out on the LP after all the commotion. Also, as bad as Johnson's farts smell, the boar, now dead, reeks to high heaven and in this heat will only get worse. However, this is the army and reason and common sense are often in short supply. We wait for several tense minutes before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. decides to allow us to end our LP, so Johnson didi maus for his track. Although I am boo coo pumped up on High Alert, I crawl into my tent to see if I can calm down and get another hour or two of sleep. I was hardly able to sleep at all on LP, so soon after laying down I fall fast asleep.

*July 27, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp Hard Creek*

*Broke camp this morning, marched six miles and camped. Day cool and well suited to marching. Detailed for guard tonight.*

*Videttes came in and reported Sioux but proved only to be Crows returning from a scout.*

March 27, 1970

Friday, Good Friday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me by pulling on my foot as I sleep in my tent. After the excitement last night, I didn't think I would be able to fall asleep, but it's almost 7 a.m. now and that's why Fanelli wakes me.

After I get up I can see a couple of the Second platoon members out in front of 2-3 probably looking at the wild boar. I decide to go and have another look in the daylight, and both Fanelli and the loader join me. We still have to find our way through the trip flares, but it's full light now and there's also dew on the trip flare wires, so they're fairly easy to spot.

We can smell the boar before we even get close. He looks even bigger in the daylight. As I survey our LP location, I can tell by the way the brush is trampled down, the boar was circling around us last night.

"The boar was probably attracted by Johnson's farts," I joke with Fanelli and the loader. They now pale in comparison to the stench of the decomposing boar in the tropical heat.

"Man, you guys were fuckin' lucky last night," says Fanelli.

"Tell me about it. Lucky, boo coo big time!" I reply. "Look it how he was walking around us, stalking us."

"In the dark, if he had run at you guys before I got the spotlight on him, it would have been ugly. Look at those fuckin' tusks will ya," says Fanelli.

"Maybe we can have bacon with our breakfast," adds the loader who, like most of us, is thinking about food.

Any thoughts about butchering this boar would be quickly dismissed after one whiff.

Even Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. comes out to have a look. He seems as unconcerned as ever about the danger he put us in. He gives the boar a kick, just to make sure it's dead I guess. By the smell, a blind man could tell it's dead.

It's Good Friday today and Sunday is Easter. In my family it is traditional to have a ham for Easter dinner. This wild boar will be the closest thing to a ham for me this Easter I think. We walk back inside the RON together, mindful not to set off any trip flares. It's easier to pick our way through the trip flares in a group watching the person in front of you. I didn't get as wet from the dew as the loader did the night before, but I wasn't out for the whole night and might have been under a tee tee bit of cover that kept me fairly dry.

After I heat some water for my coffee and open a can of pecan roll, I hunker down in the side shade of 2-3 and have a late breakfast.

I just finish with my breakfast when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders us to prepare to break camp and move out. After bringing in and stowing all of our gear, Fanelli and the loader climb up on the turret as I get into the driver's compartment. I put on my commo helmet, start the engine, and wait for my orders.

Soon the Second platoon is ready to didi mau and we uncircle and line up behind 2-5. 2-5 Tango Charlie leads the platoon to the edge of the RON and then one of his side gunners dismounts and starts to mine sweep our way to the redball.

I can hear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. talking over the horn to 2-5 Tango Charlie about our day's mission. He says we're going back to the southern part of Quang Tri Province with the other two platoons. He tells 2-5 to start heading east on the redball until we meet up with the First and Third platoons.

It's scorching hot already, so I hope we drive more than we stop. The sun still being low in the eastern part of the sky is shining in my eyes so I have to wear my red sunglasses. My boonie hat doesn't have a chin strap, so I can't wear it or it keeps blowing off my head. And I don't want to lose it. We drive east on the redball for about 2 kliks before we catch up with the First and Third platoons. After several minutes of horn chatter, the First platoon takes the lead of our convoy with the CO's P.C, 1-5, in front.

We are getting close to Cam-lo, so there is some excited horn chatter from some of the members of the Second platoon. I can first smell Cam-lo, and because I am completely out of menthol oil, I can't take any corrective action. As we approach and enter the village, we slow down to about 10 mph. As I expected we don't see Fanelli's mamasan or Lon and her brother. Even the old guy who likes to flip everyone the bird is absent from his spot by the side of the road. Cam-lo is a very small village, and it only takes 2 or 3 minutes to drive through it. Once the entire Troop is through Cam-lo, we speed back up to 15 to 20 mph and the breeze is number one in the intense heat.

We drive for at least another hour and have gone past our base camp at Dong ha before the CO pulls to the side of the redball and orders the platoons to break for lunch. I decide to save my goodie box stash and join Fanelli and the loader in a c-rat lunch. It's getting harder and harder choosing a c-rat meal. I pick one blindly and at least it's not Ham and Eggs. If it had been I

would have picked again. I pick the Chicken, boned, for my lunch. Boring, but not horrid.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. also has lunch and probably because the CO is nearby, he once again heats his c-rats with the heat tabs. He wouldn't be a good person to pull the C-4 trick on. I suspect he has no sense of humor, so instead of laughing it off he would probably get mad and plan some revenge for the perpetrator.

As it is smoking hot in the sun, we are all hunkered down in the sliver of side shade on 2-3, but we can hear the horn and the CO finally orders the platoons to prepare to move out.

The breeze coming at me when I get up to 20 mph feels like a man-cooling fan blowing directly on me. It's number one! I know we will be going like this for several hours. A pleasant thought that makes me smile. We have already passed the storage depot south of Dong ha where Fanelli and I picked up the New 2-3 after our land mine encounter. We are now passing the base camp for MACV which everyone calls Mac-Vee.

We drive past fields of rice paddies and farmers working in their fields with their water buffalo. We even share the road with some civilian traffic, which we never see when we’re near Cam-lo. After two hours of non-stop driving, we break to let all the track drivers give the tanks and P.C.s a walk-around. A couple of the tanks need to replace some cracked end connectors, so the rest of us wait by the roadside while the repairs are made.

It doesn't take too long as everyone, especially the guys working on the tracks, want to get going again. After less than 30 minutes, everyone is ready and the whole Troop skys south on the redball. Once again, as we are getting well practiced at it, we get spaced out and up to 15 to 20 mph boo coo quick so we can all enjoy the breeze.

During monsoon the operational areas for the armor and mechanized units were restricted due to extremely muddy road and trail conditions. So now that monsoon is over Higher has us moving a long distance from our normal area of operation for the second time. Because Higher doesn't tell us anything about our mission today, many of the guys in the Second platoon are worried again that we are going to the Ashau Valley. We didn't do much when we were here a few days ago, and as far as we know we did not go to the Ashau Valley. So I am hopeful about our current mission. I am also pretty sure there won't be any resupply or mail call today just like the last time. We hate that! Resupply is about all we have to look forward to each day. Well, mail call

during resupply mostly. That means we are going to be low on c-rats again, so it's a good thing I saved something from my goodie box. I'll probably need it.

We drive through some farming areas, but when we get to an area of what appears to be jungle, the three platoons separate. The First and the Third platoons continue south on the redball while we turn west onto a trail through the jungle. 2-5 Tango Charlie is leading the way. Since it's an existing trail, we are mine sweeping as we proceed at a walking pace. This is a number ten place for us, as the jungle is dense and it comes right up to the sides of all the vehicles so we can see virtually nothing.

"Just like in the Ashau Valley," says Fanelli as he often likes to remind us. Ashau Valley or no Ashau Valley, this is a number ten place.

"Thanks for the tee tee reminder, Fanelli. Man, I really needed that," I say.

2-3 is behind 2-5 so at times, but not often, I can catch a glimpse of the side gunner who is mine sweeping with the fervor of a recent convert to the religion of Mine Sweeping. For me that is number one. I, like everyone here, am a convert to the religion of mine sweeping, and we all want it done properly.

Still no actual word on what our mission is, other than to be sitting ducks looking for trouble in a place known for trouble. This is turning out to be a number ten day, and it's not over yet. The jungle is sweltering with heavy hot humid air. The jungle is so thick and dense that none of the tracks can get past each other, so 2-5 has had to lead the whole way. It's so hot that the other side gunner on 2-5 is now mine sweeping. If we keep going until he gets tired, we usually have someone from the other crews come forward to mine sweep. Usually it's Wack, and that's because he's the best mine sweeper we have. He's always willing to do it, and he finds mines all the time. More importantly, he has never missed a mine.

It's getting to be late in the afternoon, and no one needs to tell us there will be no resupply today and therefore no mail call. The stifling heat coupled with the high humidity makes this a number ten place. It would be a number ten place without a war going on.

The trail is so narrow in most places, it is ideal to place mines. But so far we find none. We cross a small narrow stream and continue driving into the jungle for another hour. The sky starts to open, and we enter a rather barren place in the middle of the jungle. Either the ROKs were here or some sort of defoliant was sprayed on this place. I'm guessing defoliant, as the ground isn't

burned to a cinder as it would be after the ROKs have been there.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has us circle up in the open area, as there is no reason to drive in circles. There is nothing to flatten. Not a typical place for tunnels being so open, but of course we look anyway. We find none, and orders are given to set out our night defenses. I set out my trip flares, and because I got through my set-up last night and also because I feel confident I won't have to go on LP or AP, I set the pins on the trip flares to the absolute minimum. Then I back them with the claymores.

I get my tent and set it up behind 2-3 and I put my stretcher inside along with my sleeping bag. I use my sleeping bag as a mattress mostly, although I often wake up to find myself part way under it. Trying to defend myself from the bugs when I'm half asleep I guess. My tent aired out some in my absence and any lingering odors are minimal and overpowered by the smells of the jungle.

The ground is clear in front of all the tanks and P.C.s by a good 50 feet, and then the jungle starts again. The kind of jungle I would expect to see tigers in. I'm glad I'm not on an LP here like last night, because it really would have been a tiger instead of a wild boar. And being a tiger, it wouldn't have made the kind of mistakes the boar made by making so much noise as tigers are well known for their stealth.

I don't know what Fanelli is thinking, but it's his turn if Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. sends one of his crew on AP or LP. I don't bring it up. Fanelli, the loader, and I chat behind 2-3 as we wait for Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to announce whether there will be a Mad Minute or an AP or LP tonight. We wait. Because it is near dark, the expertise we display at waiting goes largely unnoticed. In the end the order comes that there will be no further activities tonight. It's just about dark, so there’s not much we can do with our newfound slack time. So we just stand behind 2-3 joking a tee tee bit with our Body Bag humor until it's full dark. Then I climb into the driver's compartment while Fanelli and the loader get into the turret.

We turn on the red interior lights and we continue to chat through the ammo pass-through between the turret and the driver's compartment. I'm exhausted from lack of sleep last night and a long drive today and of course the heat and humidity. I am stretched out in my seat trying to relax. While I recline, I take my piece of chalk and write a few more names on the main gun ammo as we are sure to have a Mad Minute soon. Fanelli and the loader now expect the main gun ammo to have names on them and are disappointed

when they don't. After playing with the chalk for a while, I start writing a letter to my friend Jerry who is getting ready to leave on his school bus adventure which sounds like boo coo more fun than my current adventure. I'm on a writing roll, so I get out my journal and add some entries. I write for a while, but I finally get too sleepy. I put the unfinished letter and my journal in my ammo box.

I climb out of the driver's compartment and close the hatch almost all the way, and then I climb up on the turret and poke my head inside. It smells like they've been dueling with farts. I hold my breath as I wait for confirmation that I have last shift on guard. It's a roger, so I climb down to the ground and feel my way back to my tent. Much nicer sleeping conditions compared to last night. Tonight, as I lay on my sleeping bag covered stretcher, I only have to suffer my own farts and the bugs of course. Number one compared to last night.

*May 9, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Ft. Pease*

*Do not feel well at all today. Detailed for fatigue this evening, am so weak can scarcely do anything.*

*Day very warm. Boys playing cards so could not rest if I wanted to. Some of the officers rowing up and down the river and seem to be happy, singing the Freedman's song, Ship ahoy, and other songs, all old, which I have heard several years ago.*

*We break camp tomorrow, E Co. going down the river in boats. Lieut. Bradly and detachment came in this evening. No Indians, although plenty of signs.*

March 28, 1970
Saturday
Southern Quang Tri Province

The loader wakes me for my shift at guard at 4 a.m. so I crawl out of my tent and climb up on the turret of 2-3 and drop half way into the TC's hatch.

The RON is clear of all vegetation but at about 50 feet in front of us the jungle is thick and a number one place for Charlie to hide in. I had a number

one night's sleep compared to usual but would still like a cup of java right now. I call in my sitreps every 15 minutes until 6 a.m. when guard duty officially ends. Most of us are still on alert. Not High Alert, but in the first light not everyone abandons their post behind the .50 Cal. all at once. As the first one up, I usually drink my coffee while sitting behind the .50 Cal if Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is engaged in more important things, such as shaving.

The first rays of sunlight can just barely be seen through the canopy and jungle around us. More visible is the bright light of burning C-4 as the rest of the Second platoon slowly wakes up.

It never noticeably cooled down last night, and if we stay in this open area it will be like a blast furnace at a steel mill when the sun clears the treetops.

After making my coffee I grab a c-rat pecan roll, and then I climb back up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. while the rest of the crew take care of their morning rituals. I can't believe I'm drinking hot coffee in this tropical heat. I guess I must really be hooked on caffeine now. I can believe I'm sitting behind the .50 Cal because this is a number ten place to be even when it's light out. If we have a good field of view from our RON, most of the time after guard duty ends in the morning some of the .50 Cals are unmanned. The rest of the Second platoon must also think this is as a number ten place, because I can see someone sitting behind the .50 Cal. on every track except Double Deuce. That would be typical for Double Deuce, and Smitty was the last guy on guard. He probably went back to sleep and didn't wake anyone. Xin loi, Charlie Brown!

Payday is in a couple of days and Smitty and the rest of the juicers are trying to figure out how to get some beer and whiskey. We haven't resupplied near Cam-lo lately, and we are boo coo far from Cam-lo now. So it seems likely there won't be anything for us to buy on payday.

It's about 9 a.m. when we hear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. call the other TCs over the horn to send one crewman over to 2-3 in 30 minutes prepared to go on patrol. The loader and I are looking each other in the eye thinking the same thing. And that is: it's not our turn to go on patrol. However, that means nothing here in the Nam.

While we're still thinking that but saying nothing (we don’t want to jinx it), Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. says to Fanelli, "Get your gear for patrol."

Sending out a patrol means the rest of the Second platoon will be staying here at least until the patrol returns. Unless, of course, we have to go to their rescue. So the loader and I rig the poncho over the .50 Cal. Even Double

Deuce has someone behind the .50 Cal. now even though no orders have been given to do so.

You'd have to be a FNG and your first day in the field to not know this is a number ten place to be. I can tell everyone here is on High Alert now. It's a boo coo number ten place to go on patrol. Xin loi, Fanelli! After only 15 minutes, some of the guys going on patrol start to show up at 2-3, apparently anxious to have their chance at death today. Big Al from 2-6 and Wack from 2-4 arrive first. Knowing Wack, he probably volunteered. Because it is a walking patrol and not an Ambush Patrol, Wack has his M-16 instead of his M-60. One of the other patrol members is trying to chide him about it.

To which Wack replies, "If you carry the ammo, I'll carry the M-60," which quickly quiets his tormentor. In this heat and humidity, no one wants to carry anything extra and especially anything heavy. That ends any more talk about the M-60. Next they decide whether to take extra horn batteries. Again it's hard to get anyone to carry them unless ordered to. Everyone on the patrol wants to travel as light as possible, taking just ammo and water. They are hoping to be back before noon so they take no food. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has to order several patrol members to carry a spare horn battery. During daylight no one is worried about returning to the RON unannounced due to a dead horn battery. But that's not the concern of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. He wants them to stay on patrol until all the batteries die, not just one. Especially since some batteries only last 15 minutes.

While Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. lines up the patrol for its mission, I walk around 2-3 and inspect the track on both sides. I find some cracked end connectors and one dead track block. The cracked end connectors are a fairly straightforward repair that I do all the time. But to replace a track block, the track has to be separated and that takes longer. We have some brackets we connect to the track to hold it together when we remove a dead track block. It sounds fairly easy, and it can be, but everything has to be just so to get the end connectors off and back on.

I won't have Fanelli to help me as he is leaving on patrol. I guess it's time to start breaking in the loader on some of the routine maintenance we have to perform. The dead track block is on the shady side of 2-3, so I'll change that first as it's the most serious problem. Dead track blocks can break apart causing the track to separate and the result is similar to throwing a track. If you 're lucky, it comes off and lays in a straight line. It can be a tee tee bit easier to get back on if you don't consider all the razzing the driver will get

from the other platoon members.

The patrol didi maus and as they enter the jungle they quickly disappear from our sight, but they stay in horn contact thanks to their horn battery cache. I'm re-thinking my plan to replace the track block, as I realize we could be called to rescue the patrol if they get into trouble. The patrol is already having a rough go as the jungle is very dense. We are not well practiced at crawling through the jungle and looking for booby traps. The patrol is having to resort to using a machete, but it's still slow going and very noisy, so they won't be surprising anyone, let alone Charlie. I decide to wait for the patrol to be on its way back before changing the track block. Instead I'll replace the cracked track block end connectors.

After draining the accumulated water out of the fuel filters, I start to assemble the tools needed and the loader, without my asking, offers to help. It's boo coo easier to do anything in the tropical heat with two guys instead of one. The loader has been showing some initiative lately, so much so that I might have to find out his name. Maybe. We have the horn volume on 2-3 set boo coo loud so we can hear the patrol's progress as they report back.

Instead of calling in sitreps every 15 minutes, the current radio man, Big Al, is giving us a running commentary on the patrol's progress as they hack their way through the jungle.

Big Al says, "If you look on both your right and left, Ladies and Gentleman, you will notice we have some boo coo dense foliage in our immediate vicinity. Areas such as this are the natural habitat of some of the Nam’s wild flora and fauna. By flora I mean all the boo coo shades of green you see before your eyes and by fauna, I mean tigers."

The loader and I have a tee tee laugh about Big Al's comments. Because we have 2-3's horn volume set so high, we can also hear another of the patrol members say to Big Al rather loudly, "Shut the fuck up about tigers!" The patrol is definitely not worried about anyone or anything hearing them.

Many of us have had no actual training in jungle warfare, so it could be number ten if the patrol somehow stumbles onto Charlie. It will be nearly impossible for the rest of the Second platoon to respond for a rescue mission in a timely enough fashion to do the patrol any good. The first horn battery has already lasted more than 15 minutes, so things are going as well as can be expected for a group of guys hacking their way through the jungle looking for trouble in a place where trouble is in abundant supply.

In order to work on the track, we are at times out in the sun which adds to

the misery of our situation. But I console myself by the fact that I'm not on the current patrol with Fanelli. While working on the end connectors we try our best to stay in the side shade most of the time. We have two brackets connected to the track so it doesn't come apart when the end connector is removed. The cracked end connectors are typically harder to remove than installing the new one. We usually have to beat the old ones off with a hammer. Or as a last resort, beat them off with Little Joe if they're really stuck on. We only have to resort to the hammer today and leave Little Joe in the toolbox.

A tee tee bit before noon, the patrol reports that they are on their last horn battery and are going to start on their way back, especially since they have found nothing of significance. The loader and I have our rhythm down and decide to continue with our repairs and prepare to remove and replace the dead track block before we break for lunch.

The dead track block is no longer in the side shade, but right out in the sun, so we need to make short work of it. I make a mental note to have Fanelli order another track block for resupply to replace the spare we are using. The tropical sun motivates both the loader and me not to dally with our task at hand. Working together on the cracked end connectors was a good warm up for the track block replacement. We install the holding brackets and because the end connectors on the dead track block aren't damaged, they come off with a few gentle taps of the hammer. We like that. The dead track block is removed and the new one put in place and the four end connectors slide on with no problems. We tighten all the nuts on the bolts and remove the holding bracket, and we are done. And a job well done, we think, and so we decide to break for lunch and some shade.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has been taking advantage of the poncho shade while the loader and I completed the track repairs. To reward myself for my labors I've decided to have the last can of Dinty Moore stew from my goodie box. I only have a few things left, and it's going to be difficult to have anything left for my actual twenty-first birthday. If I make it to my birthday. My nagging inner voice keeps admonishing me to not get killed before I finish everything in my goodie box, birthday or no birthday. Believe me, I am trying with my whole being to not get killed before I finish everything in my goodie box and then some. I offer to man the .50 Cal. so Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. can have lunch if he wants. I want to savor the anticipation of having something other than c-rats for lunch. Also it would be number one to sit in

the shade for a while. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt waves me off and tells me and the loader to have our lunch and he'll man the .50 Cal. for the time being.

I climb half way into my driver's compartment and grab my can of stew out of my goodie box. I open it with my P-38, heat it quickly with some C-4, add a few crumbled c-rat crackers on top, and eat. It is a number one lunch for a hungry guy. I don't remember liking carrots so much, but they are number one in the stew. The gravy is so rich and tasty and the potatoes… potatoes that haven't been dehydrated and rehydrated! It might have tasted so good because that was the last one. I finish off my lunch with a can of c-rat peaches, being careful to let the juice run into my beard and down my face. Then I rinse my face and leave my beard soaking wet for a tee tee bit of what we call “field air conditioning”. It feels number one for a few minutes.

We're just finishing lunch when the patrol returns. All the other members disperse to their tracks for lunch and leave it to Fanelli to fill in Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. It is boo coo easy for Fanelli to report, because they saw nothing on their way and coming back. This is greatly distressing to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., as he is intent on us being attacked so as to cure several of us of our Cherry Disease. Eighty-two days in country, and I'm still a cherry, a fact that doesn't bother me a bit. I also have not been killed or wounded yet, which is number one in my mind. I can tell by the way Fanelli goes for the open case of c-rats that lunch is on his mind. I don't think I've ever seen him so enthusiastic about eating c-rats. Our c-rat base load is getting depleted so the choices are only bad or worse. We have already eaten all the c-rat meals we only detest. Xin loi, Fanelli!

We all worry we may have to eat the Ham and Eggs instead of watching Johnson snarf it down. We've been here for almost a day now and still no word on our actual mission. Other than to send out one patrol. After Fanelli finishes his lunch, he and the loader and I saunter over to Double Deuce to chat with Charlie Brown and to see if they're eating dog food yet. Smitty is having a c-rat lunch when we arrive and Charlie Brown is manning the .50 Cal. with Snoopy, his trusty companion, at his side. Though glued to Charlie Brown's side, Snoopy is still watching Smitty's every move. The dogs know better than anyone when we are low on c-rats. We almost never finish a whole can of c-rats, and the dogs get what's left.

Smitty is getting pumped up because it's payday in three days, and he has high hopes of scoring some Tiger beer. Fanelli, who wants to score some Ramen probably even more than Smitty wants to score some Tiger beer, is

the lone voice of reason. He points out that we may get paid, but we have nowhere to spend it. When I first came out to the field, the company clerk said there was nothing to buy in the field. That is sadly becoming a fact.

Smitty is obviously not eating dog food, but it doesn't stop Fanelli from teasing Charlie Brown.

"Charlie Brown," says Fanelli, "Snoopy's looking a tee tee bit slim there. You guys haven't been eating his food again?"

"Ha! Ha! Fuck you, Fanelli," responds Charlie Brown. "Even if we were, it's better than

c-rats. I used to have a cat back in the Real World, and I can tell you, without a doubt, the reason they're called c-rations is because it's really cat food."

Fanelli and Charlie Brown have been friends long enough that they know they're both kidding. At least I hope Charlie Brown is kidding. I have to admit when I open a can of c-rats, sometimes the smell and the texture strikes a memory chord that reminds me of feeding my own cat back in the Real World. I hate that!

If they weren't friends, we would have left in a huff already. Smitty wants to get the conversation back to the subject that is more interesting to him, and that's Tiger beer. He asks me if I want some Tiger beer should he manage to score some. Fanelli points out that even if he gets some, there will be no ice. Smitty, being a major juicer, doesn't care about ice. Although he would like it, he will gladly drink his Tiger beer warm, whereas I won't. I decline his offer.

Charlie Brown asks if we know what we're doing here.

Fanelli says, "Charlie Brown, you've been in the army long enough to know Higher tells us nothing."

Charlie Brown has the horn volume set high enough that we can hear some of the horn chatter. Someone asks for an "Attitude Check" over the horn.

It's quickly followed by several loud replies of "Fuck it!" that are so boo coo loud they can be heard everywhere around the RON.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. hates that. Xin loi, Sarge!

Someone starts to brag about being short over the horn.

"Shee-yort! Can't talk now. Xin loi, but I'm too short to hear you," someone is saying rather loudly. "I can't hear you, because before you can reply I'll be gone. Two weeks and a wake up. Shee-yort!"

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. really hates the guys bragging about being short.

But the Lifers can't really do anything to someone who is short. The short-timers are acting up because they *want* to be sent to the rear now.

Being short is a draftee thing, as Lifers are never short. They re-up at the end of their enlistments. It's considered bad luck to brag about being short, but some guys just can't help themselves. I can understand because while I am not short, I will be hard pressed to not shout my head off if I ever get short.

There's nothing going on here, so the three of us head for the center of the RON where the Medic track and mortar crew are set up. The mortar crew doesn't mind staying in one place, because then they don't have to dig another huge pit. Because we are low on supplies, mostly c-rats, the mortar crew is trying to conserve their energy and stay out of the sun by sitting inside their P.C. playing cards with the rear ramp down and the top hatches in place for some shade. They're playing Hearts again and not Poker because it's still three days till payday and no one has any money. Some guys get boo coo more worked up playing Hearts than they do the few times anyone plays Poker here. We watch the guys play for a while, but we have to stand right out in the sun in order to watch. The P.C. is full with the card players, so we are not invited in to the shade.

We decide to sky to 2-4 and visit Wack and Sgt. Green. When we arrive at 2-4, Wack and Sgt. Green have done the same thing as the mortar track and have the rear ramp down and the top hatches in place for some shade. Wack and Sgt. Green are both sitting inside to keep out of the sun and there is boo coo room, so they invite us in. After being ignored at the mortar track, we thought they would never ask. As we have been roasting out here in the sun, we quickly clamber inside 2-4. Although we're out of the sun, we are not out of the heat, and adding three more guys inside of 2-4 only makes it hotter. But at least we're in the shade.

Sgt. Green wants me to score some Kool cigarettes for him if we get to the rear before he does. I decide to try to make a deal with him. If I get to the rear before him, I'll get some Kools for him if he'll get me a thermos at the PX if he gets to the rear first. He agrees. We're both being a tee tee bit optimistic about one of us getting to base camp. In order to get to base camp last time, I had to hit a land mine. I'm not willing to do that on purpose. Sgt. Green is smoking right now, and that coupled with the heat makes us decide to didi mau back to 2-3. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has been manning the .50 Cal. by himself, so he's got to be getting hungry by now.

When we get back to 2-3 Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. readily accepts the loader’s offer to man the .50 Cal. There's almost no side shade on 2-3, so I climb into my driver's compartment and drop my seat all the way down. We have the turret vent fan on and it draws a tee tee bit of air down my open hatch. But it's still boo coo hot, and we just constantly drip with our sweat.

I get my .50 Cal. ammo box and get the letter to my friend Jerry out so I can finish it. There's not much to tell him, as things have been quiet lately which is number one with me. So I mostly complain about being in the army and now instead of complaining about the near continuous rain during monsoon, I complain about the heat and humidity and of course the bad food.

After I finish the letter, it causes me to remind myself what an idiot I was to correct his sister Annette's letter with my red ink and then send it back to her. I don't even know all the grammar rules, as evidenced by the fact that both times Fanelli found errors I had missed. Xin loi, Annette!

I will say that although I don't know all the rules of grammar, for a left hander my handwriting is number one. When I was in the 6th grade, one day my teacher, Mr. Sherman, had a fit because of our poor handwriting. He immediately instituted a handwriting improvement regimen that we practiced daily for months. He called it the "Easy Sherman Method." I cannot speak for my classmates, but my handwriting, which was boo coo bad, did improve. Most left handers slant the letters back or at the most straight up and down but very rarely slant their letters forward. I, because of the "Easy Sherman Method", can slant my letters back, way back, straight up and down, or forward like most right handers. A skill I'm quite proud of. And because the army has provided me with no skills that will be useful back in the Real World, I guess I can always be a forger. Xin loi, Mr. Sherman!

I put the letter to my friend Jerry in an envelope and address it. I don't know why, since it doesn't look like we'll have resupply today and therefore no mail call. We hate that! One of the little known perks we get for being in a combat zone is we can send home all the mail we want, and we don't have to pay any postage. A perk that goes largely unused, as most of the Lifers can neither read or write from what I can tell, but most of them can count to at least three.

It's too hot in my driver's compartment, and so I climb out and join Fanelli in the sliver of side shade of 2-3. We have to really hunker down to stay out of the sun, but it is something we are well practiced at.

Fanelli notices and comments on the new end connectors, as they are quite

obvious being clean and shiny in a world of mud and dirt. It reminds me to tell him to order a track block for whenever we get resupplied again.

"Fanelli, you're not jealous because I let the loader help me change out a dead track block?" I ask.

He makes a tee tee pouty face.

"Hey, Fanelli, what's the loaders name?" I ask.

He smiles and says, "FNG."

Maybe I'll have to ask him myself, I think. Maybe. At least Fanelli calls me Wolf.

We take turns manning the .50 Cal. mostly so we can get our share of the shade under the poncho. The sultry afternoon passes slowly, as all time in the Nam seems to pass. Even without telling us, it's evident that Higher isn't sending us anywhere. So no resupply and no mail call. Some of the guys will miss the hot chow, but only because we are low on c-rats.

I decide to offer up what I have left in my goodie box for our dinner tonight, as it would be especially impolite to eat well while the loader and Fanelli fight over the Ham and Eggs. Better to let Our Idiot platoon Sgt. have the Ham and Eggs since he likes to play soldier, and I can't think of a better way. The Ham and Egg c-rat meal epitomizes all that is wrong with the army, I think.

I walk to the front of 2-3 and reach into the driver's compartment and grab my now near-empty goodie box. I pick the Planters mixed nut container out and toss it back into 2-3.

I have to save something for my actual birthday (should I make it), I think. But finishing off the rest should quiet my inner voice for a while. I carry my box to the rear of 2-3 and Fanelli and the loader and I take inventory of what we have. A can of corned beef, which was number one last time. Two cans of Vienna sausages and the last can of Spam, which was also number one. We get some c-rat crackers at the ready, and we heat the corned beef in one canteen cup and the Spam in another. While we heat up the Spam and corned beef, we snack on the Vienna sausages. It doesn't take long as the C-4 is very efficient at heating up food. Considering its cost, it should be. I take the last Vienna sausage and hold it next to the burning C-4 for a few seconds. It is boo coo number one. I wish I would have thought of that earlier. There is still boo coo food for the three of us, so we offer to share with Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. He insists he's fine with the last of the c-rats. We polish it off with gusto and with a lot of burping and belly slapping once we are full. It is number one

and the best meal we can expect for a while.

After our dinner we can hear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. informing the rest of the Second platoon that there will be a Mad Minute tonight. What goes without saying is there will be guns to be cleaned tomorrow. We hate that! As there is still at least an hour of light, Fanelli and I decide to visit the crew on 2-6. We only have to walk past two P.C.s to get to 2-6, but because Fanelli knows almost everyone, except the FNGs, it's a task because everyone wants to chat. Everyone thinks we know more about what we're up to than they do since we're on the platoon Sgt.'s tank. We don't. We're just like them. We know nothing. We do eventually make over to 2-6, only to find Steve and Big Al behind 2-6 with their coax machine gun laying disassembled on a tarp. In their case, it really is being the Little Bastard that has earned it the nickname.

"What's it doing?" asks Fanelli.

"It keeps rupturing the shell casing on the first round fired. Then the casing doesn't get ejected, and we have to open the breach and pull the ruptured shell casing with the pliers," replies Steve.

Fanelli and I are both well-versed in the idiosyncrasies of the Little Bastard, and we are able to immediately tell him the problem.

"You need a new breach block," we both say in unison.

The breach block has to be perfect, and if it's not perfect, it does exactly what Steve and Big Al described. You can't tell a bad breach block from a good breach block with the naked eye. So if a coax ruptures the shell casing, the only fix is to replace the breach block. Because it can take several days to get another breach block on resupply, we keep a spare, and we suggest they do also. We don't offer our spare because it's not ours to offer. They would have to ask Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., and no one wants to do that.

We also mention that while some guys swear you can use bug juice instead of gun oil to lubricate the weapons, if you do that with the coax, you will really find out why it's called the Little Bastard. Although the Mad Minute is mostly a show of power, it can also show the weaknesses of certain tracks and that is Steve and Big Al's concern. They're going to look wimpy during the Mad Minute tonight. We hate that!

It's a good thing we're not going to do our fake mini-gun tonight, because that would make

2-6 look even boo coo wimpier. Everyone we've talked to today is complaining about the food situation and the only good thing about the Mad Minute is that we always resupply when we have less than our full base load

of ammo. Typical army priorities: being more concerned with our capabilities to kill and not really concerned with keeping us alive when they need to do both.

Fanelli and I decide we have abandoned the loader long enough with Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. The daylight is fading fast, so in the last light I take a walk out front of 2-3 to check on the claymores and the trip flares to make sure they haven't been compromised. Fortunately for me, everything still looks number one. When it finally gets dark I climb into the driver's compartment as the turret is too small for all three of us. We chat as we wait for the start of the Mad Minute. At about 8 p.m. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gives the order to prepare for the Mad Minute. I climb out of the driver's compartment to push down the RPG screen, and then I scramble back inside the driver's compartment as fast as I can. I can’t help but worry that someone might get too excited again and shoot off the main gun too soon. I hate that!

I manage to get safely back inside, so I close my hatch cover, put my commo helmet on, and start the engine. When the order to commence fire comes, I take hold of the steering bar and hang onto it so I don't get knocked around. The loader asks for a can round, so I hand him one that I have written "Widow Maker" on. I can hear both Fanelli and the loader laughing over our intercom, and they continue laughing when I hand the loader another can round on which I have written "Detroit BBQ”. I've written their favorite on the next one, I think: "Wad Cutter". It's number one that Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. calls a cease fire, because I'm running out of clever names for the main gun ammo. I shut the engine down.

It's been dark for more than an hour when I climb out of the driver's compartment to set the RPG screen back up. Your tax dollars at work. I smile knowing that I pay no taxes this year. Well, if I survive this year I'll pay no taxes. I get back into the driver's compartment. My commo helmet did a number one job of keeping the gunfire noise to a minimum and for once the Mad Minute hasn't resulted into a loss of hearing and loud ringing in my ears. I can chat with Fanelli and the loader before I finally decide to call it a day.

I'll have to remember tomorrow not to let Fanelli roll my tent up in the tarp after we clean all the guns on it. My tent is gun solvent odor free and I want to keep it that way, no matter how much Fanelli complains. It's hot and stuffy in my tent, and that along with the ever present bugs always make it hard to fall asleep no matter how tired I am. But finally my exhaustion wins out after another long, hot day in the Nam.

*August 15, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp Powder River*

*Reveille sounded and woke up and found it raining as usual. After Reveille cooked breakfast then went and layed down and fell asleep and came near being left behind. One of the fellows woke me up to say I had better hurry up as the packs were all on and that I would be left if I did not take care.*

*Order for us all to fill our canteens as we had 29 miles to go before we would get water. We then broke camp and marched 22 miles and camped on Powder River. Here the Indians had burnt all the grass so that we had to cross the river so as to have grass for the animals.*

*We passed over the roughest country I ever saw. Nothing but high, dry bluffs, not any vegetation at all. Nothing but up and down hill all day so that we are all very tired and glad to rest after our hard days march. A great many have very sore feet myself among the rest. But it can't be helped, we will still have to march. Had a shower of rain soon after we got to camp. Made myself and chum a tent with rubber blanket but (as one of the boys said) our feet stuck out too long to be comfortable.*

*We have a large crowd of Indian scouts along with us from Crow, Ree, and Snake tribe. We are about 45 miles from mouth of this river. Cottonwoods and the bottom which is pretty wide (I mean the valley). Fires ordered to be put out. May be Indians around. Some of us wish there was so we could have some satisfaction of our hard march we have had this Summer. Do not know which way we will go tomorrow - up or down the river. The day tolerable.*

March 29, 1970
Sunday, Easter Sunday
Southern Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m. so I get up and settle in for my special time with the .50 Cal. It takes me a while to get fully awake, and I've already called in my first sitrep when I realize that it's not only Sunday, but Easter Sunday. Just a same-same day here in the Nam. No Easter bunny or baskets of dyed eggs and jelly beans and certainly no edible chocolate of any kind.

The chocolate situation here is abysmal. Except for the M&M's in my goodie box, there has been no real chocolate here. And the only eggs are in the c-rat Ham and Eggs, which also has the only Easter ham I will see. No bunnies, and for being in the jungle it's eerily quiet all day and all night except for the noise the Second platoon makes. No birds and no animals, with the exception of the tiger and the wild boar. Two notable and significant exceptions to anyone walking around in the jungle though.

The early morning air is heavy with the overwhelming smell of jungle. Vegetation, damp and fecund earth aromas. Although it's hot already it is only hinting at the heat to come with the arrival of the sun. We still welcome the sun, as it marks the end of The Scary Time and another night survived in the Nam. Several sitreps later and the sun makes its pending arrival known by the gradual lightening of the dark sky. The noticeable silence ends when the first member of the Second platoon lights the first of many chunks of C-4. By daybreak, it sounds as if a bunch of guys are welding around the RON. The intense bright light given off by the burning C-4 adds to the illusion. After I heat up some water for my morning java fix, I rummage around in our last open case of c-rats. We are low! Lower on c-rats than we've ever been since I've been in the field. Maybe it's just the army's way of getting us to appreciate the c-rats we revile so much.

There are still a couple of pecan rolls. I only take one for my breakfast to try to make them last. Fanelli and the loader and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. are all up, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. informs Fanelli that they can't shave today as we need to conserve our water. I almost faint, but I attribute that to the intense heat of the day.

I now feel somewhat justified for growing my beard, which as far as I can tell is one of the best in the Second platoon. Having to conserve water is a significant bad omen. It probably means we are not going to be resupplied today, and that is number ten. Easter Sunday, but as I've already said, it's just a same-same day here in the Nam.

After breakfast, Fanelli and the loader take the tarp off the side of 2-3 and spread it on the ground behind my tent. Fanelli and the loader make short work of cleaning the .50 Cal. while I drain the accumulated water out of the fuel filters. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. and I remount the .50 Cal behind the bullet shield, and then I drop into the turret and hand the coax to the loader. He lowers it to Fanelli on the ground who takes it back to the tarp for disassembly and cleaning.

I ask Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. if we are moving out sometime today. He gives me a roger, so I take my tent down and roll it up in my stretcher and tie it to the opposite side of 2-3 from where Fanelli usually ties the tarp. He notices and make a tee tee pouty face.

"Fuck you, Fanelli," I say as I make a smart aleck smile back at him. The tarp is coated with something, so the solvent doesn't saturate it, and the smell doesn't last long. But my tent is just waterproofed canvas, and it reeks for days after getting cleaning solvent on it. While Fanelli and the loader finish with the coax, I decide to bring in my trip flares. Even though I have my trip flares set on boo coo hair triggers, I manage to bring all of them in without incident much to the disappointment of both Fanelli and the loader. As I stow the trip flares in their compartment they have started cleaning the main gun which doesn't take them long.

I reach into the driver's compartment and grab my boonie hat, and when I see my .50 Cal. ammo box it reminds me of something so I grab it as well. Fanelli and the loader have just finished cleaning the main gun. I open my ammo box and inside is about half a bag of M&M’s I put in there for safe keeping and had forgotten about until now.

"Happy Easter!" I say as I hand them each some of the M&Ms.

I can tell by the look on their faces they didn't know it was Easter. Our hands are covered in gun oil and cleaning solvent, but the M&Ms are number one anyway and also, I point out, they are egg shaped. The three of us quickly finish the chocolate, and it's number one, but then it's back to work.

While I bring in the claymores, Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to prepare to move out. Not a minute too soon, I think, as our camp is starting to reek from all the unburied crap around the perimeter of our RON.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has us uncircle and line up behind 2-6, and they lead the way on the trail we used to get here on Friday. As scary as this place is after we've been here this long, we're going to miss the place. Sort of.

Big Al is out front of 2-6 mine sweeping our way so it's slow going to wherever that might be. After about an hour, we come to a small stream we crossed on Friday. There's some talk of filling our water containers from the stream, but we decide the water is too questionable to risk it.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has been talking to Higher, and we take a fork in the trail. We are no longer heading towards the redball. It's boo coo dense jungle here on both sides of the trail. It’s so narrow Charlie would have to be right

next to the tank or P.C. to assure hitting his target. But being so close would assure his death. As Fanelli often points out, Charlie did that many times in the Ashau Valley. We hate that! It's also tee tee consolation for the guys killed or wounded.

Let's just take stock of our current situation. It's unbearably hot and humid. We have been in a number ten place for a couple of days now with no apparent mission other than looking for trouble. We are almost out of food, and we're so low on water we're taking conservation measures such as no shaving, washing, or bathing. Bathing? Who has been bathing? We're getting low on fuel, and we have less than our full base load of ammo. I think that about sums it up. As I've said before, things just seem to go from bad to worse here in the Nam. It's Easter Sunday and not only don't I expect to get some hot chow for dinner, we can't even expect c-rats for dinner.

As we move slowly through the jungle wondering half the time if we're really still on the trail, there is a boo coo amount of horn chatter between members of the Second platoon as we attempt to keep each other appraised of the situation. Everyone is in a foul mood, so there are more "Attitude Checks" than usual. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. hates that. Xin loi, Sarge.

We arrive at another stream a tee tee bit bigger than the last one with a small clearing on the other side. The Second platoon crosses the stream single file, and then we circle up in the clearing. It's a tight fit for the Second platoon, but it's the best place we're likely to find. We break for lunch with orders for the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times. The rest of us scour the area for tunnels and booby traps. Nothing is found and so we have our meager lunch from the last few c-rat meals we have. Some of the guys on the other tracks are trying to trade for c-rats that they hate less than the ones they have. But all the crews are down to the c-rat meals we used to throw away.

We're situated under the jungle canopy at our current location, so we don't put the poncho over the .50 Cal. It's scorching hot and humid, but at least we're not right out in the tropical sun. Once again we almost have to force ourselves to eat because we know we need to. The combination of heat, bad food, and little or no appetite makes it difficult. Fanelli, the loader, and I have our lunch and then I relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. so he can have his lunch. One of the side gunners on Double Deuce has put some sort of bunny ears on Snoopy, who is walking around our site trying to look cute, begging for some scraps. That will be the closest thing to an Easter bunny I expect we'll see today. When Snoopy gets over to us, I can tell he doesn't like the fake bunny

ears much, but he's smart enough to know that is why the guys are tossing him the last precious bits of our c-rats. A sign of our dire food situation is the dogs begging for food. Usually we have so much we can throw food away, and the dogs are still well fed.

We prepare to move out after lunch. It's hard to tell if we were bigger sitting ducks during our lunch break or now as we move single file through the jungle. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. and 2-5 Tango Charlie have been in constant contact over the horn as they try to decide where we are exactly on our map. Because of the two streams, they're pretty sure they know where we are. But in the jungle there are few if any landmarks so it's easy to get lost.

The tanks and the P.C.s take turns being in the lead and mine sweeping our way. The heat is stifling, and we continue to move slowly for the rest of the afternoon and early evening. We arrive at another place in the jungle where it's apparent some sort of defoliant has been used. The jungle abruptly ends at an area devoid of any vegetation, although there are remnants of it. Some dead trees and vines, but it's mostly bleak and barren. No need to drive around in circles, so we just position the tanks and P.C.s in our typical RON formation and then most of us dismount to search the area for tunnels and booby traps. We are always well focused as we search. Today as we are in a most number ten place, we search as if our lives depend on it, and they probably do.

Snoopy is cruising around the RON, still trying to look cute, but he has lost one of his bunny ears. Plus we're busy now, so he gets no treats or scraps this time. Xin loi, Snoopy. We in the Second platoon are all in a decidedly dejected mood. It's Easter Sunday, and we haven't had resupply for several days now, and we won't have it tonight either. No mail call. We hate that!

After we clear the area, we start to put out night defenses. I put out the trip flares with the pins set so that if I look at it too hard it can trip. Next I put out the claymores and I string the detonator wire up to the turret and hang the detonators over the bullet shield for the .50 Cal. Fanelli and the loader put out the concertina wire and set up the RPG screen. While they put the tarp on the side of 2-3, I set my tent up behind 2-3 and put my stretcher inside.

Because we didn't resupply, it's still a couple of hours before dark. We go through our meager stash of c-rat meals to pick out our dinners. Nothing but the c-rat meals I hate, so after noting the location of the Ham and Eggs, I close my eyes and grab one. If the heat tabs didn't smell so awful, I'd consider using them to heat my dinner since I'm not in a hurry.

After a horrible c-rat dinner, and just when I thought it couldn't get even a tee tee bit worse, it gets boo coo worse. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and tells the TCs to send one man each over to 2-3 just before sundown prepared to go on an AP.

He then turns to me and says, "Wolf, you're on the AP."

What's worse is I know he will make me try to lead the AP out through my trip flares again. It really will be impossible for me to do that, but there is no reasoning with an idiot. I resign myself to that fact, and I sky over to 2-4 to ask Wack if I can borrow his M-16. I jokingly offer my Grease Gun in trade. He declines my offer but lends me his M-16 with two magazine clips. When I get back to 2-3, I start getting my gear for the AP. More M-16 ammo, my hated .45 and 2 loaded clips for it and some loose .45 ammo, two frags, my boonie hat, flak jacket and my canteen full of water. I slather every bit of exposed skin (and some that's not) with bug juice and I'm as ready as I'll ever be. I also have my flashlight with red lens in place, which has proven boo coo worthless for finding trip flare wires, but it's all I have.

Just before dark the other members of the AP start to arrive at 2-3. I recognize the main tunnel rat, but I still don't know his name. No Jets is here, but I don't know most of the guys, and it's soon dark so no time for idle chat and other pleasantries such as introductions. Though we have no real mission, we are given the horn but no one will volunteer to carry any spare batteries. As expected, I’m ordered to lead the AP out of the RON through my trip flares. I can hear Fanelli and the loader snickering already expecting some amusement to come for them but not for the AP.

Once it's full dark, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders us to didi, and I lead the way. At first I find my trip flare wires, but someone just barely touched one and that was it. As I tried to kick the tripped flare out, I set off another. What a number ten way to start off the AP. Because I can no longer see where anything is, we set off the rest of the trip flares as we continue on our way out of the RON. Xin loi, guys.

I stumble along behind the AP, still mostly blind, when the horn battery dies. We turn around and head back while it might still be safe to approach and enter the RON. When we think we are there, we make a boo coo lot of noise and call out to the Second platoon that it is the AP returning. We manage to end up in front of 2-3, so we can stroll right through where I had set my trip flares. No sympathy from Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. who just gives us another horn battery and orders us back into the jungle.

We are all weighed down with our gear and ammo. No one will carry a spare battery unless ordered to, so back into the jungle we go. I stick to the end of the line until I can finally see again. It's not pitch dark, but it's so close it hardly matters, and we move along mostly by feel. All we want to do now is get far enough away from the RON so we won't get shot by the .50 Cal. should the RON get attacked tonight. It will be impossible for us to get that far away, but that's our goal more so than setting up any sort of ambush.

In the dark we don't have any idea where we are now in relationship to anything. How are we supposed to set up an ambush? We assemble ourselves in a small circle, sort of a mini-RON. A tee tee bit of a defensive position and for an hour each we take turns being the actual lookout while the rest of us try to sleep. The lookout would have been the radioman, but our horn battery died soon after we set up.

After the First platoon's AP got shot up by us, no APs want to chance stumbling into another platoon's RON. So when our horn battery dies, our plan is to stay put until daylight. It was scary enough going back into the RON when we had just barely left. Not to mention we have no idea where we are, and we would just be stumbling around in the dark in a number ten place at a number ten time.

Calling in sitreps every 15 minutes always helps the lookout stay awake, so it is number ten when the horn battery dies. Everyone is still supposed to stay awake for their hour of lookout whether the horn is working or not (and usually it is not). We are now unable to call for any help should we be attacked. Not that we would ever expect to be rescued by Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

I have my flak jacket to lay on when I'm not on lookout. We got out here so early, we all might get more sleep than we normally would. Although we are sleeping in a boo coo number ten place.

*August 17, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Camp at mouth of Powder River*

*Broke camp this morning at 6 o'clock. Froze out last night again. Hope we will soon get back to Ft. Shaw or the nights will get warm.*

*Crossed the river 2 miles from last night's camp then struck out across the hills for 18 miles. Hills were well covered with grass and has a great many*

*springs running out there sides. Very warm today. Crossed the river near its mouth and on account of some misunderstanding we recrossed and found the 17th Inf. on this side we are on. Also Lieut. Woodbridge and recruits were there.*

*The steamer is just now coming down from the mouth of the Rosebud River loaded with forage left at the place when we left. Boys all yelling "Steamboat, steamboat!" Our First sergeant who is sick was first on the boat so as to receive proper care. Letter from brother Madison. Day pleasant but warm.*

March 30, 1970
Monday
Southern Quang Tri Province

Every time I wake up in the bush when I'm on AP, it takes me a while to figure out where I am. Why am I looking up at open sky, and where is my tent? I try to collect myself as these thoughts race through my mind. Fortunately, someone was always awake last night on lookout. Even more number one than that is we didn't have to ambush anyone. Nor were we ambushed ourselves.

As it gets light, I can finally see where we are. We're under the upper jungle canopy, and I can see some sky even though we're also under the ground cover vegetation. The AP slowly starts to wake, and I take stock of our situation. We are all soaking wet from the morning dew, but it's so warm it almost feels good. Not quite as good as it feels to make it through another night in the Nam. Especially after a night on AP in the bush.

Since we didn't ambush anyone, we have to carry all the ammo back to the RON, wherever that might be. We can just make out a faint trampled path that must be our trail, and so that's what we follow hoping it will lead us back to the Second platoon. We must have made it boo coo far away last night, because it's light now and we still can't see or hear the Second platoon yet.

After a few tense minutes of apprehension, we finally start to hear the sounds of the Second platoon, so we know we're on the right track. When we arrive at the edge of the RON, we are in front of 2-3. We can once again just stroll through what had once been my impenetrable trip flare set up. Right through an opening in the concertina wire where someone opened it to answer nature's call earlier this morning. There was obviously no concern about us, even though we were out of communication all night. No one,

including Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., asks about our mission.

I heat up some water to make coffee, which I hope is allowed under our water conservation measures. I take a look at Fanelli on day two of not shaving because of said water conservation measures. I know as soon as our water supply is back to normal Fanelli will start to shave again, but if he doesn't shave soon his beard will easily eclipse mine in a few days.

It's later than I usually have my coffee, and the sun is starting to peek over the tops of the trees. I have to get in 2-3's side shade so I can drink my coffee without overheating inside and out. Even though we are almost out of food, there is still one pecan roll in our c-rat stash, and that's what I have for breakfast. Fanelli seems lost in the morning when he doesn't get to shave, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., unlike Our Dear Platoon Sgt., does need to shave. With a two day beard stubble going he looks a lot less like Hitler. I consider it an improvement.

Tomorrow is payday, but in our current situation, it's boo coo hard to get excited. The real sad part is payday used to feel almost like Christmas once a month. But now we'll be happy to get some warm water and a couple of cases of c-rats.

When I finish my meager breakfast, I just stay hunkered down in the shade next to 2-3. I feel pretty well rested for once. As I let my mind wander a tee tee bit, I remember it is my younger brother's birthday today. When we were kids, it was a boo coo big deal for my brother Mark, because for five days we are the same age since I'm only 360 days older than him. That, of course, reminds me that my twenty-first birthday is in five days. But I don't want to think about it too much and jinx myself. At least if I get killed before my birthday, my inner voice won't have anything to complain about since we have eaten everything in my goodie box except a can of nuts.

I climb up on 2-3 to the bustle rack where we all have our thermo chests bolted on. I want to change my damp and dirty shirt. When I open my thermo chest, I have a couple of clean shirts. I take one of the O.D. t-shirts off the top of the pile and notice the next one down is my last brand new white t-shirt. I'm tempted to put it on, but only for a moment. We're in a number ten place to go waltzing around in a bright white shirt. I decide to save it for my birthday.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to prepare to break camp. I head out to retrieve what is left of my impenetrable trip flare set up and I bring in the claymores and wind up all the detonator wire an pack everything

away. Fanelli has already rolled the tarp around the RPG screen which works just as well as my stretcher, so he's not complaining for the moment.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and orders the Second platoon to uncircle and line up behind 2-3 and he then tells me to head to the edge of the RON to the trail we followed here yesterday. We wait at the edge of the RON for someone to bring our mine sweeping equipment up to the front of 2-3. The loader is going to start mine sweeping, so while we wait I get out my hated .45 and put a loaded magazine clip in and chamber a round. I set my hated .45 on my lap pointing at my .50 Cal. ammo box.

The trail is boo coo narrow and sometimes so hard to see we're not sure we're still on it. Our field of vision is very poor due to the dense jungle that brushes along the sides of the P.C.s and tanks. I try to not let the loader get too far ahead, but I have my seat set low so I can barely see him most of the time. There is boo coo horn chatter this morning. Some of which is asking Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. if we're getting resupplied today.

Several guys are worried about getting paid tomorrow. How dumb can they be? Worrying about getting paid when we are almost out of food and water? Even if we get paid, there most likely won't be anything to spend it on. I expect they will be playing Poker instead of Hearts for a while. At least until most guys lose all their pay.

I'm glad to have the loader walking out front and mine sweeping, because the jungle is so thick and dense I can't see the trail at all. After about an hour of travel, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has 2-6 come to the front of our procession while we are at a wide spot in the trail. When 2-6 makes it to the front, the loader turns the mine sweeping equipment over to Big Al and once again we are on our way. We cross one stream that we think we recognize, so we are fairly confident that we’re not lost. We hope.

Even though 2-3 is not leading the way, I decide to keep my hated .45 on my lap because this is still a number ten place to be. After we cross the first stream, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has Double Deuce take the lead. 2-3 is the third track back now, so I can't see who is mine sweeping, but I hope it's not Smitty. Xin loi, Smitty.

When we get to the second stream, I can see it is the other side gunner on Double Deuce that was mine sweeping. He's the FNG that shot up the First platoon. I wonder if that incident would be considered a cure for his Cherry Disease?

Before we cross, we spread out and set up in a tee tee open area to break

for lunch. This is really just a bad joke since we have almost no food.

Fanelli and the loader are smirking at each other like a couple of smart alecks when I approach them up on the turret, so I know something is up. Fanelli says that because I was so generous with the stuff in my goodie box, they are going to let me have the very last can of c-rats we have. I already get the joke, because I know it has to be the Ham and Eggs, and of course it is. I'm hungry, and I have watched countless times as Johnson made it look like the Ham and Eggs tasted number one. I decide to give it a try. It's either that or have no lunch. The Ham and Eggs are just as horrible as I remember, but I think I'm giving a passing performance of pretending to enjoy them. When I open the can with my P-38, I can smell the vile contents before I have it fully opened. It's a strong sulphuric smell that's halfway between rotten eggs and a ripe fart. It looks like old seat stuffing from a 1959 Rambler, but it tastes considerably worse. As for the taste, there is nothing there even remotely resembling ham. The egg taste leaves no doubt its origins are from powdered eggs with the texture of foam rubber.

I put on a fake smile while I makes sounds indicating how tasty the Ham and Eggs are.

"Ummmmmmm, boo coo good," I say. I doubt they are fooled, but I'm giving it my best.

It is a supreme effort on my part, but I manage to eat the whole can. We are now officially out of food. Like Johnson, I didn't heat up the Ham and Eggs as they are already boo coo warm from the heat of the day. I can only imagine one thing that would improve the Ham and Eggs: watching someone else eat them. They are best when enjoyed vicariously.

Lunch break turns out to be mostly a smoke break since most of the Second platoon was already out of food. There was a time when we could count on resupply every day. But now even though we are out of food, we are not sure anyone but us cares.

We are on our way again, and after we cross the stream, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has 2-4 take the lead. That means Wack is out front mine sweeping. Finally someone I trust to mine sweep. Xin loi, Wack. I still have my hated .45 on my lap as this place is number ten. Still no official word of where we are going and what we'll do once we get there. The longer we drive, the more we worry about resupply. When we set up our RON, there is a boo coo amount of hard work and to do that we need food. I'm starting to feel lightheaded just thinking about working hard on an empty stomach.

2-3 is the fourth track from the front of the procession so I can't see the front. I'm just trying to keep 2-6 in sight but not get too close. I'm listening to all the horn chatter of the Second platoon. I hear Sgt. Green, who is leading the way on 2-4, let out a shout that sounds like he is happy about something. We finally make it to the spot where Sgt. Green shouted, and we all shout out in relief as well. It's the redball. I never thought seeing the redball would excite me, but we all feel we're back to civilization after being in the jungle for three days.

The Second platoon lines up on the side of the redball as we wait for our orders. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is on the horn with Higher. We wait, which we do in a very professional way. I finally climb out of my driver's compartment to hunker down next to 2-3 in a tee tee bit of side shade. As I look up and down the redball, I can see other members of the Second platoon standing next to or hunkered down by their tracks as we wait.

We're spaced about 50 feet apart, so there is no socializing going on. The horn chatter on the Second platoon's frequency is all about resupply. Being on the redball is a boo coo good sign. While we're waiting the fuel trucks show up and start to re-fuel all the tracks. Another boo coo good sign, we think. After all the tracks of the Second platoon are re-fueled, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me pull to the front and lead the platoon heading north on the redball.

I almost forget my hunger pangs and worries as we cruise on the redball at about 20 mph. The breeze is number one, and I could easily drive all the rest of the day. After about two hours of driving, we stop so the drivers can check the track blocks and the road wheels. It's also number one to stretch our legs a tee tee bit. It's a short break, and it's probably really more for the cigarette smokers. We're all glad to get going 20 mph again so we can enjoy the breeze. We drive past fields under cultivation and rice paddies. At times can see the farmers in their fields, and there is even some civilian traffic on the redball, so we really feel we're back to civilization now.

After another hour of driving, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me start to slow down. I can see the First and Third platoons of the side of the redball at a resupply point we have used before when we were south of Dong ha. We plug ourselves into the empty parking spots around the resupply site. The way our guys in the Second platoon are talking to the guys in the First and Third platoon, you would have thought we hadn't seen each other in years instead of just three days.

I have to park 2-3 to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s exacting demands, so it takes a while. 2-3's position is just for resupply and not our RON, but you just can't reason with idiots. By the time I'm finished, Fanelli and the loader have finished putting out the concertina wire. We want to sky up for mail call. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is occupied on the horn, so we saunter over to mail call. It's hard to explain, but we're almost as excited as if it were some holiday back in the Real World. It's been three days since the last mail call, so it takes a long time because boo coo guys get letters and packages. As we are experts, we wait. In the end that's all we do, as none of us on 2-3 get any mail. We're standing with the crew of 2-6 and Wack. We all have resupply duties, because we are all low on c-rats, ammo, and water. We are all hungry and even if we get our c-rats first, we still have to heat them. So we decide to at least check out the hot chow.

Of course we are sorry because as usual (and even after three days of no hot chow), it is terrible. Having had the benefit of eating Ham and Eggs for lunch, I feel I can make a fair comparison to the hot chow. I'm not sure which is worse, but it matters little as they are both number ten. I do manage to eat most of my helping of the hot chow. I find it much easier to eat the hot chow when I don't have to pretend I'm enjoying it. There is no time to socialize after we finish eating, as we have boo coo to do.

We head for the resupply convoy of deuce and a halfs to start humping our ammo and c-rats back to our tanks. In the end, we only have to carry our c-rats. Because we need so much main gun ammo, the resupply truck is going to bring our ammo over to 2-3. That's number one. But there's still work to do as we have to uncrate, unpack, and stow the ammo, and then we have to burn all the packaging.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has left for the hot chow. While we wait for our ammo, we break open a case of c-rats. I can never remember them looking so boo coo good.

"I think I'll have the Ham and Eggs again," I joke. The c-rats look so good, we can't resist, and we all grab our favorite, mine being the Beans and meatballs. We quickly heat and eat them. We're just finished with our dinner and the ammo arrives. Back to work. Besides the main gun ammo, we also need .50 Cal. ammo and coax ammo. It takes all three of us to handle the main gun ammo. First one person on the ground hands the ammo to someone on the turret. Then that person hands it down to someone in the turret where it is stowed.

After the turret is full of main gun ammo, I get into the driver's compartment and the loader and Fanelli take turns bringing me the rest of the main gun ammo. I don't even think about the danger any more. All I think about is what I'm going to write on each one. As we finish stowing the .50 Cal. and coax ammo on the bustle rack, Smitty shows up with a small bag for each of us. It is our share of the Sundry pack they send out to us on resupply.

Every week or two we get a sundry pack of supplies for each platoon. It's mostly different kinds of tobacco products, such as cartons of cigarettes and chewing tobacco and some small cigars. Everyone gets cigars and cigarettes, whether you smoke or not. I use mine for trade and barter. But lately there's been nothing to trade for. Some guys, who are non-smokers, take it up due to the stress and boredom, not to mention the free smokes. Also in the sundry pack is extra toilet paper, as there is a tee tee pack of toilet paper in each c-rat meal box. There are some heat tabs that we just throw away and some Hersey's tropical chocolate bars which are inedible so we throw those away too.

It's been a long day and it's getting late, so we need to be leaving for our RON soon. Fanelli and I already have the burn hole going with our trash, and thanks to a liberal douse of diesel fuel, it is burning quite nicely although boo coo smoky. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns and he gets on the horn to order the Second platoon to prepare to sky to our RON.

The Second platoon waits as the First and Third platoons uncircle, sky to the redball, and head north. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally orders the Second platoon to uncircle and line up behind 2-3 at the edge of the redball. We didi mau heading north as well. The First and Third platoons are far enough ahead that there is no road dust or diesel exhaust for me to inhale. I quickly get 2-3 up to 15 mph while the rest of the tracks pull onto the redball and correct and adjust their spacing and then I start going 20 mph. The breeze is number one and feels even better than soaking my beard with water.

We pass the storage depot where we got the New 2-3, and then we pass our base camp at Dong ha. Some guys breath a sigh of relief as they were worried about spending the night at base camp. They are so dumb. If we were going to base camp, we wouldn't have had resupply. What idiots! They must be RAs. Most guys who are RAs conceal that fact for fear of a razzing from the draftees. Xin loi, guys.

We drive less than a klik further where the redball forks with Route 1 continuing north. We turn west at the fork and head towards Cam-lo. Our

Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me stop as we wait for the rest of the Second platoon to catch up. He also calls for the mine sweeping equipment to be brought to the front. When it arrives, Fanelli dismounts and starts mine sweeping our way on an existing trail. We are back in our normal operating area, and the low sparse scrub looks number one compared to the number ten jungle we've been in for the last few days. Our field of view is so good, I don't even consider having my hated .45 on my lap, let alone loading it. Finally I can see where I am going, and someone I trust is mine sweeping. But it will be dark soon and The Scary Time. Any tee tee good feelings I have now won't last long. We proceed at walking pace for at least a half an hour. We pass one clearing that could have been a suitable RON before we arrive at our intended RON.

We have been here before, but the vegetation has recovered from our last visit, so we drive around in circles flattening everything in sight. Then most of us dismount and comb the entire area for tunnels and booby traps. It's boo coo late, so Fanelli and I hope we don't find any tunnels, or more correctly- that there are no tunnels to be found. We search like a plague of locusts looking for food. There are no tunnels found, so the Second platoon starts putting out our night defenses.

I'm not giving up and I put out my trip flares with such hair triggers that I set two off trying to set out the last one. The loader and Fanelli get a good laugh at my expense finally. They didn't dare laugh out loud when the AP was going out last time. We were all highly pissed off and heavily armed. Not a group of guys you want to antagonize with teasing laughter. I have to hustle now to replace the trip flares before full dark. I put the claymores in place and string the detonator wire over to 2-3.

I catch a whiff of the tarp and its cleaning solvent odor, and I am glad I stowed my tent separately. I'm well practiced at setting my tent up, and I make short work of it. I put my stretcher inside, throw my sleeping bag in, and I'm ready for The Scary Time. Well, as ready as I ever am. At least I don't have to go on AP tonight, and I must say my tent looks inviting compared to sleeping out in the jungle on the ground.

Fanelli and the loader climb into the turret while I climb into the driver's compartment. I turn on the red interior light and have a look at all the new main gun ammo that needs something written on it. I got a lot more sleep last night than I'll get tonight.

Tomorrow is payday, and we're close to both base camp and Cam-lo. We

feel confident we will get paid tomorrow, but not so sure of being able to buy anything. So it's hard to get excited about payday. Especially when we have to make it through The Scary Time first.

After chatting with Fanelli and the loader through the ammo pass-through, I verify I have last shift on guard. Then I climb out of the driver's compartment and feel my way along the side of 2-3 to my tent. I can only make out the outline of my tent, but that's enough. I crawl inside and unlace my boots half way, lay back, put my boonie hat over my face and try to fall asleep before the bugs start attacking. Too late! The bugs never cooperate.

*July 31, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp Cottonwoods*

*This morning dawned bright and clear. Paymaster came up to pay off the troops here. The other regiments were payed off before we got here and the consequence is a great many drunken men. Our regiment were payed off today and many more drunk. In fact they became so bad that the settlers were ordered not to sell anymore to them.*

*Weber, drunk and trying to go through the manual of arms. Lieut. Booth stopped him, telling him to go into his tent.*

*Weber says, "Yes my friend, I will go."*

*"Go into your tent immediately", says Booth.*

*"Yes, sir," says Weber going in and laying down, grumbling all the time.*

*Gambling going on, almost every game. Boat left for Powder River this morning.*

*One of the 7th Cavalry men's wife could not believe that her husband was not killed in the recent incident so she came up on the boat and luckily found him alright and well. Appearances of rain.*

March 31, 1970
Tuesday, Payday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me from a deep sleep, and it takes me a couple of seconds to figure out where I am. I can't remember where I was in my sleep, but it was a number one place. Now that I'm awake and cognizant of my actual number

ten location here in the Nam, I am bummed out.

I climb up on the turret of 2-3. I stand on the folded down seat of the TC's hatch to take up my position behind the .50 Cal. Even remembering that it's payday doesn't raise my spirits. I'd better not count on anything special happening because it's payday. If I do I'll just be disappointed later on.

Most guys who survive the Nam will start a special calendar called a Short-Timer's Calendar sometime near the end of their tour of duty. For guys in the field, the last 90 days would be typical. Some more prudent and cautious guys might not start until they only have 30 days left. You don't want to jinx yourself. Of course most REMFs start their Short-Timer Calendar on their first day in the Nam. It's the last day of March, and I'm not even close to being short. I can't start a short-timer calendar as I don't even have 90 days in-country yet.

Three more months before I can even start to think about R&R, so I won't think about that.

I call in my first sitrep of my stint at guard. I can see nothing in front of me, but I can see the ghostly silhouettes of the rest of the tracks as I look around the RON. One of the tracks on the other side of the RON says they have some noise out front and get permission to fire off a grenade from Thumper. I can't hear the noise myself, but I hear the grenade explosion from Thumper. No return fire so far. That's number one.

I can see someone lighting a cigarette two tracks over, and it's number ten the way the end of his cigarette is glowing brightly. Smoking is a boo coo dangerous habit here in the Nam, and it makes me glad I haven't taken it up. At least my java habit doesn't cause me to expose myself to danger during The Scary Time.

The track on the other side of the RON launches another grenade. Still no return fire and for me that's number one. I call in another sitrep, and it's all quiet here on my side of the RON. All the other sitreps are negative as well.

A tee tee bit of horn chatter about payday. But everyone is being cautious about getting too excited about it. Guard duty drags on as usual. When it finally starts to get light and I can almost feel the collective sigh of relief expelled by all the members of the Second platoon. To celebrate, I climb down off the turret with my canteen cup in one hand and a chunk of C-4 in the other.

Our water container is low, so I sky to the center of the RON to fill it up at the water buffalo. There's a short line of guys doing the same thing. Fanelli

will be happy to be able to shave again, and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. will be looking like Hitler again. I fill our can with water and hump it back to 2-3.

Fanelli is already waiting with his shaving kit. It's been three days since he's shaved, and I can see he's got his work cut out for himself today. I've been growing my current beard for three weeks now. I think it's quite impressive, but that would depend on who you ask. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has a differing opinion I'm sure. I give my beard a stroke and have a look in Fanelli's mirror. I think if Fanelli were inclined to grow a beard, I would have to shave my beard off in shame. In fact, Fanelli's beard is so tough he has to lather up twice to get a decent enough shave. One that he is satisfied with anyway. When he's finished, that's the Fanelli I know. Strack!

The c-rats looked so boo coo good yesterday but we already hate them again. We are back to choosing whichever variety we hate the least.

The sun is starting to clear the nearby trees, and we can already feel its power. We're finally close enough to the Cam-lo river that we can hope for a cooling swim and bath sometime soon. But today we're just hoping to get paid, even if we don't have anywhere to spend it. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and orders the Second platoon to prepare to break camp. I bring in my trip flares without setting any off. The rest of our routine is done so often we could probably do it with our eyes closed. I take my tent down and roll it around my stretcher and tie it to the opposite side from the tarp. Fanelli, as usual, makes his tee tee pouty face when he notices.

Fanelli makes a boo coo great pouty face, and it always makes me laugh. We're half or full deaf much of the time, so most of us can read lips a tee tee bit. As I'm laughing I silently mouth to him, "Fuck you, Fanelli!"

I pour diesel fuel on our trash in the foxhole next to us. A foxhole I didn't have to dig I think, and I smile to myself. Once it looks like the trash is burning well I climb into the driver's compartment and start the engine. The heat and the humidity are being driven by the sun now, so it will be number one to get moving. The Second platoon lines up behind Double Deuce and the loader gives the mine sweeping equipment to Smitty, and he once again stays up front to assist with the mine sweeping. We are following an existing trail. Where to? We don't know.

After being in the jungle this place almost feels like home, and because of a great field of vision in all directions we're not too concerned about being attacked. But we are as always boo coo concerned about mines, and it doesn't take long before Smitty and the loader find the first one of the day. They

make short work of it with some C-4. We continue on and find three more land mines as we proceed along the trail. Yeah, feels just like home. We break for lunch around noon.

The green scrub is short and the area is open and we can see for several kliks in all directions. Because of where we have been the last few days, some guys think we're in a number one place. That would not include me. Having an encounter with a land mine has given me a boo coo healthy respect for mines. Even though I survived, it was mostly from dumb luck. Since we have been finding land mines all morning, for me this is a number ten place.

We are again fighting for the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese to make our c-rat lunches more edible, but not much.

We're spaced 100 feet apart, so it's a long walk in the intense sun to visit the other tracks. We all elect to stay put instead. After lunch I give 2-3 a walk around. Everything looks number one, not even one cracked end connector. After our lunch break, the Second platoon continues on the trail. Still no word on our mission or our destination. At least we're not finding anymore land mines, and that's number one. The trail has deep ruts in most places, but the tanks and P.C.s are made for this kind of terrain. Double Deuce is still in the lead although Charlie Brown has his other side gunner mine sweeping instead of Smitty. Charlie Brown's driver, Goofy, takes a wrong turn. In his defense, I will say that he was just following the mine sweeper who is being directed by Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. via Charlie Brown over the horn. As Goofy backs up, the track on one side gets thrown off. We hate that!

Being the closest tank, 2-3 is used to pull the track out and lay it straight after the track is taken apart. Getting the track back on a P.C. is easier than a tank because the track blocks are smaller and don't weigh as much. But we are right out in the sun with no shade, so it turns out to be an arduous task.

Double Deuce, the screw-up track. Charlie Brown gets razzed unmercifully by the rest of the platoon. Fortunately, Charlie Brown is expert at being razzed, so he seems totally unfazed by all the ribbing. After the time spent on our unplanned track Snafu, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has all the tracks do a neutral steer in place. Neutral steers are the common way that we throw tracks around here. Our tee tee bit of luck holds as ten tracks do neutral steers and no tracks get thrown.

Someone is still feeling lucky, so we don't mine sweep as we make our way back. We go a tee tee bit faster on the way back, but the trail is boo coo

rough. After dealing with one thrown track, the drivers are all being cautious, and that would include me. Of course after my land mine encounter, the only way I drive now is cautiously.

We drive through our RON from last night, and when we get to the far side and onto the trail we start mine sweeping again. We continue on the trail until we arrive at an open area and we circle round and position the tracks for resupply. We hope. We put out the concertina wire and the First and Third platoons show up and fill in the spaces we left. Soon we can hear the convoy of deuce and a half's making their way on the trail. We're at least a klik off the redball so we know the resupply convoy will be extra nervous about our location. It's a tee tee convoy, just food and supplies, no ammo or fuel.

First things first as we all head off to mail call, leaving Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. behind the .50 Cal. talking on the horn to Higher. All three platoons are here, so mail call takes forever. We don't mind much, as the anticipation of getting mail is almost as good as getting mail. And it's a good thing too, since none of us on 2-3 get any mail. But we have some fun chatting with our friends as we wait in vain for our name to be called.

They announce we are being paid one platoon at a time. There is a small folding table the XO has set up, and I can see he has a pile of MPC on one side of the table and his .45 on the other side. Having been paid many times now since being in the army, I know the cash on one side of the table and the .45 on the other is some sort of army protocol for being paid. It looks boo coo stupid here in the Nam as the XO and his .45 are a tee tee bit out-gunned by just about everyone here. Even by me if I count my Grease Gun. The Second platoon gets paid second, as the First platoon is first, and the Third platoon is last. They probably do it this way because even the Lifers can count up to three, and so everyone knows when it's their turn to be paid.

Since we're trying to keep ourselves occupied as we wait to be paid, we decide to sky up to the hot chow line. I mean, the hot chow, as there is hardly ever a line and today is no exception. We're not really here to eat, just to waste some time.

We have some fun joking around with the KPs, whose only thought is to get back to Dong ha before dark. Our body bag humor makes them nervous, and they think we're all dinky dao for staying out in the field at night during The Scary Time. We are dinky dao for staying out in the field at night during The Scary Time, but we have no other choice.

As we expected, there is nothing to buy today, so we're only tee tee excited

about it being payday. It's finally the Second platoon’s turn to be paid. I get to further practice my skill at waiting since we get paid alphabetically. So just like mail call, I'm almost last. We only get paid once a month, so I can't even remember what I arranged to get paid this time, though it hardly matters. It takes a while, but I finally get to the front of the line.

After I'm paid, I didi mau for 2-3. Fanelli and the loader have already gotten our supplies and our two cases of c-rats. We all have a c-rat dinner. It's the best possible, as we all get to have the c-rat meal we hate the least. My list for that gets shorter and shorter. How do guys eat this stuff for a year, I wonder? Fanelli knows some of the guys from the Third platoon on the tank parked next to us, and he skys to have a chat. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns to 2-3 in a foul mood, as the army has screwed up his amount of pay. As I already know, it takes a month to straighten it out. Maybe a month, but maybe longer.

We're close to the convoy, so we leave Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to seethe on his own and saunter over to offer a tee tee bit more body bag humor to the KPs and ease their minds some. As I mentioned, they all think we're idiots out here in the field and at times I would have to agree with them. With two notable exceptions (Smitty and Our Idiot platoon Sgt.), idiots are usually not allowed in the field. The idiots that somehow make it out to the field tend to take care of wounding or killing themselves without any help from us. We, who have had to fill countless sand bags and endure the assault on our sense of smell by just entering base camp, think the idiots are the REMFs.

The paymaster takes up boo coo time at resupply, and since there is nothing to buy we are thinking it's time to didi mau for our RON before it gets dark. The resupply convoy is already starting to head back and some of the other tracks are bringing in their concertina wire as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets off the horn with Higher. He is not able to correct his pay Snafu, and even if he did the paymaster is gone. He is sullen. Nothing makes him happy anyway. I could give him some tips on how to be happy. First of all, the next time his re-enlistment comes up, don't re-up. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. momentarily breaks out of his fog of disappointment enough to order the Second platoon to prepare to sky to our RON.

Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire as I give the trash in our burn hole a boo coo big splash of diesel fuel. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt has me pull 2-3 forward and wait at the edge of the resupply site. Because the resupply convoy and the First and Third platoons have driven down the trail

ahead of us, we assume it is safe and clear of mines. We forgo mine sweeping as we head for the redball with the rest of the Second platoon following behind.

We make boo coo good time on our way to the redball and once there we head west. I'm thinking that if we don't go far, we could get set up before dark. We drive towards Cam-lo, but well before we get close Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me stop and wait for the rest of the platoon to catch up. There's an unmarked trail off the redball. He has me lead the way with the loader mine sweeping in front of us. It's really getting late, and if we don't get to our RON soon it will be number ten. We proceed at a walking pace for about a half an hour and several TCs on the other tracks have been calling Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. on the horn to voice concern about how late it is.

As I've said before, you can't reason with an idiot. Why try? Part of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s problem, I think, is that he hasn't been here long enough to get used to it being dark at 6:30 p.m. It feels like summer here, and back in the real world it stays light till 10 p.m. or later in places farther north.

We finally arrive at our intended destination, we hope, but we don't know yet. It's not completely dark as we circle around and flatten everything and then park the tracks. Most of us dismount to look for tunnels and booby traps, but it is so late now it will be dark before we can set out all of our night defenses. We hate that!

The biggest worry now is if we find any tunnels, we absolutely have to clear them. It's too late to look for another RON tonight. The light that's left is also very poor for looking for tunnels and booby traps. We scour the entire area with extra scrutiny because we know we have to stay here no matter what. Fortunately we don't find any tunnels or booby traps, so we start putting out our night defenses. Before I'm finished, it is totally dark.

Having had to mess with my trip flares in failing light a couple of times makes me realize I will have to forgo my penchant for ultra sensitive hair triggers. I am satisfied to just get them in place. I have to set out the claymores now during the start of The Scary Time. I manage to string the detonator wire through the concertina wire and up to 2-3 without getting hung up in it for once. Since I'm already in front of 2-3, I give Fanelli and the loader a hand with the RPG screen, and we are ready. We are not done, but we're ready with our night defenses. I untie my tent and stretcher and take them to the rear of 2-3. I can still smell the cleaning solvent on the tarp from here. Knowing I made the right decision about that, I smile.

I don't know why both Fanelli and the loader insist on sleeping under the tarp, as I've offered to share my tent and they have both refused. My conscience is clear, at least. I am practiced at setting my tent up, so putting it up in the dark is no problem at all.

Fanelli and the loader are getting into the turret, so I walk around and climb into the driver's compartment, turn on my red interior light and stretch out in my driver's seat and exhale a long deep sigh. It has been another long tiring day, and although several of the main gun rounds need to have something written on them, I am too exhausted to think that hard. Being out in the coming darkness and then the dark itself and now being exposed to the red light, my night vision is good enough that I can look out my driver's hatch and look into the night. I can see the concertina wire and the scrub on the other side of it. I can hear pretty well lately, and I am able to chat with Fanelli and the loader as the night progresses. We joke about how we have money but nothing to spend it on. I don't mention Ramen specifically, as I don't want to agitate Fanelli. And since I would like some Ramen myself, I don't want to jinx it. Fanelli points out if anyone wants to spend some money, they could go over to the mortar crew's track, as they are sure to be playing Poker instead of Hearts.

We all have our night vision, so we decide to do something we almost never do, and that is walk around the RON when it's dark and The Scary Time. We all sky to the center of the RON where the mortar track is parked next to the mortar pit. As we cross to the center of the RON, we can see the eerie red light emanating from the rear of the mortar track. We can hear laughing and swearing so they could be playing Hearts after all. But when we finally get there, they are in fact playing Poker. It's crowded inside the mortar crew's P.C., so we just hang around the rear ramp and watch the game for a tee tee bit of entertainment. No one has lost all their money yet, so there's no open seat in the game. But there will be eventually, because most guys play until they lose all their money. It makes no sense at all to me, as we only get paid once a month. But on payday, some guys will play Poker until they lose it all.

I think I've had enough fun watching and decide to hit the sack. Fanelli and the loader decide to stay for a while, so after making sure I'm still last shift on guard, I sky to my tent. I crawl right in and untie my boots halfway, lay back, put my boonie hat over my face and try to fall asleep before the bugs become a boo coo nuisance on this last day of March. No such luck, of

course.

*April 1970*

*August 1, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp mouth of the Rosebud River*

*With this morning came the steamer Carrol and Far West. The Far West left here yesterday for the Powder River but had not got that far when they met the Carrol which reported Indians at the mouth of Powder River who fired into the boat and had destroyed all the forage left at that place.*

*There was about 150 recruits and 7 companies of the 22nd Infty. on board boat. The recruits look knobby but think they will not be so in a few weeks. Four more boats are expected here loaded with troops.*

*Mail came in this afternoon. Received a letter from bro. Wilson. Corporal Abbot and Roller who brought the mail made the trip in 2 days. 7th Cavalry Band gave us some music this evening.*

*Corporal Short of our Company deserted from Ft. Shaw a few weeks ago.*

*Boys all drunk. Whiskey aplenty. A good many put under guard and likely to stay there a while.*

*Day pleasant. Our Indians all went across the river and had a medicine song.*

April 1, 1970
Wednesday, April Fools' day
Quang Tri Province

The loader wakes me at 4 a.m. for my shift at guard. We all hate guard duty like sin, especially since we have to do it every night. That may be the only advantage the REMFs have over us. However, it must be said that the bunkers the REMFs have to spend the night in are vile and disgusting places. The bunkers I've seen are small cubicles made of concrete blocks. Usually there is a corrugated steel roof that they pile several layers of sandbags on. In the front there is a opening about 12 inches high and 5 or 6 feet long to look out and shoot, if necessary. The interior measurements are about 10 feet by

10 feet, with a ceiling height of 6 or 7 feet. Except for the lookout opening in the front, there are no other provisions for ventilation, so any odors linger on. The bunkers I've been in smell so strongly of piss that I know some of the perimeter guards urinate inside the bunker rather than leave their post.

The air here is steaming hot and humid, but at least it's fresh. If you can stay upwind of Johnson and the loader, that is. I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and position myself behind the .50 Cal. I realize that except for in training (and that seems like a million years ago), I've been here in the Nam for almost 3 months, and I have never fired the .50 Cal. That might be some sort of a record. Maybe.

I realize as I start to become fully awake that it is April Fool's day. The Nam is not a place that suffers fools of any kind, so it's not the kind of place to pull pranks on anyone without first giving it considerable thought. Young men, heavily armed and under boo coo stress, are not always a good mark for a prank. When I think back to some backfired pranks from my past, it makes me decide to experience any of today’s pranks vicariously, if possible. April 1st was my grandfather's birthday on my father's side of the family. I don't think my grandfather ever forgave my mother for not pushing me out of the womb a couple of days early so I could be born on his birthday. I, however, have always been glad not to have been born on April Fool's day and have to suffer that my whole life. Xin loi, Gramps!

My 21st birthday is now only three days away. I don't want to jinx it, so I try to stop thinking about it, but I can't. I think, in three days I can legally drink and vote. But just like on payday when we have money but nowhere to spend it, there's nowhere to vote and nothing to drink here except warm water.

It wouldn’t be much of a consolation to make it to 21 and then get killed shortly thereafter, with the dying thoughts of, "at least I didn't jinx it."

I have been dutifully calling in my sitreps every 15 minutes as I wait for the coming dawn. Everything has been quiet, and no one has seen or heard a reason to fire off Thumper. When Thumper fires off a few grenades at some real or imagined sound, it is such a common night time sound that it hardly wakes anyone except the FNGs.

I start to see the sky lighten in the east so I know sunrise is soon. Just like how it quickly goes from dusk to full dark, the time is brief from daybreak to daylight compared to the more northerly latitudes. For us waiting for the end of The Scary Time, it is number one.

I can see at least two other guys in the Second platoon have some C-4 lit and are heating up something so I climb down from the turret.

As I heat up my water, I reflect briefly about my only April Fool targets again. The loader is young and impetuous and therefore a dangerous mark. Fanelli? No, I still think Fanelli is The Man, and I value his friendship too much to risk it on a cheap joke. Especially now because I consider us even about the C-4 ejecting the spaghetti on my boots. I don't want Fanelli to think I'm one prank up on him. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.? A boo coo no way. Would you pull a prank on Hitler? I think not. I'll just content myself trying to foresee any pranks aimed toward me and be watchful for anyone else being had.

Fanelli and the loader are soon up and attending to their morning rituals. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. also arises, and it's evident no amount of beauty sleep will help him. It's all I can do to prevent myself from giving him a Nazi type of salute and say, "Hiel Hitler!" It being April Fool's, day I just might get away with it. But humor requires a certain level of intelligence that I think our Idiot Platoon Sgt. lacks. I do and say nothing. He already hates me, so no reason to antagonize him further. My beard is reason enough for him to single me out for special treatment.

Although we have adequate c-rats, we still compete for the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese. When I lose out, I'm still experimenting with the tee tee cans of peanut butter. It's number one in all the c-rat meals with beef that I've tried so far. Luckily, no one on 2-3 likes the pound cake or the pecan roll except me. Since we have nowhere to trade or barter they are mine now, for the most part. Today I have one of each for breakfast, and it’s quite filling. The c-rat diet is noticeably bulking me up. During my initial draft physical, I tipped the scales at 145 lbs. I can tell I weigh at least 180 lbs now, easily 185. A case of c-rats weighs about 25 lbs, so in less than three months I have gained almost the weight of two cases of c-rats. Sort of coincidental in that our daily allotment of c-rats is two cases a day.

No reason to ask Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. what we're up to today, so we wait. An exercise at which we are all well practiced. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is finally on the horn to Higher for orders for our day's activities. He stays on the horn and then orders the Second platoon to prepare to break camp.

We start bringing in our gear, and when I pass the tarp it still smells too much like cleaning solvent. So when I take my tent down and roll my stretcher up in it, I make sure to tie it to the opposite side of 2-3. Xin loi,

Fanelli.

I climb into the driver's compartment and put on my commo helmet, start the engine and wait some more. I back 2-3 up under the guidance of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., and we line up behind Double Deuce.

Snoopy is jumping around on the deck of Double Deuce while we wait for Smitty to explain the mine sweeping equipment and procedure to an FNG recently assigned to Double Deuce. Charlie Brown gets all the screw ups, and the number one thing about the side gunner who just ETS'd from Double Deuce is that he is gone. One less screw up. The number ten thing is that he is replaced by an FNG. If the FNG on Double Deuce survives for a while and proves to not be a screw up, he will be assigned to another track and replaced with a known screw up or an FNG. Xin loi, Charlie Brown.

Smitty eventually starts to mine sweep after giving the FNG a brief lecture. At least it's only April Fool's day and not Friday the 13th as I start my day having to trust an FNG and Smitty with the mine sweeping detail. Snoopy finally settles down once we are actually under way and is now sitting on the very front of Double Deuce looking like a ship's bowsprit. It takes less than an hour to get to the redball, at which point Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me take the lead as we head towards Cam-lo.

We drive until I can smell Cam-lo, and I have no menthol oil. Xin loi, Wolf. When we get to the edge of the village, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me slow to about 10 mph. It's late morning, and we don't see Fanelli's mamasan or Lon and her brother. Even the old guy who is almost always by the side of the road flipping everyone the bird is also absent.

We drive at 15 to 20 mph again once we're out of the village of Cam-lo. The breeze is number one and soon turns fresh as we distance ourselves from Cam-lo. We drive for about another hour before we stop alongside of the redball for a break.

It's about noon, so we are thinking about lunch, but this might really just be a smoke break. It's a number ten place for a lunch break, as we have hardly any side shade. This is the time of day when the sun slams down on us like a blacksmith's hammer pounding red hot metal on a forge. It does turn out to be a short break and Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gives the order for the Second platoon to move out. We drive a couple of kliks before we turn off the redball onto a trail that heads south. We wait for the rest of the Second platoon to line up and for Double Deuce to bring the mine sweeping equipment up to us.

It's low rolling hills with short green scrub we operate in often, and at least we can see well into the distance. We're only a couple of kliks from the Z. As usual we can see and hear boo coo chopper activity. We proceed at a walking pace as the loader mine sweeps the trail for about 30 minutes. We break for lunch at the top of a small hill with an excellent view of our area.

Fanelli and the loader and I are a tee tee bit distracted by the chopper activity so that Charlie Brown actually has to grab us and tell us to didi mau with him over to Double Deuce with no questions asked. When we arrive at Double Deuce, Smitty is again lecturing the FNG and giving some pointers on heating up c-rats with C-4. Some pointers, but of course not everything. I knew I would see this prank again, and I had already forgotten that it's April Fool's day.

"OK, FNG," says Smitty, "pick yer poison."

The FNG picks out the Beans and meatballs for his lunch. That's a good choice for the prank to work well.

We all know the outcome of the prank, but we hang around to see the FNG's reaction to being had. At least for him it's April Fool's day, so he is getting more of a hint that something is up than I did.

First of all, FNGs should always be wary when someone starts being nice to you or offering help for no apparent reason.

Before letting the FNG heat his lunch, Smitty cautions him, "Now, FNG, always remember when yer done heatin' yer stuff up to never, ever step on the C-4 when it's burning. If ya ferget and do, it'll be yer last step, FNG!"

To make sure the prank comes off well, Smitty has the FNG use about a third of a stick of C-4. The burning flame is like a blow torch. The result being when the FNG holds his c-rats over the flame, the contents of the can are propelled farther than I would have thought possible. And none of it got on the FNG's boots like it did mine.

We all just about split a gut laughing so hard. The FNG takes the prank well, and he gets a good laugh as well. No harm done even if that tee tee prank cost about $300 if we don't count the wasted c-rats.

We saunter back to 2-3 after what will probably be the high point of our day. When we get back, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is behind the .50 Cal. still on the horn with Higher trying to correct his pay Snafu. Good luck with that, I think. We attend to choosing our c-rat for lunch. We are mindful to stir it well before and during the heating so there isn't another c-rat mishap.

We eat our c-rats as we watch Puff the Magic Dragon and Snoopy working

out an area north of our location, probably at the edge of the Z. Xin loi, Charlie.

When we return to watching the air show to our north, one of the aircraft is missing.

"Hey, where'd Snoopy go?" asks the loader.

"He's right there on Double Deuce sitting next to Charlie Brown." says Fanelli.

"No, not Charlie Brown's dog, Snoopy," says the loader. "I mean the other plane that was with Puff the Magic Dragon, the other Snoopy."

As we survey the sky to our north both the fixed wing aircraft come into our view.

"He musta been behind a cloud," says the loader.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally comes down from the turret to get some shade, and the loader climbs up to replace him behind the .50 Cal. He is once again thoroughly disgusted and cannot resolve his pay Snafu. He says the only way for him to correct his pay problem is to go to base camp on resupply today. That's the first good news I've gotten today. Even though there will only be three of us for guard duty tonight, he won't be missed. Also, it makes us confident in resupply today and more importantly mail call. There is nothing like the anticipation of getting mail or seeing others receive mail, as we always wonder if the Real World is still there. It's difficult to explain, but that's about the only comforting thought we get here in the Nam. That the Real World is still there.

After our lunch break, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to move out. He has 2-6 take the lead but has them break brush so we don't mine sweep.

We keep mostly to the ridge line and hilltops when we can, riding single file. It's blazing hot and so humid our sweat doesn't evaporate, and there is no shade or breeze. Even though we are not mine sweeping, we are only going 8 to 10 mph at best along with a lot of stop and go. Steve, the TC on 2-6, tries to follow the directions of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. But we suspect he doesn't know where we are exactly. Since 2-3 is nowhere near the front of the line, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. can't even see 2-6 most of the time.

I have my canteen full of water, so occasionally I can splash my face and saturate my beard to get my field air conditioning going to cool me off a tee tee bit. Sometimes I even take a swig of the water, but it's boo coo horrible so I usually spit it out after wetting my mouth rather than swallowing it.

We don't expect any action this afternoon, as we can see boo coo far and we see nothing of concern. Also, if we can see boo coo far, so can Charlie. The Second platoon is quite noticeable both visually and by all the racket we make as we move around. Even if Charlie is in the area, he is sure to make himself scarce in the daylight. It would be just be complete suicide for some NVA infantry to take us on in broad daylight out in the open like it is here.

We continue to drive around the rest of the afternoon, and when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. finally has enough of exploring his domain, he has the Second platoon turn around and head back to the redball. And from there to resupply, we hope. We drove around so aimlessly, it is extremely difficult to tell which trail is the one we made when we come to any intersections. We stop and debate which direction at several trail forks. It would be just as fast to mine sweep, but we don't. 2-3 is not leading so I don't mind as much. As usual we just follow orders no matter how dumb. In the end we arrive at the redball and we head east towards Cam-lo.

We are boo coo kliks west of Cam-lo so not even Fanelli is hopeful about resupply by Cam-lo today. So no one is disappointed when after driving east about 9 or 10 kliks, we see the First and Third platoon setting up for resupply in a large open area that we have resupplied at boo coo times.

The tracks of the Second platoon drive around and fill in the empty spaces left by the other two platoons. When I finally climb out of the driver's compartment, it feels number one to be able to walk around and stretch my legs after driving so much today. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is getting his gear together for his trip to base camp. He tells us to didi mau to mail call and we do. We're standing with Wack and the crew on 2-6 as we wait at mail call. Some of the guys on 2-6 get mail, but we on 2-3 and Wack get nothing.

None of us is foolish enough to go to the hot chow on April Fool's Day. We all head to the resupply deuce and a halfs to get our c-rats and supplies. Steve is still hoping to get a replacement breach block for the Little Bastard on 2-6. They ordered it about a week ago. We didn't order much so Fanelli, the loader, and I are able to carry everything in one trip back to 2-3.

When we get back to 2-3, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is talking to 2-5 Tango Charlie, who will be acting platoon Sgt. in Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s absence. We hate that. We are sure to be treated like dog robbers again. But as much as we hate being treated like dog robbers, I almost dance a jig when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is gone. We have boo coo extra c-rats now, so we break open a new case, and everyone gets a tee tee can of c-rat cheese to improve their

chosen meal.

We haven't had an LT since he killed himself, and we've also been without a platoon Sgt. periodically since I've been here. It doesn't seem to matter who our leaders are as it's still a number ten place here in the Nam.

We'll be surprised if we don't get assigned to some number ten detail or mission before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s return. Resupply is ending, as several of the crews are bringing in their concertina wire. 2-5 Tango Charlie is on the horn ordering the Second platoon to prepare to sky to our RON. I help the loader bring in the concertina wire and tie it to the side of 2-3. Fanelli is at the TC's position and on the horn as I climb into the driver's compartment. I put on my commo helmet and start the engine and chat with Fanelli as we wait. Finally we start to move out and Fanelli and the loader and I can chat over the intercom as we drive on our way. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. only gives me driving directions. But when Fanelli is the TC, we chat and I don't feel so left out being all by myself in the driver's compartment for long periods of time. He guides me as I back around and the Second platoon lines up behind 2-5.

It causes me to say to Fanelli over the intercom, "Just like old times." Like when we used to line up behind 2-5 when the LT was still alive. How long ago was that? I can't remember. I can't even remember when monsoon ended. Just same-same days after same-same days here in the Nam.

We follow 2-5 Tango Charlie east on the redball a couple of kliks before we turn south onto a dirt trail. We work our way at the pace of the mine sweeper for about a klik before we come to a suitable site for our RON. It's April Fool's Day so I have my lucky boonie hat on while we search for tunnels. We find no tunnels, so maybe my hat is lucky.

We proceed to put out our night defenses, and then I set my tent up behind 2-3. When I’m finished, I climb up on the turret and drop inside. I don't spend much time in the turret except when the platoon Sgt. is gone. The most comfortable seat in the turret is the TC’s but Fanelli is standing on it as he mans the .50 Cal. We takes turns at the .50 Cal. at about one hour intervals. There's a ventilator fan for the turret, but it's no match for the loader's farts. Fanelli and I make sure we don't miss our turn to man the .50 Cal. and get a tee tee bit of fresh air.

We all stay up till midnight chatting until the loader and I go to bed. Fanelli has first shift at guard. We have one final laugh for April Fool's Day, and it's about how far the c-rats shot out of the can when Smitty initiated the FNG on Double Deuce at lunch today. I feel a tee tee bit better now that I'm

not the only sucker for that prank. I am exhausted so I crawl into my tent, unlace my boots halfway, and lay back with my lucky boonie hat over my face. And that's the last thing I remember.

*August 21, 1876*
*Monday*
*Camp on Yellowstone River at mouth of Powder River*

*This morning dawned bright and clear and continued so all day. Reported through camp that there is 250 recruits on board the steamer Durfee which is coming up the river and also says that General Sheridan is on the same boat. Wagon train fourteen mile from here.*

*At eleven o'clock a.m. today the prairie caught fire in cavalry camp and made them stir around lively.*

*Gamblers still running and pocketing the money off most of the boys. Hastings in trouble again, got up late to get his days rations and is very angry about it. Cursed the cooks and everybody else but finally quieted by the sergeant telling him to keep still or he would put him to carrying a log.*

*Everyone here is his own cook, waiter etc. Only 21 recruits after all. Boat in sight. The Carrol.*

April 2, 1970
Thursday
Quang Tri Province

The loader wakes me at 4 a.m. for my turn on guard duty. I only got four hours of sleep last night but it must have been a solid four hours. The last thing I remember was putting my boonie hat over my face, and the next thing I know the loader is softly calling my name.

When waking someone up in the Nam, it's always prudent to try calling their name first and touching or shaking them only as a last resort. That's one of the things I like about always having last shift of guard is I don't ever have to wake anyone up during The Scary Time. The only time I was supposed to wake someone up I didn't have to because the FNG on Double Deuce shot up the First platoon and woke up Our Dear Platoon Sgt. early. Xin loi, Sarge. Xin loi, First platoon!

Not much sleep last night, but no Idiot Platoon Sgt. to deal with today. But

of course we have to worry about being put on some number ten detail for being perceived as dog robbers.

A clear sky and some stars out, so I can see a tee tee bit at my position behind the .50 Cal. It's a tee tee consolation during The Scary Time. Two more days until my birthday, but I've got to stop thinking about it or I'll jinx it for sure. Plus, if I make it till then it will just be another same-same day in the Nam. There will be no cake and ice cream and people singing "Happy Birthday" to me, and there most assuredly will not be any cold beer to quaff legally for the first time.

I call in my sitreps when my turn comes until finally I see the first rays of the sun peeking through the trees. I wait until I see someone else in the Second platoon lighting some C-4 before I climb down from the turret.

It's not long before Fanelli and the loader are up, and despite our lack of sleep we are all in a jovial mood from Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s absence. Fanelli heats some water for his shave which always prompts me to check my beard in his mirror. I definitely do not look like I'm in the army, and I will surely suffer some sort of retaliation from Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., if he ever returns. Our Dear Platoon Sgt. left us to never return. So we can only hope as much will happen with Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

The atmosphere around 2-3 is much lighter than usual, and we even get a visitor. Smitty stops by to see if anyone wants to order any Tiger beer. Fanelli, not interested in Tiger beer but interested in what Smitty knows, and asks if he knows we're resupplying by Cam-lo. Smitty doesn't know but is just hoping, and so he is planning ahead. I don't want any Tiger beer, but I tell Smitty I want to get more menthol oil from his Tiger Beer Boy. Smitty, like Fanelli, thinks I'm dinky dao for using the menthol oil. But Fanelli thinks I'm even more dinky dao for giving Smitty any money. Smitty moves on to the next track to continue his order taking.

2-5 Tango Charlie orders the Second platoon to prepare to break camp, so I go and bring in my trip flares. I accidentally set one off so Fanelli and the loader get their first laugh of the day at my expense.

When I’m finished stowing the rest of my gear, I climb into the driver's compartment and chat with Fanelli and the loader over the intercom as we wait for our orders. 2-5 Tango Charlie orders the Second platoon to uncircle and line up behind 2-5 and we sky. Where to? We don't know. To do what? We also don't know. Before we leave the RON 2-5 Tango Charlie has one of his side gunners dismount and mine sweep our way back to the redball. We're

about a klik from the redball and it takes about 30 minutes to get there. This morning we find no land mines, and that's number one.

After driving about 4 kliks east, 2-5 Tango Charlie halts and waits for the rest of the Second platoon to catch up. The breeze is number one, but I can see we're going to turn off onto a trail here so no more fast driving for now. I recognize the trail as one that leads to one of the better river crossings. Because the trail crosses the river, I don't allow myself to get any hopes up that we will stop at the river. When we get to Cam-lo River, to me, it really is just like old times.

The Second platoon, given the circumstances, is in a tee tee bit of a good mood due to the absence of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. The Cam-lo River looks like it flows from paradise. The smell of the cool water and the sparkle and noise of it is almost too much. If we just cross the river and continue on, I think I will die. To see and smell this river when we haven't had a cool or refreshing drink of water for weeks now will be too much to bear.

We line up behind 2-5 at the river's edge and wait with incredible anticipation. The longer we wait, the worse it will be for 2-5 Tango Charlie if he orders us across without stopping. The river is surprisingly fast flowing and deep for the dry season, so it must be raining somewhere. After what seems an eternity, orders come to space out along the river's edge at 50 to 75 foot intervals with the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times. For a moment we all think we have died and gone to heaven. For a moment. We know we are really 4 or 5 kliks south of the Z.

I have never seen the Second platoon spread out and get in position so boo coo fast. When we park 2-3, we put up the poncho immediately, and then we flip a coin to see who has guard first. The loader loses, so both Fanelli and I head for the river. Xin loi, guy.

I'm already planning ahead as I have my bar of soap and some clean clothes. It is so hot right out in the sun that I just strip down to my birthday suit and join Fanelli who is already swimming around. The water is boo coo cold but so clear. It feels so rejuvenating. I'm careful to stay upstream of everyone, as I drink what feels like a gallon of water as I swim. I am so thirsty. And it is number one. I'm so thirsty I don't care if there's a dead body in the river upstream from us, I don't care if there's a hundred bodies in the river. I'm drinking it.

Maybe the river water is fed from mountain snow melting and not from rain. Whatever the reason for its frigid temperature, that's what finally forces

me to the shallows near shore. I sit down in about 6 inches of water and splash myself to keep cool as the air temperature must be in the 90's. Except for the guys manning the .50 Cal., everyone is in the river or right next to it. I have a tee tee bath using the bar of soap to lather up and then rinse off in the river. I'm the furthest up, so I hope no one is drinking the river water now. Xin loi, guys.

At least I'm not pissing in it. I have another short swim as I rinse off from my bath. It feels number one to feel clean and be cooled off. I know it won't last long. Fanelli has already relieved the loader from behind the .50 Cal., so he's having a swim now. After washing my clothes, I walk back to 2-3 to hang up my wet laundry to dry. It's close to noon and the swim in the cold water has sharpened my appetite even for c-rats. With just three of us, I can easily score one of the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese for lunch.

After I heat up my chosen c-rat meal, I climb up on the turret and take Fanelli's place behind the .50 Cal. More importantly, I move into the best shade we have at this time of day. Blue sky, good shade, and a tee tee breeze coming off the river. I'm clean and currently not suffering the heat and we have no real platoon Sgt. for the moment. This has been a number one day so far.

Fanelli climbs back up on the turret as we share the poncho shade and watch the loader swimming around with a couple of other guys in the Second platoon. Having finished my c-rat lunch, I'm ready for another swim, but decide to sit in the shade and chat with Fanelli and with some of the other guys manning the .50 Cal. over the horn. We're all feeling boo coo good about getting to swim and bathe in the river today. The tropical heat has been so unbearable lately, and this has been our first respite from the heat in a boo coo long time.

No chopper activity that we can see or hear, so it's quiet along the river except the sound of rushing water and guys laughing and joking in the water. 2-3 is the last track in our line up on the river bank, so from up on the turret I can look downstream and see the whole platoon strung out along the river's edge.

I can see several guys trying to wash some clothes. I say try because we are not well practiced at clothes washing. The results are mixed at best. Lots of broken buttons on the fatigues of the guys who try to employ the Vietnamese rock pounding method. We're not close enough to Cam-lo to have any of the locals show up with offers to wash them, so we're on our

own. I myself just use some bar soap to get my dirty clothes all soapy and then I rinse them thoroughly in the river current. It seems to work fairly well with no smashed buttons and none of us care if our fatigues still have some stains. Don't want to be mistaken for an FNG. A fate, some think, that is worse than being mistaken for a REMF.

The loader finally has enough swimming and returns to 2-3 for lunch. When he climbs up on the turret for some shade, I give him my spot. I hadn't fully laced my boots from my last swim, and I didn't put on any socks, because I knew I'd be back in the water again. So I just kick off my boots and strip back down to my birthday suit and run back into the river. I realize I'll have to be careful not to get sunburned as I look downstream and all I see is lily white bodies, with the exception of No Jets and Johnson. Once again, being the furthest person upstream, I can drink my fill of cold and refreshing river water without much concern.

I try floating and letting the river current carry me downstream, but when I try to swim back upstream the current is too swift. I have to stand up in the shallows near shore and walk back upstream. It is boo coo hard going, as the river bottom is cobble stones which are sharp and slippery and hard on bare feet. Even so, I let myself float down the river several times, as there is nothing else to do. I finally feel cooled off enough to get out. Plus I don't think my feet can take another walk upstream on the rocky river bottom. I stand up along shore and let myself drip dry in the sun. It doesn't take long for the sun to correct my thinking about not seeking shade. When I return to 2-3, both Fanelli and the loader are ready for another swim, so I take position behind the .50 Cal.

Fanelli has his transistor radio out so I can listen to music from the Real World. Fanelli and the loader, after watching me float down stream, are anxious to try it themselves. I should have warned them about the river bottom, but they'll soon find out. And they do, as it's a number ten walk back upstream with all the nasty rocks on the river bottom. After they do it once, they give it up. They are smarter than me, I guess.

There seems to be a breeze that just blows down the river following the rushing water. On a hot day like today it feels number one.

Another plus about Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. being gone is that other Second platoon members actually come to visit, like now. While I'm on guard, Wack stops by. As we're chatting and joking, Johnson shows up in search of Ham and Eggs, of which we have many.

We haven't been throwing them away as usual. And now, because of my great performance of pretending to enjoy them, every time Fanelli puts a can of it in our stash box, he says to me, "This is for you, Wolf."

I watch Johnson open and consume the first can of Ham and Eggs, trying to pick up some acting pointers. He's good, and what's really impressive is that he can keep it up when eating the second can. I could never eat two cans in a row and keep up the acting. It's possible he really likes them. But I doubt it. You can almost smell the farts to come when you first open the can.

About half the day has passed so far, and it's been as enjoyable and entertaining as can be expected when you're 5 kliks south of the Z. I'm in my driver's compartment for some shade, so I pass the time by making entries in my journal. I'm just thinking about trying to squeeze in a third swim when 2-5 Tango Charlie announces over the horn for the Second platoon to prepare to move out. Wack has to didi mau because 2-4 is in the middle of our line-up along the river, and it's boo coo far. Johnson is on the next track over, so he doesn't have too far to go. I knew I should have gone for my third swim earlier, but I had a number one time joking with the guys and sitting in the shade.

2-5 Tango Charlie has 2-3 lead the way on the trail back to the redball. No mine sweeping, so we proceed at a fast pace. With Fanelli's guidance, I make no wrong turns, and in short order we are back at the redball. 2-5 Tango Charlie takes the lead as we head east on the redball towards Cam-lo.

Things have been so number one today, we can't help but hope to resupply near Cam-lo. We have money and Smitty wants some Tiger beer, and Fanelli and I want some Ramen. Maybe even, dare I say it, bread? Bread! How long has it been since I had bread? A boo coo long time, I know that. So long, I can't even remember when it was. I better stop thinking about it, or I'll jinx it for sure.

Too late! As we follow 2-5 Tango Charlie east on the redball, I see him pull off into an open area we resupply at often. We circle up and leave spaces for the other two platoons. As I position 2-3 under Fanelli's guidance the loader dismounts and starts to put the concertina wire out by himself. I need to find out his first name, I think.

I shut the engine down, grab my boonie hat and climb out of the driver's compartment. There won't be mail call until the other two platoons get here, so we wait. Eventually the First and Third platoons arrive.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. will be gone for another day at least since he did not

return to the field on the resupply convoy. Fanelli and I leave the loader back on 2-3 with the promise to get any mail he may receive. We catch up to the crew of 2-6 and Wack. They all have noticed the failure of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. to return, so there's some concern about tomorrow. The First platoon is being lead by our troop CO, a captain, and the Third platoon still has their LT. We in the Second platoon have only acting platoon Sgt. 2-5 Tango Charlie. If there are any missions tomorrow, the Second platoon is sure to get the worst one. We hate that!

Mail call turns out to just be another exercise in waiting, since none of us on 2-3 get any mail. I relieve the loader behind the .50 Cal. while he and Fanelli didi to pick up our supplies. I check out our c-rat stash and find a Spiced Beef, which I only hate a tee tee bit. After heating it carefully with C-4, I climb back up on the turret. Just then, Fanelli and the loader return with our supplies and two cases of c-rats.

They're not tempted by the hot chow either, so they both start their selection process for their dinner. While they eat, I drop to the ground and unwrap our supplies and stow everything. I don't know how much longer we will be here, so I don't light the trash on fire yet. We won't have to suffer breathing all the smoke although some of the burn holes are on fire already, spreading dense black smoke through our resupply site.

As I walk back to 2-3, I catch a whiff of some of the smoke and quickly realize that's not diesel smoke! Although the juicers haven't been able to score any beer or whiskey that I'm aware of, apparently the Heads have been able to score some pot. Pot is such a non-issue here in the Nam that the Heads are toking down even now when the CO is around. They are being tee tee discreet, as I don't see anyone walking around with a lit joint or guys passing a bong around. If I did I might be tempted to get in on it.

Some of the other platoon crews are starting to bring in their concertina wire, but we have to wait for our orders from 2-5 Tango Charlie. We don't wait long before he orders the Second platoon to prepare to sky for our RON.

Fanelli has already been chatting away with me since I've had my commo helmet on. He has me back up and uncircle, as does the rest of the Second platoon. We all line up behind 2-5 Tango Charlie, and we head west away from Cam-lo. Xin loi Fanelli.

As we head west the sun is low in the sky and shining right into my eyes. It takes me a few seconds to get my red sunglasses out of my ammo box. Because I have 20-20 vision, the army won't issue me any sunglasses. As if

needing corrective lenses has anything to do with the sun shining right in your eyes. Unlike Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., 2-5 Tango Charlie is more attuned to when sunset happens here in the Nam. We only drive about 2 kliks before he slows and stops by a trail leading off the redball. It's still light but it won't be for long. We only proceed into the bush for about 15 minutes before we arrive at our intended RON. We have been here before, but not for a while.

We flatten everything, park, and then dismount to search for tunnels and booby traps. It continues to be a number one day, as we find no tunnels and no booby traps so we proceed to set out our night defenses. It will soon be The Scary Time, number one day or not.

I'm still setting my trip flares on ultra hair triggers, so it takes me a tee tee bit longer to set mine out. The loader puts the concertina wire out and I take Fanelli's place behind the .50 Cal. so he can help the loader set up the RPG screen. There's still a tee tee bit of daylight left as we finish with our night defenses. I stay behind the .50 Cal. as Fanelli and the loader climb into the turret and turn on the red interior lights.

We have boo coo more fun joking around and chatting on the horn than when Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is here. We're in a pretty good mood considering we all have to stay up to at least midnight, and then we'll only get four hours of sleep like last night. Fanelli had first shift last night, so the loader has first shift tonight. That means the loader has to stay up till 2 a.m. I get last shift at guard as usual.

We take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. until midnight when Fanelli and I get to go to sleep. It feels number one to lay down because I stayed in the turret all evening. Unlike my driver's seat, there really isn't a comfortable seat in the turret.

I unlace my boots half way and put my boonie hat over my face and wait for sleep to come. Hopefully before the bugs. But after a number one day here in the Nam, my luck finally runs out and the bugs, as usual, win. They land and take off like I'm their own personal landing strip.

*August 22, 1876*
*Tuesday*
*Camp on Yellowstone River at mouth of Powder River*

*Boat came in last night. 21 recruits on board, 4 of whom were assigned to our company. The wagon train also came in. Each man allowed a blanket a*

*piece. We will start out for a 10 day trip. We went across the river and got pots and some camp kettles so that we will not have to make coffee in the cups any more.*

*Pretty decent fellows the recruits. Rain last night, slept under a brush pile.*

*Would have been run over by a fellow on horseback only that I called out, "Keep off the brush pile."*

*But even if I did sleep under a brush pile, I slept well and that is all I cared for. Very cold this evening. Borrowed some money and bought several cans of peaches (small ones). One dollar each but tasted good.*

*On guard tonight. Raining hard. No sleep tonight.*

April 3, 1970
Friday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m. for my stint at guard. He waits for me to crawl out, not only to make sure I don't fall back to sleep, but also because he wants the sleeping bag. We only have two sleeping bags now because for some reason Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. took one with him to the rear. The sleeping bags are so damp and funky smelling, we don't care which one we use as we're so tired when we get to lay down and sleep. Compared to our B.O. and farts, the sleeping bags smell number one. But I'm glad I only have to lay on top of it now that monsoon is over.

I climb up on the turret while Fanelli drags the sleeping bag under the tarp. I can see someone smoking a cigarette on the other side of the RON. It's not like we're hiding out here at our RON. We set up as late as possible so it's not immediately apparent where we are. But if we're known to be in an area, it wouldn't be hard to find us. Especially if we have a Mad Minute which is all about "Here we are! We're bad!"

I don't so much mind someone smoking since any sniper would be shooting him and not me. But night is a tough time for snipers without a starlight scope. We only have one starlight scope that we have to share amongst the whole Second platoon. I'm sure our snipers have their very own starlight scope, but I doubt that Charlie has any. Unless they are using some of ours that they captured. And if so, I hope they got some batteries with it. We can't seem to get any that last very long here in the Nam. Xin loi, Charlie.

I call in my first sitrep when my turn comes and all the sitreps are

negative. It feels like I'm in a oven with the door closed, and it will only get worse when the sun comes up. But we still sigh with relief when the sun comes up and ends The Scary Time. It’s my second night in a row with only four hours sleep, and it's starting to catch up to me. I have to keep slapping myself to stay awake. All I can think about is coffee, and I can't have any yet. Another round of sitreps goes by, and all is still quiet.

Tomorrow is my birthday, and I'm feeling fairly hopeful of making it. I still try not to think about it so I don't jinx it, but I’m having little success. If I make it, it will be boo coo anti-climactic as there will be no fanfare. I can't, in my wildest dreams, imagine Fanelli singing the Happy Birthday song to me.

Because of my extreme fatigue, time seems to drag as I wait for The Scary Time to end. But eventually the first few rays of sunlight penetrate the trees and brush and gradually the sky starts to brighten. I quickly get my water boiling with C-4, and soon I'm having my morning cup of java with my usual coffee klatch of bugs. Blowing the bugs to the far side of my canteen cup is not much different than blowing on it to cool it off but maybe a tee tee bit more important.

Fanelli and the loader are both tired and cranky. Fanelli as always starts heating water for his shave. My beard is so long now I couldn't shave it off with my razor. I would need to start with scissors, of which, I have none. The loader is cruising through the open case of c-rats for his chosen breakfast and while the box is open I grab a pecan roll that just happens to be laying out in the open.

Being up on the turret and listening to the chatter over the horn I hear Higher asking 2-5 Tango Charlie if there is room for a Huey loach to land in our RON. 2-5 Tango Charlie gives them a roger. The last time we had a visit from Higher, it was a Full Bird colonel who was concerned about my use of C-4 for heating up c-rats. Maybe we're getting a new LT, we think. Maybe. It's not much later that we hear a chopper approaching. When it comes into sight, it is just above the tree tops and already slowing down to land. A tee tee bit of debris blows around as the chopper lands just off the center of the RON until the pilot shuts the engine down. Even before the rotor blades stop, an officer jumps out. 2-5 Tango Charlie is walking over to him, and when I finally get a good look at him, I realize it's a general. Must be Our General, I'm guessing, and his uniform is tailored and pressed jungle fatigues with crisp military creases on his shirt. He has two chrome plated pearl handled revolvers that he carries around in two holsters at his waist. The pistols are so

shiny that they sparkle as they reflect the early morning sun. The pistols are outshone, however, because he also has a chrome plated helmet that he is actually wearing. His gleaming helmet makes it even more noticeable that 2-5 Tango Charlie and virtually everyone else in the Second platoon are walking around bare headed. Xin loi, General.

I quickly realize how number one it is that Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is at base camp or else the general would have been coming over to 2-3. I'm not sure what Our General's reaction to my beard would be, but I'm confident it wouldn't have been favorable. I'm keeping close tabs on Our General as he skys around the RON. If he gets too close or actually comes over to 2-3, I plan on dropping all the way into the turret until he didi maus.

In three days I will have been in the Nam for three months, and this is the first time I've seen Our General. And now I'm trying to stay out of his sight. I'm having a good laugh as I watch the screw ups on Double Deuce try to do the same thing as they move all over the RON to keep away from Our General while 2-5 Tango Charlie escorts him around.

The thing that's number one about Our General being here is that Higher must consider this a “safe” area. Even so, he doesn't stay long. After one quick walk around of the inside of the RON, he is back on his chopper and gone. I did notice that he had gotten his boots dusty. They probably have a medal for that just for officers. I bet he was anxious to didi mau to the rear so he could put himself in for whatever medal is deemed appropriate. I would guess that to be the D.B.C.Z., Dusty Boots in a Combat Zone medal.

After the general didis, our worries turn to our more immediate concern: that of being the orphan crew since being abandoned by Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. When we were last abandoned by Our Dear Platoon Sgt., we were sent on the Mission to Hell looking for the remains of the tank crew that hit a bomb rigged as a land mine. We hate that!

2-5 Tango Charlie gets on the horn and orders the Second platoon to prepare to break camp so I bring in my trip flares and much to Fanelli and the loader's amusement I set off one of the trip flares trying to disarm it. I really don't mind their teasing, because if I can't disarm one of my trip flares in daylight, I can't imagine that Charlie will be able to get past my trip flare set up in the dark. And that is precisely my intent. I bring in the claymores and wind up the detonator wire and then stow everything. I take my tent down and roll up my stretcher in it, and I let the loader roll it all up in the tarp and we tie it all to the side of 2-3. The loader has already brought in the

concertina wire while Fanelli talks on the horn. The loader and I take down the RPG screen, and we on 2-3 are ready to sky.

I climb into the driver's compartment as the loader climbs up on the turret and drops half way in the loader's hatch. I put on my commo helmet, start the engine, and wait for directions from Fanelli. He has me back up and line up behind 2-5 at the edge of the RON. 2-5 Tango Charlie has one of his side gunners dismount and start mine sweeping our way to the redball.

After spending the day on the Cam-lo River yesterday we can't even dream about that for a while. We on 2-3 are just hoping we are not singled out for some “special” mission today. As we pull onto the redball 2-5 maintains the lead and heads west. We cruise for a while at 15 mph and the breeze hitting me in the face is number one. I've got my canteen filled with water so I can periodically splash my face and beard for a tee tee bit of added cool down. I sometimes even drink the water from my canteen, but it's horrid stuff so I keep it to a minimum.

We continue heading west for about an hour so the breeze I get for most of the time is number one. I hate for it to end, but I know it will and eventually it does.

We slow and come to a stop at the edge of the redball. We're in an area where it looks like the road was cut into a mountain side. On the north side of the road, the terrain goes up at a boo coo steep incline, and on the south side the land drops off rather sharply. As we wait while 2-5 Tango Charlie confers with Higher we are once again sitting ducks. We hate that. There's nowhere we can drive around here except on the redball, so any mission around here will have to be on foot. We really hate that!

It's still a tee tee bit before noon. If they send a patrol out soon they will certainly miss lunch and maybe more. If Higher is not concerned about us getting killed, we certainly can't expect them to be concerned about any missed meals. After a few anxious minutes, 2-5 Tango Charlie orders the Second platoon to move out. A collective sigh of relief goes up, similar to when the sun comes up. We are quickly back up to 15 mph and the breeze is also back. We continue heading west for another 3 kliks where the terrain on both sides of the road levels out. 2-5 Tango Charlie has 2-4 come to the front and start breaking brush on the north side of the redball. 2-4 enters the bush, which isn't too high or too dense so our field of view is fair. Certainly nothing like the number ten jungle we drove around in the southern part of Quang Tri province a few days ago. We are making good time to wherever we are

going, because we forgo mine sweeping.

It's past noon a tee tee bit when 2-5 Tango Charlie calls a halt and has the Second platoon break for lunch. We spread out as best we can and still keep all the tracks in sight of one another. Not a number ten place to break for lunch but not number one either. Orders are given for the .50 Cal. to be manned at all times. Tomorrow is my birthday, and I worry that I may have jinxed it by thinking about it too much. Before I climb out of the driver's compartment, I strap my holster on and put my hated .45 into it. Unloaded of course. I put the magazine clip in my pocket for safe keeping. Fanelli immediately notices my hated .45 and shakes his head in disapproval. I don't waste my time explaining my reasoning as I rummage around in our c-rat stash. It's so miserably hot I'm almost not hungry, and the c-rats do nothing to correct that. I eat because I know I should. Plus if I don't eat now, I don't know when I'll get a chance to.

Some of the platoon members are taking advantage and visiting the other tracks. Wack and Smitty both stop by for a chat. Because we're the platoon Sgt.'s tank crew, Smitty and some others assume we know more about our future destination than them. We don't. We know nothing, as we are told nothing. Smitty wants to score some Tiger beer, and he is frustrated because he and the rest of the juicers have money but can't find any Tiger beer to buy. We share his pain. Fanelli and I want Ramen, and we too have money but nowhere to spend it. We also want bread and milk, but even money won't get them for us where we are. Bread. Something so common back in the Real World you never give it a thought.

Smitty is getting no useful information from us, and as he gets ready to didi he says to Wack, "See you later, boy!"

Wack immediately shoots back, "Now I know you said 'Leroy' even though Leroy ain't my name. Cuz I know you didn't say 'boy', cuz there ain't no boys here!"

Smitty was expecting that response from Wack, and it's OK because they are friends. Being called “boy” is acceptable teasing among friends, but we all resent it when the Lifers do it. That goes double for the Soul Brothers. If you decide to call one of the Brothers “boy”, you are sure to find out if you are truly friends or not. As we all walk around with loaded automatic and semi-automatic weapons most of the time, my advice is this: call no one “boy” here in the Nam.

2-5 Tango Charlie orders the Second platoon to prepare to move out so

Wack skys back to

2-4, and I get back into the driver's compartment. Fanelli has already been chatting away with me over the intercom. I don't have my hated .45 on my lap, as the brush isn't too dense, but I am wearing my shoulder holster for the first time.

The heat seems even more intense than usual. How can people live here, I wonder? Certainly air conditioning and fans would help, but we have neither. We don't even have any cold water, just warm, very warm water. Maybe it seems boo coo hotter today because we got to swim in the Cam-lo River yesterday. We can't expect to do that again for a while, especially if Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. ever returns.

We drive around aimlessly for most of the afternoon. Because I sit so low in the driver's compartment, I have no idea where we are. So I am boo coo surprised when we break out of the bush at the redball.

2-5 Tango Charlie moves up to the head of our column and starts heading east on the redball. We all hope we are going to drive all the way to Cam-lo so we can enjoy the breeze and be able to spend some of our money. There is no joy in money if you can't spend it. I know we are boo coo far from Cam-lo, so I try to not let myself hope at all.

Long before we get anywhere near Cam-lo, 2-5 Tango Charlie starts to slow down. I can see the First and Third platoon arranged for resupply, so we in the Second platoon fill in the spaces left by the other two platoons. The loader dismounts and starts putting out the concertina wire while Fanelli talks me into position. He is not as fussy as Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., so we get 2-3 positioned ASAP.

All three platoons made it to the resupply site before the resupply convoy, and that's not surprising to me as resupply has to come all the way from Dong Ha which is farther than Cam-lo. I'm thinking the resupply better get here soon as they will have a boo coo long drive back to Dong Ha, and they will want to be back before dark.

The loader and I climb up on the turret with Fanelli as we all wait for the resupply convoy. We half expect Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. will be returning with the convoy, and it will feel number one to get more than four hours of sleep at night. Though if he doesn't return, that will be OK too. Actually, that's preferable.

As we wait I'm watching some of the Brothers shaking hands. When a group of Brothers meet, they often exchange special and boo coo elaborate

handshakes with each other, but only two at a time so the others watch until it's their turn. Sort of like calling in our sitreps, it can sometimes take a while. Actually it always takes a while, but we often have time to fill as we wait for one thing or another. Along with the elaborate hand shake, there is also some verbal chanting about how boo coo bad they are as they tap or pound on their chest with their free hand. The Chicanos and some of the Heads also have similar handshaking and chanting rituals. For the rest of us, it boo coo entertaining to watch and about the only entertainment we get. We are so engrossed in the handshaking circus, we almost don't notice the resupply convoy when they arrive. But as soon as someone yells, "Mail call," they have our attention.

The loader offers to man the .50 Cal. while Fanelli and I sky to mail call. I'm really going to have to find out his first name now. Today might be my chance if the loader gets mail. They only call out our last names at mail call, but if he gets mail, his full name should be on the envelope.

But he loader gets no mail, so his name will remain unknown for now. Neither Fanelli or I get any mail, but boo coo other guys do, so we know the Real World is still there. We hope. Also, no sign of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. on the convoy, so that's number one.

Fanelli and I sky to pick up our two cases of c-rats and the rest of our supplies. The loader climbs down when we return to 2-3, and the three of us stow our supplies and then pick the c-rat meal of choice for our dinner. We're tired from lack of sleep and the heat and humidity. But our mood is still good as we joke around while we eat. Another full day, my birthday, without Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. I consider that the boo coo best birthday present, ever.

Resupply starts to break up as the convoy of deuce and a halfs didi mau for Dong Ha. 2-5 Tango Charlie is on the horn to the rest of the Second platoon with orders to uncircle and follow 2-5 to the redball. Fanelli is chatting with me as he guides me back.

We only get a few minutes of cool down heading east on the redball before 2-5 Tango Charlie pulls off into the bush. After less than 30 minutes of breaking brush, we arrive at an open area. Most of us then dismount and we search the area for tunnels and booby traps. The loader mans the .50 Cal. while Fanelli and I join the search. We won't go in any tunnels found, but we want to be in on the search so we are confident there aren't any. No tunnels found tonight, so we start to set out our night defenses.

Now that I'm only hoping to make it to my birthday tomorrow without

jinxing it, I understand a tee tee bit about how difficult it can be to not jinx yourself if you get short.

I put out the trip flares set on ultra hair triggers and then put out the claymores. Fanelli has been manning the .50 Cal., so I help the loader set up the RPG screen. He already put the concertina wire out for me.

We still have a tee tee bit of light left but not much. Fanelli continues to man the .50 Cal. while the loader gets in the turret. There's room in the turret for me but I climb into the driver's compartment so I can stretch out in my seat. I chat with the loader and Fanelli as we take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. We wait for midnight and the start of guard duty for us. I nap a tee tee bit, as I am so exhausted from lack of sleep the last few days. When midnight comes, I can't wait to climb into my tent. I am so tired even the bugs can't keep me awake tonight. Xin loi, bugs!

*July 28, 1876*
*Friday, Sylvester's 21st birthday*
*Camp Poaker*

*Today my birthday. Marched sixteen miles today. Had a very good guard last night. Three prisoners (Poakers). Have a very good camp. Encircled by a row of cottonwood trees. River close.*

April 4, 1970
Saturday, My 21st Birthday
Quang Tri Province

Because I'm so tired, the loader has to actually give me a shake when he wakes me at 4 a.m. I'm sure he is loath to do it, since he knows about my hated .45 that is by my side. I'm groggy as I crawl out of my tent. The loader pulls the sleeping bag out to use under the tarp.

"Are you awake?" he asks just to make sure.

"I think so," I reply.

I climb up on the turret of 2-3 and drop half way in halfway out of the TC's hatch. I'm so tired I have to keep slapping myself in the face to stay awake. I hate that. All I can think about is coffee and how badly I want and need some right now. I'm still slapping myself around when the first round of sitreps are being reported. I give my sitrep when my turn comes. All the

sitreps are negative and that's number one.

It's hot all the time now, even at night, and by hot I mean the kind of heat where your clothes are always plastered to you as we are all soaked in our sweat. Still the sun, when it rises, commands respect all day. We can't wait for the sun to rise, but when it does we hide from it when we can. The sun makes its appearance and guard duty finally ends.

Normally when I light the C-4 it wakes the rest of the crew up but not today. I finish heating my water and pour in the instant coffee and creamer. The noise of the Second platoon moving about eventually wakes Fanelli and the loader. They both look how I felt when I got up this morning, crappy. Not only do they look crappy, but they're both crabby as well. Lack of sleep is the only thing that makes us miss Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. a tee tee bit, but no more.

There's some horn chatter going on, more than usual because of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s absence I think. I'm a tee tee bit ahead of the loader and Fanelli because they slept in. While they finish their breakfasts, I drain the collected water out of 2-3's fuel filters, and then I walk around and inspect all the track blocks. Everything looks tiptop, and the track tension is good on both sides and that's number one.

Fanelli and the loader are barely finished with their breakfasts when 2-5 Tango Charlie shows up at 2-3. We know this can't be good and it isn't. We've been expecting to be sent on some number ten mission to maintain our reputation as dog robbers. Two of the Second platoon's tanks, 2-3 and 2-6, along with three of the platoon's P.C.s, Double Deuce, 2-4, and 2-7, are being sent somewhere about 2 kliks south of the Z for the day. This is a number ten mission in a number ten place for sure. 2-3 and 2-6 are to be used as artillery pieces to fire main gun rounds into North Viet Nam. Double Deuce, 2-4, and 2-7 are to guard our rear and to act as support helping with the unloading and unpacking of the main gun ammo and then burning all the packaging. We're supposed to meet up with two deuce and a halfs loaded with main gun ammo at the redball that will accompany us to our firing site.

I start to bring in my trip flares and the claymores, and then I stow everything. We have to hustle because Fanelli, who knows the location of our mission, says it's boo coo far. It looks like the rest of the Second platoon is to remain at the RON after we leave, so I don't set fire to our trash. 2-3 starts right up as it always does and should as it's practically new, although it doesn't look it. The layers of mud and dust plus all the gear we have bolted

and tied to it makes it look old and used.

Fanelli is chatting away with me as he talks me back. 2-6 is already waiting at the trail head followed by 2-4 and Double Deuce when I pull up. 2-7 pulls up behind us as Fanelli, Steve, and Sgt. Green discuss our route to the firing site. Fanelli and Sgt. Green both know the way, but they let 2-6 lead to the redball. Steve has Big Al get out front and mine sweep our way. Because we proceed at a walking pace, it takes about an hour to reach the redball.

Sgt. Green on 2-4 takes the lead of our tee tee procession as we head east to meet the ammo trucks. We get up to 15 mph, and it's probably going to be the only cool down we get and the breeze, for now, is number one. We continue heading east for about 3 kliks, and we see the deuce and a halfs waiting at the edge of the redball. Sgt. Green pulls alongside the first deuce and a half and tells the driver to follow us. Fanelli and Sgt. Green have been discussing the expected trail conditions to where we are headed. The deuce and a halfs are fully loaded with ammo and all parties are concerned about being able to make it there. We know the tanks and P.C.s can get there, but for the trucks it might not be possible.

As I listen in on the conversation on the horn, someone points out if the deuce and a halfs can't make it to the firing site, it sort of cancels our mission. But someone else points out we can't just leave a deuce and a half loaded with ammo 2 or 3 kliks from the Z.

This is turning out to be a number ten mission. Just like we thought. I'm glad I'm not in charge. Since we are at less than platoon strength, we decide to proceed with one tank in the lead and one tank bringing up the rear. Steve, the TC on the other tank, doesn't know the way to our destination. Fanelli does, so 2-3 leads the way. When we turn off the redball onto a dirt trail, Fanelli has the loader dismount and start to mine sweep for our procession. It's slow going and although not jungle, it's bush and a number ten place. The guys on the deuce and a halfs are understandably nervous. We are too, even if we are armed to the teeth while the deuce and a halfs only have someone riding shotgun with an M-16. Boo coo pathetic, we think. They won't be much help in a firefight. It's scorching hot with no breeze. Fanelli says there will be no shade where we are going. The trail is boo coo rough in places, so we have to get way ahead of the trucks periodically so they can speed up and drive fast to make it through some of the worst places.

We break out of the bush onto some open rolling hills. We don't have to drive on the trail, so we call Wack in, who replaced the loader doing the mine

sweeping. We start to break brush through the scrub to our destination. Breaking brush through the scrub allows me to drive about 10 mph, and we arrive at our destination well before noon.

2-3 and 2-6 are set on the front edge of a small ridge with our main guns aimed at North Viet Nam. We can see the Z a klik or two to the north of us. It's very apparent by the burned and barren ground. The terrain is rolling hills pockmarked with bomb craters as far as the eye can see. The whole area is devoid of trees or vegetation of any kind. An area that looks hard fought over. It looks a tee tee bit the way I imagine Hell would look, but I think Hell would have less bomb craters.

The three P.C.s set up behind us, and we're arranged in a small circle, sort of a mini-RON. The crews on the P.C.s start unloading the main gun ammo off of the deuce and a halfs and stacking it up next to 2-3 and 2-6. In the center of our mini-RON, Wack and Smitty start to dig a hole to use to burn all the packaging from the main gun ammo. It's hard rocky ground, and the digging is hard. Of course Zack and Big Al have to watch and offer encouragement but little else as usual.

It takes till close to noon to unload the ammo and stack it all next to the tanks. It's a boo coo amount of main gun ammo. A sliver of side shade next to the tracks is all we have. Unloading two truckloads of ammo in the sun is an enormous amount of work and so we break for lunch before we start firing it off.

By opening a fresh case of c-rats Fanelli, the loader, and I can all have one of the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese we use to slightly improve our c-rat lunch.

After lunch Fanelli and Steve are on the horn with Higher about our mission this afternoon. Higher has some spotter aircraft observing as we fire our first rounds off at the coordinates given to us. They are having us fire the ammo beyond our field of vision. So after we fire off some shells, the airborne spotters call with new coordinates for Fanelli and the gunner on 2-6 to aim at for the next series of shells.

Because we aren't using any of our base load ammo, I don't need to be in the driver's compartment. And since Fanelli is sitting in the gunners seat inside the turret, I'm at the TC's position behind the .50 Cal. While Fanelli is firing the main gun and the loader is loading, I keep a lookout with the binoculars. It's open ground all the way to the Z, so my field of vision, especially with the binoculars, is number one. I don't think Charlie can sneak up on us in our current position, and I want to make sure he doesn't.

We are firing so far beyond our field of view that I can't even see where it's hitting with the binoculars. We're firing HE rounds. The "HE" stands for high explosive, and I wouldn't want to be on the other end of where we are firing. If we don't count the extreme heat and high humidity, it's a beautiful blue sky day with some tee tee white puffy clouds here and there. If you look up and really use your imagination, you can almost feel like you're back in the Real World. Almost, but not.

The scrub is quite green despite it being the dry season. It's like a vast rolling sea of green that just seems to change to blue at the horizon. The airborne spotters from Higher call with new coordinates for the next rounds to be fired. I'm wearing my commo helmet, so I can listen in on all the horn communication from Higher and the target spotters. This is the first time I've been at the TC position when firing the main gun, and it is boo coo loud. My commo helmet works well to block the noise of the main gun blast when I'm in the driver's compartment with the hatch closed, but up here on the turret my ears are ringing again.

Because the main gun is so loud, just before Fanelli gets ready to fire the main gun, I drop down into the turret as far as I can. It helps a tee tee bit, but the damage has already been done. My ears will be ringing for a while. That being the case, I climb down from my lookout on the turret and take a turn handing ammo up to the loader when he comes part way out of the loader's hatch for the next round. If I survive my year in the Nam I'm sure to be deaf or close to it before I'm done.

The afternoon passes slowly as the pile of main gun ammo gets smaller and smaller.

Higher lets both tank crews take a break from firing. The loader and Fanelli and the crew on

2-6 can't wait to get out of the turret as it is hot in there. It's hot out here too, but now there's a tee tee bit of side shade next to the tracks so we all hunker down in it for the only cool off we get. The pile of main gun ammo is down to about the last third. We figure it will take about another hour to fire it off. I give up my place in the side shade to continue my lookout to the north from the turret. Higher has us take a 30 minute break as the aerial spotters move to the next target location.

I decide it's time for the loader’s first lesson and introduction as to the proper way to load the ammo belts into the ammo box for the Little Bastard. I start by telling him it's boo coo important that the ammo box is filled exactly

right. There is no *good enough*, it has to be perfect. The ammo is pulled out of the ammo box at an extremely high rate of speed when the coax is being fired. The ammo belts have to be put in perfectly so they can come out perfectly. Loading the ammo box is not that difficult during a casual time if you've had some practice. It's filling the ammo box during a firefight and when the main gun is being fired when it's both difficult and dangerous. Not to mention a boo coo important time for it to be done correctly. It's times like that when you're so pumped up on adrenaline that you consider High Alert to be a relaxed state of mind.

The loader appears attentive as I pull several layers of ammo out and then slowly and carefully replace it. He thinks he is ready for his first loading attempt, so we switch positions. Because I am practiced at it, I make it look easy as the loader quickly finds out. I have a good laugh because I knew he wouldn't be able to do it his first try. No one can. Now I tell him the really important part, and that is the recoil path of the main gun. It's painted on the turret floor with wide red lines. As a loader he knows that, as that is the main religion of loaders. It's just that you have to remember not to forget where the recoil path is in all the excitement of a firefight. If you forget, the main gun will remind you when you are hit by the breach block resulting in a serious injury if not death. It would be number ten.

It's too hot and stuffy to stay inside the turret, so we end the loader's lesson for today. We both climb out for some fresh air. Hot air but fresh. Being in the turret with the loader can be a life threatening situation when he starts farting.

We hunker down in the side shade for a tee tee while longer, and then the aerial spotters call us over the horn with new target coordinates. It's about 3 p.m. as we continue to fire main gun ammo at targets beyond our field of view. After we fire off about five rounds and are waiting for sitreps from the aerial spotters, we start to take incoming.

They definitely have our coordinates, as the first rounds land right in the center of our mini-RON. One round hits the pile of main gun packaging in the burn hole and blows all the crating and packaging all over the place. Even though we're used to loud noises and explosions, the incoming sound blast takes us all by surprise. It smells like burned gunpowder from firing all the main gun ammo, but now it also smells like explosives. Just like old times.

Most of us can barely hear after the explosion from the first incoming round. A second round of incoming hits us before some of the guys can take

cover. The TC on 2-7 gets hit in the back from the incoming shrapnel. He was taking all the cover he had, but the bullet shield on the tanks and P.C.s is open at the rear. With the incoming landing in the center of our mini-RON, all the TCs are exposed.

I was tucked safely away in my driver's compartment just by dumb luck. All luck, except bad luck, is acceptable here in the Nam. The TC's wound is a number ten one, and he was bleeding pretty badly until Wack and Sgt. Green got a bandage on him. Doc is with the rest of the Second platoon, so we have to do our own first aid. Fanelli is on the horn calling in a dust off chopper for the wounded TC. We wait for the chopper before we fire anymore main gun ammo at the remote targets.

We are boo coo lucky none of the main gun ammo stacked next to the tanks got hit. That would have been so number ten that there would be no need for the dust off chopper, as all of us would now be dead. Blown to smithereens kind of dead. The dust off chopper is here in about 15 minutes, and the wounded TC seems in good spirits as they load him onto the dust off chopper. Once he is gone, Fanelli calls in a status report to officially notify base camp of 2-7 Tango Charlie's wounding. As he closes his report over the horn he gives today's date which is April 4th, 1970.

When I hear Fanelli say the date at the end of his report, I realize it's my birthday. My 21st birthday to be exact. In all the excitement and trying not to think about it so as to not jinx it, I have forgotten about and almost missed my birthday. I made it to 21, but I'm currently in a number ten place having survived two rounds of incoming. And we have to stay here to finish our mission. I hate that!

While we're still taking a break, I grab the can of Planters nuts that I have left from my goodie box and had been saving should I actually make it to my birthday. Fanelli and the loader are both hunkered down in the side shade of 2-3 when I walk up and join them.

"What's the occasion?" asks Fanelli when I offer some of the nuts to both of them.

"My 21st birthday is today!" I reply.

Fanelli, always a hard guy to impress, just says, "See if you can make 22."

22? I just want to make it out of the Nam alive.

This should at least silence my little inner voice. Now if I get killed, my dying thought won't have to be: I should've eaten the nuts! I feel bad that 2-7 Tango Charlie got wounded. But if that hadn't happened, I would have

missed my 21st birthday. Xin loi, 2-7 Tango Charlie.

It seems absurd, but we collect all the packaging after the incoming blew it all over the place. War is weird. We still have some main gun ammo to fire off, and we hope we can fire it off and didi before there's any return fire like last time. Now that I made it to 21, my next milestone here in the Nam would be R&R if we make out of here today. But I better not start thinking about that or I'll jinx that for sure, as it will be another three months before I can go.

The aerial spotters give us target coordinates and Fanelli and the gunner on 2-6 fire off the first volley and then we get new coordinates based on where the first rounds landed. After the second round, the aerial spotters tell us to fire the rest of the ammo at the last coordinates, and that's what we do until all the ammo is gone. We then pour diesel fuel on everything in the burn hole. It is an awesome pile of wood, paper, and debris. When we light it, the flames shoot at least 25 feet into the air. There is boo coo black billowing smoke, and as Charlie already has our coordinates this just screams, "Here we are!" So we uncircle and didi mau on the trail we made coming here.

At first it's easy to identify our trail, but once we get to a couple of forks in the trail none of us is sure which trail is ours, so we start to mine sweep. It's getting to be late afternoon but we proceed at a walking pace back to the redball.

We're still leading the way on 2-3, and to give the loader a break, Charlie Brown has Smitty come up to the front to mine sweep. Because 2-7's TC was dusted off, they are a 3 man crew as well. We're still in a number ten place and two of the tracks are short a crewman. We luck out and find the trail through the bush that we mine swept earlier, so we proceed a faster pace but not much. We just want to make it to resupply and meet up with the rest of the Second platoon before The Scary Time. Although we all agreed this was the right trail, they still all look alike so there is always some doubt. Since I'm in the lead, I worry. When we finally break out at the redball there is a collective sigh of relief.

The deuce and a halfs, now empty, say their goodbyes and then head east to base camp as fast as they can drive. We drive about 4 kliks east before we see the resupply convoy.

It's going to be a three platoon mail call, and because it's my birthday, Fanelli offers to stay behind the .50 Cal while the loader and I sky to mail call. It's a large crowd, so at first we can't find anyone we know, but after a while we hear Wack calling us and we meet up with him and the crew of 2-6.

We were together for most of the day, so we have little news to share, but we have another good laugh about what a mess the incoming made when it hit our trash in the burn hole today. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. isn't here so I can't ask him if the incoming counts as no longer being a cherry. For the TC on 2-7, the cure was definitely worse than the disease. As much as I was jinxing myself by thinking about my birthday, I made it. And so far haven't gotten wounded either. So far.

My lucky streak ends with the end of mail call, as I get no mail, not even a birthday card. Since my luck has run out, I definitely will not ruin what is left of my birthday by attending the hot chow offering today.

Fanelli and the loader sky over to the resupply deuce and a halfs. Although it was a number ten mission this afternoon, it was number one that we didn't have to shoot off our base load. If we had, we would now be humping main gun ammo to top off our base load.

The resupply site is bigger than two football fields side by side since all three platoons are here. About 30 track vehicles and close to 150 guys to feed and resupply. It takes Fanelli and the loader a while to get back to 2-3 with our supplies and c-rats. In honor of my birthday, Fanelli opens a new case of c-rats and both of them insist I choose first for the c-rat meal I only hate and not detest for my birthday dinner. For that it's got to be the Spiced Beef. The Spiced Beef still reminds me of Fanelli's mamasan's bread. Xin loi, Wolf. I mention to Fanelli and the loader that the best birthday present I get is the absence of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. Although getting only four hours of sleep at night is getting old.

The other two platoons are still engaged in their resupply duties as we in the Second platoon start bringing in our concertina wire and start to uncircle. 2-5 takes off slowly at first, heading west until all the tracks of the Second platoon are on the redball, before speeding up to about 15 mph. After about 4 kliks 2-5 Tango Charlie then turns south off of the redball and starts breaking brush through the short scrub. Rolling green hills almost as far as we can see. The sun is low in the sky and that means it will be dark soon. We have a good field of view and the brush breaking is going well, so that we arrive at our RON with enough daylight left, we hope.

We drive in circles more out of habit than any need to flatten anything. I hope for the best in the last few hours of my 21st birthday and we find no tunnels or booby traps. I set out my trip flares, trying my absolute best to make them impenetrable. I put out the claymores next while the loader sets

out the concertina wire, and then he and I set up the RPG screen. I set up my tent while Fanelli and the loader tie the tarp to the side of 2-3. We still have a few minutes of daylight left by the time we're finished, so we congratulate ourselves on a job well done.

We take turns sitting behind the .50 Cal. for an hour each until midnight. I decide to try my best to stay up until midnight because I missed most of my birthday. The masquerade is over. I am finally a *Man*, legally, at least. At midnight and the end of my birthday, I head for my tent feeling number one that my inner voice should have no complaints left. I, on the other hand, do have some complaints. I unlace my boots halfway and lay back and put my boonie hat over my face. I wish that for just once, the bugs would leave me alone but of course they don't. Maybe they just want to wish me a happy birthday since no one else did. Xin loi, Wolf.

*June 25, 1876*
*Sunday*
*Ft. Pease area*

*Today was lucky enough to find some gooseberries of which I eat my fill. Dug a ditch around the hospital tent is about all I done through the day.*

*Some of the men think that they heard guns fired up the river. I do not think they did. Day pleasant.*

April 5, 1970
Sunday
Quang Tri Province

Fanelli wakes me at 4 a.m.. The four hours sleep at night is really getting to me. It is so hot that I'm in a daze. When I drop half way into the TC hatch and stand on the TC's seat, I try to put myself in as an uncomfortable a position as possible hoping I don't fall asleep. I really think I could fall asleep standing up. I am so tired, so once again, I have to slap myself around to stay awake. I make it to my first sitrep. Only seven more to go till the end of The Scary Time. One of the guards on the other side of the RON reports some noise in front of them. Permission is given to fire a couple of grenades from Thumper.

The explosions don't usually wake the sleeping platoon members. If

anything, they sink deeper to sleep, confident that the guards are being vigilant in their task. The guard fires a couple more grenades and receives no return fire so far. My hearing is not completely back to normal after yesterday's mission. I don't think it'll ever get completely back to normal, but the ringing in my ears has stopped for now. No more noise or activity reported on the other side of the RON, so that is number one, and the rest of the Second platoons sitreps are negative just like mine.

All I can think about is coffee. I need coffee but my mind keeps saying, "Sleep!" I have to ignore my inner voice again as sleep would be number ten right now, as much as I want to.

Someone's canteen is sitting next to the .50 Cal. so I splash my face with some water, and it's almost number one. It keeps me awake and refreshes me a tee tee bit and cools me off some as well. Another round of sitreps pass, and I give mine when my turn comes. Back in the Real World it would be light by now, but here in the tropics we are still waiting for the sun. Another guard is reporting hearing noise in his vicinity and permission is given to fire a couple of grenades using Thumper again. Again the exploding grenades have no apparent effect on the sleeping members of the Second platoon. No return fire and no continuation of any noise. Number one so far. The sounds are probably just some animal that has somehow escaped being killed already. Boo coo remarkable but somehow a tiger and a boar survived. Well, the tiger survived.

The first rays of sunlight finally make their appearance. As exhausted as I am, as soon as I let the sun shine on my face, I feel a burst of energy that I can't explain.

I have been saving my last brand new white t-shirt to wear on my 21st birthday, but having been sent on our dog robber mission so early yesterday morning, I totally forgot about it. I open my thermo chest and get my white t-shirt out and put it on. Clean and white. It feels good and looks even better. It's a good thing Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. isn't here, as he would be having a fit right now about my non-standard-issue-attire and my beard.

Fanelli and the loader are both bleary eyed and a tee tee bit grumpy this morning. So after making my coffee and grabbing a c-rat pecan roll, I get back up on the turret and sit behind the .50 Cal hoping for a tee tee breeze to go with my breakfast.

After Fanelli shaves he looks and seems to feel much better. We both would feel boo coo better if we could get some Ramen again. I'm careful not

to mention it out loud lest I jinx it. Now that Fanelli is fully awake he gives me that knowing look that I still respect. Fanelli is still The Man. He says nothing but just shakes his head. I don't really have a valid excuse for wearing my white t-shirt today except we're in the tropics and it's hot and humid. Yesterday, when I actually had planned to wear it, I could at least say I was celebrating my birthday. My excuse today sounds pathetic: I meant to wear it yesterday, but I forgot. Xin loi.

The Second platoon is ordered by 2-5 Tango Charlie to prepare to break camp, so I bring in my trip flares without incident, and then I bring in the claymores and wind up the detonator wire and stow everything. The loader brings in the concertina and then he and I take the RPG screen down. While he unties and rolls up the tarp around the RPG screen, I take down my tent. 2-5 Tango Charlie breaks brush through the scrub so we don't mine sweep. It's fast going for once, and we are at the redball in less than fifteen minutes.

When we arrive at the redball, there is a jeep from base camp waiting for us. The passenger is Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. At least, I think, he was gone for my birthday. He chats briefly with 2-5 Tango Charlie before dragging his gear over to 2-3 and tossing it up on the bustle rack. Fanelli relinquishes the TC position to Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

I say to Fanelli over the intercom as we get underway, "Just like old times, aye Fanelli?"

After a couple of minutes of getting settled in, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. orders the Second platoon to follow 2-3, and then says to me, "Head west, Driver."

I start slowly so as to give the rest of the tracks a chance to space out properly. After a couple of minutes, I get 2-3 up to 20 mph and the breeze is number one. We drive for an hour before we stop for a break. The drivers all dismount to stretch our legs and check the track blocks and road wheels. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is on the horn with Higher. Presumably about our mission, but knowing him he might still be trying to correct his pay Snafu.

The break isn't long and was probably more for the smokers than for the drivers. It's the boonies out here with no civilian traffic and no military traffic except us. There are no farms or rice paddies or villages. After another hour driving west on the hard top, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. calls a halt. When the rest of the Second platoon catches up, he has me pull off the redball heading south breaking brush through short green scrub.

The terrain is gently sloping hills as the eye can see. We drive slowly at

about 5-10 mph for about an hour before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has the Second platoon circle up on a small hill with a good view in all directions.

At least for once we're not sitting ducks. After all the tracks are properly situated, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. lets the Second platoon break for lunch. He stays up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. Fanelli and the loader and I now have the unpleasant task of trying to decide which c-rat meal to eat. Except for using the tee tee cans of c-rat cheese and peanut butter, we are out of tricks to improve the dining choices. We quickly heat our chosen meal, and then we hunker down in the side shade of 2-3 to eat.

We have little to look forward to in our current situation. Our food is horrible, but at least we have it. Our drinking water is warm, but we have it also. No more holidays until Memorial Day at the end of May. Not that there is any holiday celebrated here in the field. Pay day is at the end of the month, but except for the poker players, most of us will probably still have money left from last pay day, so tee tee excitement there. After an hour for lunch, Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has the Second platoon move out.

Except for the scorching heat, our mission today is going well. We continue to have an excellent field of view due to the rolling hills and the short scrub. We try to go from one hill top to another and drive along any ridge lines, trying to always be on the highest ground. Boo coo amounts of horn chatter today, as many of the Second platoon are still unaware that Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has returned.

We drive over hill and dale the rest of the afternoon, and we see no other person or thing. For me it is number one. We start heading back north, as we have been traveling south-southwest and lastly west. As we continue heading north, most of us expect to hit the redball sooner than we actually do. For a tee tee while it makes us think we are lost. We hate that. Eventually we do finally see the redball off in the distance and make it there without incident. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. isn't exactly sure where on the redball we are, but he is confident resupply is to the east. We're hardly full of confidence.

We're heading east with the sun mostly behind us, and once I get going the cool down is number one. After we drive for about an hour, there is a boo coo amount of horn chatter concerning the location of resupply as it is getting late. But Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has us continue to head east and finally we can see the First and Third platoons off the side of the redball.

Because we are the last platoon to arrive, it’s almost like a game of musical chairs as the tracks in the Second platoon fill in the open parking

spaces left. It takes me a couple of back up attempts under the guidance and watchful eye of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. before I have 2-3 situated to his exacting standards. He stays up on the turret behind the .50 Cal. so he can start playin' soldier again now that he's back in the field.

Fanelli and the loader and I head for mail call after putting out our concertina wire. None of us on 2-3 has gotten any mail recently, so we are all hopeful. We would even be satisfied to get more X-rated brochures from Denmark. It is such a big crowd for mail call that it takes a while to catch up with Wack and the crew of 2-6. Because Wack and my last name start with 'W', we have to wait till almost the very end of mail call for our disappointment. At least we get to be hopeful longer than the rest of the guys. No mail again for the crew of 2-3, so we decide to go pick up our cases of c-rats and the rest of our supplies. We decide to forgo the hot chow today, as we are decidedly out of luck with mail call and the return of Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.

The three of us are able to hump all of our supplies in one trip. We relieve Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. so he can head to the hot chow. I'm the first to finish heating up my c-rats, so I settle in behind the .50 Cal. and eat my dinner. The three platoon resupply site is huge, and because of the smoke and dust I can hardly see all the way to the other side. The smoke is from some of the burn holes that have been lit already. Some of the Lifers worry that the locals will score some of our refuse. That happens when we're near Cam-lo but not here. So we have to breathe all the smoke until we sky as if the heat and humidity aren't enough already.

At least the sun is going down soon, but that just means a tee tee bit less heat and more importantly the start of The Scary Time. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. returns with today's hot chow offering. I hope it tastes better than it smells, but that would be doubtful. On second thought I hope it tastes even worse than it smells. Xin loi, Sarge! The hot chow is only made worse by being served on wimpy paper plates with little plastic forks. Just like a picnic but without the ants.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt., being finished with his modest repast, orders the Second platoon to prepare to sky to our RON. Fanelli and the loader bring in the concertina wire and I light our trash after applying a liberal splash of diesel fuel.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt orders the Second platoon to follow 2-3 and then over the intercom he says to me, "Head west, Driver." For once I can just pull

forward and drive across the site to the redball, so I need no guidance from Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. At the redball, I give the rest of the tracks in the Second platoon a chance to space out properly before I get going 20 mph and maybe a tee tee bit faster. I'm driving into the setting sun, and even with my red sunglasses on I can barely. But it's late, so I drive almost as fast as I can so we get to our RON as soon as possible.

We don't go more than 4 kliks before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. has me stop. He has the loader dismount when the mine sweeping equipment arrives, and we proceed north into the bush on an existing trail. Compared to the area we drove around all afternoon, this is a number ten place. Not as number ten as the jungle but still number ten. We hope we don't have to go too far, as it’s getting late. I have my hated .45 loaded and on my lap carefully pointed at my ammo box. Fortunately, we don't travel far before we arrive at a suitable RON site.

It's such a number ten place, the ground gets extra scrutiny for tunnels tonight. Even after a thorough search and nothing is found, I'm still apprehensive. Some tee tee bit of luck for us today. We start putting out our night defenses. I hope there will be no AP or LP tonight because as always I set my trip flares on such a hair trigger no one, including me, can get through. Next I set out the claymores and string the detonator wires up to the turret and hang all the detonators over the bullet shield for the .50 Cal.

Fanelli and the loader are tying the tarp to the side of 2-3 while I set up my tent. I can only think of one good thing about Our Idiot Platoon Sgt.'s return, and that is we may get more sleep tonight. I really need it. These last few days of four hours of sleep at night have me near the point of collapse in this heat. We hear Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. announce that after dark, we are having a Mad Minute. We haven't done that for a while, and it just means cleaning all the guns tomorrow morning and humping ammo at resupply. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. apparently can't wait to start playin' soldier again after his tee tee hiatus to the rear. If he's so hot to shoot, he should have been with us on my birthday.

Fanelli and the loader climb into the turret as I climb into the driver's compartment. I stretch out in my driver's seat and get my journal out and catch up with my entries. Then I try to take a tee tee nap before the Mad Minute starts. Luckily I've already named all the main gun ammo, so Fanelli and the loader won't be disappointed. We usually use ammo from the driver's compartment for the Mad Minutes so we can keep the turret full of ammo and

also so I can practice handing main gun ammo to the loader through the ammo pass-through. The rounds are fragile and each one weighs about 50 lbs, and I have to pass them to the loader underhanded and to the rear. It definitely takes practice, and I for one need it.

I manage to catch a few winks before Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. gets on the horn and says, "Second platoon, prepare for the mike-mike."

I climb out of the driver's compartment and knock down the RPG screen. Just as quickly, I climb back into the driver's compartment, drop my seat all the way down, and close my hatch cover. I put on my commo helmet and start the engine.

Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. next announces over the horn, "Second platoon, prepare to commence fire," followed by the order, "Commence fire."

I hold on to my steering bar as the front of 2-3 lifts off the ground when the main gun is fired. I hand a main gun round to the loader and over the intercom I can hear him and Fanelli laughing about the name on the main gun round. We only fire four main gun rounds, but Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is having a field day with the .50 Cal. I guess he really missed playin' soldier.

Eventually, over the horn he orders, "Cease fire, Second platoon!"

At least we won't have to hump much main gun ammo at resupply tomorrow. It's definitely quieter in the driver's compartment than at the TC position, and my ears aren't even ringing after the Mad Minute. With the loader's assistance, we set the RPG screen back up in the dark and then we both climb back up on the turret. The loader gets back inside, but I just stick my head in to verify that I have last shift on guard which I do. I am so exhausted all I want to do is sleep. I feel my way back to my tent and crawl in. I put my boonie hat over my face and am soon fast asleep. For once I don't even notice the bugs. Xin loi, bugs.

*June 28, 1876*
*Wednesday*
*Near Ft. Pease*

*This morning is very pleasant. This afternoon two men from the command arrived. They were looking for the steamer on the Big Horn River. They reported Gen. Custer and cavalry all killed, having had a fight at the Big Bend of the Little Horn River 60 miles from here. There is some wounded which they want to get on the boat is the reason why they are looking for it.*

*It seems General Custer arrived at the place where the two commands were to meet a couple of days ahead of time and with his usual confidence and audacity attacked the Indians immediately on finding their camp. When the Indians appeared in great numbers they were all lost.*

*We can scarcely credit it. It seems impossible that so brave a commander as General Custer with his dashing cavalry should be annihilated at one blow. It is true we do not know the whole truth yet but will in a few days as the command will come back as soon as the dead are buried. We all hope for the best.*

*Our company here consists of about eighty men and we are getting alarmed for fear of the Indians coming this way. Which if they would I am afraid we will never get away from here alive as we are camped in a very bad place for Indians to attack us.*

April 6, 1970
Monday, 90 days since leaving Oakland
Quang Tri Province

I am not awakened by the loader, but by automatic and main gun fire at about 3 a.m. I can tell by the sounds that I am about to be cured of my Cherry Disease, whether I like it or not. I don't really lace up my boots. I just wrap my laces around my boot tops once and quickly tie them, grab my hated .45, and sky up for 2-3.

I make a mad dash for the driver's compartment amid the eerie glow of the lume the mortar crew is already shooting up. I drop in and close the hatch all the way. I start the engine, and then I put on my commo helmet and wait for any orders. Because of last night’s Mad Minute, I only have six main gun rounds left next to me. The loader asks me for a main gun can round, and I hand it to him. There is no laughing in the turret at the name I have written on the round this time.

I hold on to my steering bar every time the main gun is fired. We fire several can rounds to the area in front of us. If Charlie was out there, he no longer exists on this planet. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is firing up the place with the .50 Cal. and Fanelli is laying down fire with the coax between the rounds fired from the main gun.

I continue to hand the remaining main gun rounds next to me to the loader until there is nothing left. It's surprisingly spacious in the driver's

compartment now that all the ammo is gone.

The firefight has only been going on for about 20 minutes, but we only have about half of our base load left. It's still three hours until daylight. If things keep up the way they are, we're going to run out of main gun ammo. And with the way Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. is firing up the place with the .50 Cal., we're likely to run out of .50 Cal. ammo too. We don't carry much .50 Cal. ammo, just a few boxes on the bustle rack.

I'm listening to all of the Second platoon's horn chatter during the firefight. It's apparent that the brunt of the firefight is on the opposite side of the RON with the attack focused on 2-6 and Double Deuce. Charlie was watching our Mad Minute last night. It makes sense he would attack the wimpy tank and the screw up P.C.

I hear Big Al on the horn requesting help and .50 Cal. ammo. Their coax machine gun is inoperable and after firing the main gun once, it is now inoperable as well. All Big Al has left is the .50 Cal., and he says he is getting very low on ammo, and that would be boo coo easy because as I said, tanks don't carry a lot of .50 Cal. ammo.

I call Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. over the intercom. Since there is no ammo left in my driver's compartment, I offer to go over to 2-6 and load the .50 Cal. for Big Al. Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. accepts my offer, so I grab some extra ammo for my hated .45. I put my hated .45 into my holster and strap it on. I also grab my steel helmet and put it on, I think, for the first time. It feels boo coo heavy compared to my lucky boonie hat which I leave behind.

As I jump out of the driver's compartment, I get away from the front of 2-3 as fast as I can. Not only am I completely exposed to gunfire from Charlie, I also worry about Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. firing the main gun or the coax while I'm here. In the eerie light of the lume, I can tell Our Idiot Platoon Sgt. blew the RPG screen down by firing a can round from the main gun. We'll have to order a new one on resupply tomorrow if we don't all get killed, because this one is Fubar.

The RON is at least 100 yards across. I head for the center of the RON, as I would guess

2-6 to be almost opposite of 2-3. It's almost as intense as a Mad Minute, as all the tracks of the Second platoon fire off into the darkness, somewhat sporadically at times. No one can see much in the light provided by the lume. The lume actually shows our position better than it exposes Charlie.

It's boo coo open ground from 2-3 to the mortar pit in the middle of the

RON. When I get to the middle of the RON, I drop into the mortar pit to take some cover before I run the rest of the way to 2-6. I can also now see exactly where 2-6 is from here. I crawl across the mortar around the edge, trying to keep out of the mortar crew's way. On the other side of the mortar are several guys who have been wounded, including my friend Steve, the T.C. on 2-6. Steve's got a serious stomach wound, and Doc has patched him up as best he can and given him some morphine. Steve is still in boo coo pain, but he is keeping tabs on the situation. He said when he left 2-6, Zack and Big Al were firing the .50 Cal. which was the only operational gun they have. They were low on .50 Cal. Ammo, and they still are, as I just heard Big Al requesting .50 Cal ammo over the horn. Steve confirms the attack was mostly in front of 2-6 and Double Deuce, so I don't waste anymore time. After locating 2-6, I run directly to it from behind. On the way to 2-6, a lume round fired by the mortar crew explodes, lighting up the area as it floats down to the ground with its tee tee parachute. In the bright light, I can see Zack sitting on the bustle rack on the turret of 2-6. He is right out in the open, and it's a number ten place for him to be in a firefight.

I quickly jump up on the rear engine deck of 2-6 and ask Zack if he's OK. He's just sitting there with his helmet and flak jacket on, and he sort of looks OK, but he doesn't answer back. Then I notice a red dot on his shirt in the center of his chest that keeps getting bigger. I grab him and pull him down to the ground behind 2-6 so that he's not right out in the open.

I climb back up on the turret of 2-6 and get behind Big Al. He's been firing the.50 Cal. for about 30 minutes or more without any hearing protection. He can't hear anything I say unless I put my lips next to his ear and yell. Being hard of hearing is something I know tee tee about lately. I touch his back first to let him know I am here.

As soon as he realizes I'm here he screams, "More ammo, more ammo, I need more ammo!"

He's not wearing a helmet, so I take mine off and put it on his head before I jump back down to the ground. Zack is still sitting behind 2-6 where I left him, and I can see he definitely got hit in the chest by something. I think he must be in shock, so I think I better get him over to the mortar pit so Doc can have a look at him. I manage to get Zack to his feet, and we half run, half stumble and fall our way to the mortar pit where I drop him off with Doc.

Because we're mostly getting hit on the side of the RON where 2-6 and Double Deuce are, I run to the opposite side to 2-4. Sgt. Green lets me have

all the .50 Cal ammo I want. But I can only carry two boxes at a time, one in each hand. It's another 100 yards across the RON back to 2-6, and it's completely out in the open. I try to cross the RON in mostly dark, but when several lume rounds light up the area, I drop into the mortar pit for some tee tee cover.

It's becoming apparent to me that it's number one the mortar crew digs such a big pit. It is getting boo coo full of wounded members of the Second platoon. I'm starting to wonder which we'll run out of first, ammo or platoon members.

I'm trying to time my runs in the open when the lume is almost out. Although sometimes it is completely dark, the mortar crew tries to not let that happen. This is one time when I'm hoping for the dark time. As the last lume goes out, I make a run for 2-6. I put the ammo boxes up on 2-6 and then climb up. I approach Big Al from directly behind for a tee tee bit of cover in front. I stack the two boxes of .50 Cal. up on the turret where Big Al can see them. Then I drop into the turret through the loader's hatch. The first thing I notice, besides the fact that the main gun is embedded in the radio rack, is that the turret floor is covered with cherry juice. That is number ten and would definitely be considered a hydraulic system failure. What is number one and almost a miracle is the horn still being functional so that Big Al was able to call for assistance. I can tell there is nothing that I or anyone else can do about the main gun's disabled hydraulic system.

Well, that's it, we only have the .50 Cal. I better get hustling and go get some more ammo for it. I climb out of the loader's hatch and quickly get behind Big Al. I yell into his ear that I'm going after more ammo and he nods his head indicating that he heard me. I drop to the ground behind 2-6 and decide to try to get some ammo from a P.C. closer to 2-6. I run over about two P.C.s and stick my head in the open rear and ask for some ammo. It's all laid out on the floor in two layers, and the TC says to help myself, so I do. I'm running from the rear of one P.C. to the rear of the next for a tee tee bit of cover. I'm trying to stay out of the line of fire, but there's really no cover out in the open.

I make it back to 2-6, but Big Al is shooting up the .50 Cal. boo coo fast and is still low on ammo. I just stack the two ammo boxes next to him and jump down for more. I decide to run across the RON again so I can use the mortar pit for cover and check on the wounded.

Steve is still keeping an eye on the situation and is worried the RON is

going to be overrun. The way we set up in a circle is the best defensive position, but if the circle is broken and Charlie gets inside the RON, that would be number ten. The armor around the .50 Cal. on the P.C.s and the tanks is open in the back, so they're very vulnerable from behind. Although the tank turret can be rotated so the .50 Cal. could shoot up the RON, the .50 Cal. on the P.C.s can only fire in the forward direction. It would be a mess if the RON is breached. I decide I can't let that happen, and I run for more ammo. This time I go back to 2-4 and then back to the mortar pit.

On my way back to the mortar pit with two boxes of .50 Cal. Ammo, I can feel bullets zinging by my head. I drop into the mortar pit next to Steve.

I say to him, "Man, Steve, I'm starting to get an attitude. Someone has been trying to blow my head off all morning."

Steve smiles. I think the morphine is taking effect, and he's feeling a tee tee bit better.

"Yeah," he says, "I've been watching the muzzle flashes from a NVA in front of the concertina wire between Double Deuce and 2-6. He's been shooting at you all morning."

"That-mother-fucker!" I say under my breath. I definitely won't be running over to Double Deuce for any .50 Cal. ammo.

"Hey man, thanks for the head's up," I say to Steve, and then I make another run for 2-6 trying to keep out of sight of my tormentor.

When I get back to 2-6, Big Al is almost out of ammo again. I just stack the two boxes I brought, jump down, and run for more. I'm trying to keep out of sight and time my runs to the periods of dark between the lume rounds. But I keep getting caught out in the open none the less. I still can feel the bullets flying by my head. It's boo coo unnerving. Two ammo boxes of .50 Cal. are boo coo heavy, but I hardly notice. I am so pumped up on adrenaline that I consider High Alert to be a relaxed state of mind.

This time I run to the mortar pit and drop in for cover until the lume goes out. I make a run to the P.C. two over and to the right of 2-6, staying as far away from Double Deuce as I can. I just reach in and grab two more boxes of .50 Cal. ammo, no time for small talk. As soon as the lume dims some, I run straight back to the mortar pit trying to use the P.C. for some cover.

The mortar pit is getting boo coo full of wounded, so it's hard for me to crawl to the other side dragging two boxes of ammo while staying out of the mortar crews way and not step on any of the wounded. Firefights here in the Nam typically last for a few minutes because both sides can only carry so

much ammo. When everyone has automatic weapons, the ammo is gone in a few minutes. It's number one that the Second platoon is a mix of tanks and P.C.s If we were a pure tank platoon, we would be out of .50 Cal. ammo by now, as we have been fighting for about an hour. The P.C.s can carry boo coo amounts of .50 Cal. ammo, and right now that's what's saving the day for 2-6.

As soon as the lume dims again, I run for 2-6 and stack the ammo boxes where Big Al can see them. It's been quiet for a few seconds, so I put my head up and have a look in front of 2-6 when the lume lights the area.

There is a pile of dead bodies just beyond the concertina wire. The pile is so boo coo big, the NVA are trying to take cover behind it. It's not working out too well for them though, because when Big Al shoots at them with the .50 Cal., the bullets go right through the dead bodies, wounding or killing the NVA that are taking cover. They are just added to the growing pile of dead bodies. I can tell we're being attacked by NVA, because they are heavily armed and they all have helmets and green uniforms. I quickly duck back down so my heads not a target again. It's a grotesque and surreal sight. I wish I hadn't looked.

The smell of death is all around us, but Big Al is firing the .50 Cal. Again, and it uses ammo at a right smart rate. I drop off the rear of 2-6 and go for more. I run straight back to the center of the RON and the mortar pit. As soon as I get there it goes just about dark, so I make my run for the P.C. where I got the ammo last time. A number one run so far, as I'm timing the dark periods well. I grab two boxes of .50 Cal. ammo and run back to the mortar pit. Just as I drop in, the RON lights up again.

The mortar pit is boo coo crowded now with the mortar crew and all the wounded. At the first cycle of dark, I'm on my way back to 2-6. I approach 2-6 from the right side, and I don't feel any bullets zinging by my head . That's number one. I put the ammo boxes up on the turret and then climb up and stack the ammo boxes next to Big Al. I'm finally staying ahead of Big Al's firing rate. We have three full boxes of ammo and one open box with its belt connected to the .50 Cal. When that box is almost empty, I open a full box and snap the fresh ammo belt to what is left of the last one. The .50 Cal. is so loud when firing that both Big Al and myself can't hear a thing. The firefight seems strangely silent and off in the distance.

I drop off the right side of 2-6 and run to the P.C. next to it for more .50 Cal. ammo. The rear ramp is down, so I can just reach inside and grab some. I really don't have time to ask for it. I notice they are getting down to the

bottom layer of ammo. That's going to be number ten if this firefight doesn't end soon.

Now I'm wondering how the NVA carried so much ammo here. It's been more than an hour since the start of the firefight, and they still have ammo. Must be a boo coo lot of them. That's number ten for the Second platoon.

As soon as it's sort of dark again, I run back to 2-6 with the .50 Cal. ammo. I stack it next to Big Al and we now have four full boxes of .50 Cal. and one open box about half full. I hate leaving Big Al alone, but someone has to get ammo. And I really don't want to trade places with him as much as I hate bullets flying by my head. I think that if I can get the coax to work, it would give me more time to hump .50 Cal. ammo.

I drop into the turret of 2-6 through the loader's hatch. It reeks of cherry juice in here, and it's almost worse than the loader's farts, I think. Almost. Because the cherry juice is all over the turret floor, I'm slipping all over the place as I try to pull the coax out of its mount.

I'm finally able to pull the coax back far enough to work on it. I remember that Steve and Big Al have been trying to fix this coax for a while now. When I open the breach I can see a shell casing that wasn't ejected. I pull it out with pliers and push the coax back into position and reconnect the ammo belt. I reach over to the gunner's joystick and pull the coax trigger. It fires once and stops. I pull the coax back out and open the breach, and there's another shell casing stuck in it. I hate that! I pull that shell casing out, and I see the casing is split. Now I remember. In all this morning's excitement, I forgot Fanelli and I talked with Steve about this coax and told him it needed a new breach block. I guess they weren't able to get a new one yet. It's no wonder everyone calls the coax the Little Bastard.

It's definitely up to the .50 Cal. now, so I stick my head up out of the loader's hatch to try to tell Big Al I can't fix the coax and that I'm going after more ammo. Before I can finish telling him, a bullet zings by my head, narrowly missing it by less than an inch. It hits the bullet shield around the .50 Cal. and breaks into tee tee pieces, several of which hit me in the face and eyes. I really hate that!

As quickly as I stuck my head up out of the loader's hatch, I drop back down inside. One of the bullet fragments hit me on the bridge of my nose which not only really smarts, but I'm bleeding from both the wound and from my nostrils. I still have on my white t-shirt from yesterday, and it is quickly soaked with blood from my nose bleed. I use my handkerchief to try to stop

the bleeding. Every time I open my right eye I immediately get nauseous, and if I don't close it I know I'll puke. I've got something in my left eye too, but at least I can look out of it without barfing.

When I finally get my nose to stop bleeding, I take my blood soaked handkerchief and tie it like a sort of bandana eye patch over my right eye to keep it closed. Now all I want to do is go sit in the corner somewhere and close both my eyes until they stop hurting. But I know I can't do that. The guy that just shot me will be coming for Big Al and me. He may not know I'm still alive, but he'll check for sure.

I pull my hated .45 out of its holster. When the lume goes out and it gets dark, I pop my head up out of the loader's hatch. When the next lume lights up the RON, I can see my guy with my one good eye. He's in a number ten place, and I know this because I have been there. He's caught in the concertina wire, and he is doing exactly the wrong thing. He's thrashing around, and that will just get him caught up even worse. It took both Fanelli and the loader to extricate me when I had my tee tee mishap with the concertina wire, and I wasn't anywhere near caught up like this guy is.

I don't think he'll be able to get loose, but I can see he's still got his AK. So with my one good eye and my hated .45, I shoot at him a couple of times, hoping I can hit him right away. I don't really want to have a shoot out with this guy's AK vs. my hated .45. It goes dark, and when it gets light again, I can see he's still moving. Although he's really caught up in the concertina wire, I shoot at him again. I'm pretty sure I hit him this time, but I can hardly see as my good left eye is watering non-stop. Everything looks blurry. The lume goes out, and when it gets light again, I can see he's still in the concertina wire, but he's no longer moving. That's number one.

Big Al is still shooting at NVA in front of 2-6 . As fast as he kills them, more show up to take their place. I don't think the guy in the concertina wire is going to cause me or Big Al any more trouble, so I drop down into the turret of 2-6 and sit on the loader's seat and close both my eyes. It feels number one even though they both hurt boo coo.

It's probably about 5:30 a.m. now, and there's still another hour of darkness before The Scary Time ends. The firefight continues into the third hour, and I'm still wondering how did the NVA get all that ammo here? Someone's got to run out first, and I just hope it's them and not us. I'm fairly confident that I have been cured of my Cherry Disease, but as is often the case, the cure is worse than the disease.

I can lean into the rear corner of the turret and look out at the stack of .50 Cal. ammo next to Big Al. Big Al still has three full boxes of .50 Cal. Ammo, but I can't tell how much is left in the open box. If we get down to two boxes again, I'll have to run for more. A thought I won't worry about yet. Big Al hasn't had to fire near non-stop for a while now. Maybe the NVA are running out of guys willing to face the .50 Cal. and certain death. Maybe they're just plain running out of guys. I don't care which, but I can't blame them, as there is no true cover in front of 2-6. It's a macabre sight watching the NVA trying to use the bodies of their dead for cover. It doesn't work with the .50 Cal. The NVA who try are just added to the pile of dead. The .50 Cal. goes through just about anything at this range, which I guess to be less than 40 feet. Xin loi!

There is still automatic gunfire from around the RON. But my hearing is so diminished, I can barely hear it. I feel the .50 Cal. when Big Al fires it off more than I hear it. Big Al has just opened one of the last three boxes of .50 Cal. ammo. If I see him open one of the last two, I will go get more ammo, I tell myself. Big Al is still firing intermittently, so I'm hopeful our ammo will outlast the NVAs. They must have humped ammo all night and then attacked us is all I can figure.

It's getting close to 6 a.m., and I can still faintly hear gunfire around the RON. Big Al is still having to correct the thinking of NVA who are brave or foolish enough to go head to head with the .50 Cal. The pile of dead NVA continues to grow in front of 2-6. Sometime after 6 a.m., the faint rays of sunlight can be seen. I can still hear gunfire around the RON. I also think I hear the first dust off chopper arriving. The chopper must have left when it was still dark, and the pilots and crew are boo coo fearless, as this is still a hot location. The dust off chopper is quickly loaded with wounded, and it didi maus for the base hospital.

At 6 :30 a.m. it's light. Not full light, but light. As if a switch has been flipped, the gunfire suddenly stops. Big Al had just opened one of the last two boxes of .50 Cal. Ammo, and then everything went quiet. Big Al stays behind the .50 Cal., and I stay in the turret as we wait to make sure it is really over. The quiet continues, and that is number one.

Big Al looks down at me in the turret and smiles. I smile back. We're pretty sure it's over. He is saying something to me, as I can see his lips moving, but I can't hear what he is saying. After about 10 minutes, one of the platoon members sticks his head into the turret and says something. I can't

hear what was said, and then he is gone.

I just stay put, and Big Al stays behind the .50 Cal. The same guy comes back and sticks his head into the turret. I can see his lips moving, but I can't hear what he is saying. I point to my ears and shake my head “no”, meaning I can't hear. He climbs into the turret and yells in my ear that the second dust off chopper is getting ready to didi mau, and I should get on it. I look much worse off than I really am due to my blood soaked white t-shirt. I tell him I'm OK, and the dust off chopper should didi without me, so he sky's

After about another 15 minutes of quiet, Big Al climbs down from behind the .50 Cal. and I pop my head up through the open loader's hatch. It's near full light now and still no gunfire. I climb all the way out and jump down to the ground. Big Al is in front of 2-6 looking at the huge pile of dead NVA on the other side of the concertina wire. What a suicide mission for those guys as there was zero cover for them in front of 2-6.

I walk over to the concertina wire between 2-6 and Double Deuce to check on the guy I think shot me. He looks dead, and one foot is messed up boo coo bad. It looks like a cork screw, so he probably bled to death. My aim was so bad from my eye condition, the bullet from my hated .45 must have ricocheted off the ground, and then hit him in the foot. I feel bad about killing him, but they started it. Xin loi.

I walk over to Big Al in front of 2-6, and we survey the carnage wrought by the .50 Cal. It is the most gruesome sight ever. There are bloody bodies and body parts laying about. At least this time it's not our own guys who got shot by the .50 Cal. When Big Al and I turn to walk back to 2-6, we look at the RPG screen. It looks like Steve tried to blow it down when he fired the first can round, but it only bent over at about a 45 degree angle which turned out to be number one. Being bent down like that, it wasn't in the field of fire of the .50 Cal., but it was still protecting the hull and part of the turret from RPGs. Evidenced by the fact that there are no less than six RPGs caught by their fins in the RPG screen. After looking at the RPG screen, we have a look at 2-6 and can see where an RPG hit the main gun exactly where the hydraulic seal is. It was either an extremely skillful shot or a lucky one. Either way, it broke the seal on the main gun's recoil system, so when Steve fired the main gun the first time, it lost most of its cherry juice and embedded itself in the radio stack.

Big Al and I keep smiling at each other and punching each other to make sure we are really still alive. Neither of us can hear anything unless someone

yells in our ear.

The whole battle site takes on a surrealistic view to me with smoke still wafting around. The silence seems strange, because I know there is noise being made. Fanelli and Wack show up at 2-6. They try talking to us, but we are both deaf and so out of it that we understand nothing being said.

Wack finally realizes the problem, so he gets next to me and yells in my ear, "Million dollar wound, man, million dollar wound!"

I look boo coo worse than I really am. My beard and white t-shirt are both covered and caked with blood. Mostly from my nose bleed. And then I have my blood soaked handkerchief over my right eye to help keep it closed.

As I walk across the RON to 2-3, several guys from the Second platoon pat me on the back and yell in my ear, "Million dollar wound, man!"

I get to 2-3 just about the time the last dust off chopper arrives. There are a couple of guys left like me with minor wounds. I just have time to reach into the driver's compartment on 2-3 to grab my lucky boonie hat. A few Lifers are catching a chopper ride to the base hospital to check on the wounded. And then I'm sure it's off to the NCO club to celebrate not getting killed.

I'm not ready to didi yet, but when the dust off chopper is almost full, there is one spot left by the sliding door. They just about push me in and close the door behind me. It is jammed packed inside the chopper, mostly the Lifers and one guy laid out in a stretcher. The guy on the stretcher is next to me and when I see his foot, I recognize the corkscrew wound. I realize it's the NVA that was caught in the concertina wire in front of 2-6. Apparently someone thinks he is still alive. I immediately feel better knowing I didn't actually kill anyone.

That thought is barely out of my head when the wounded NVA on the stretcher sits bolt upright. He is definitely still alive. He immediately starts yelling in Vietnamese and waving his hands around. It's fairly well known that one of the ARVN interrogation techniques is to take prisoners up in a chopper and throw a couple of the prisoners out at altitude. This tends to loosen up the tongues and refresh the memories of the remaining prisoners, who usually tell everything they know, only to be thrown out at altitude as well. Xin loi!

Our wounded NVA probably knows this and is worried that we are going to throw him out. He continues to yell and wave his arms around. Because we are so packed in, no one can do anything to restrain him or calm him down. I pull out my hated .45, and I point it at him until he finally stops yelling.

After he quiets down, I point my hated .45 at his foot and say, "Xin loi, Chieu Hoi."

That seems to ease his mind enough that he lays back down and closes his eyes and is quiet for the rest of the trip. It is a tee tee bit tense in the chopper for the pilots and the passengers, as they probably think I might shoot this guy with my hated .45. The bullet could be number ten so close to the others and not to mention the chopper's fuel tanks.

If any of the guys responsible for loading up the last chopper knew the history between me and the wounded NVA, it is unlikely they would have put us on the same chopper.

I look out the window with my one good eye and marvel at how deceivingly beautiful the Nam is from the air. It looks like a tropical paradise with all the shades of green and all the palm trees. It is not paradise though. It is the Nam.

It's a short chopper ride to the base hospital. The chopper lands on a pad about 50-60 feet from the hospital entrance. As soon as the dust off chopper lands, the sliding door I have my back to is quickly opened. I am grabbed by both arms and brusquely lifted up and out of the chopper. I am just as quickly relieved of my hated .45. I hope I never see that piece of crap again.

After I am disarmed, attention is turned to the other wounded, including the NVA on the stretcher. He is carried into the hospital on the stretcher while the rest of us walk in on our own. They put the wounded NVA on a gurney and wheel him away. They make the rest of us stand in line and wait. A pastime that most of us have honed to a razor's edge. Feeling like the least seriously wounded guy here, and also used to being last in line, I am the last guy in line.

I watch as the doctors and nurses clean and bandage the wounded guys in front of me while I wait my turn. Everyone gets an I.V. first thing, and then they attend to their wounds. Because of all the visible blood on my beard and t-shirt, I think for sure they're going to insist on sticking an I.V. in my arm.

When my turn finally comes, sure enough, they want to stick an I.V. in my arm, but I resist. "I hate needles," I say, and they let me slide.

"OK," the nurse says. "Sit down here, and we'll get you cleaned up a bit."

I sit down on a stool as she swabs the dried blood off my face and out of my beard with a wet wash cloth. After they clean my face and beard, they pull a chunk of bullet fragment out of the bridge of my nose. When they get it out, it feels number one, even if it does start to bleed again.

Next they take my blood soaked shirt and my jungle fatigue pants and my socks. They weigh me, and I tip the scales at 185 lbs. 40 lbs more than when I was drafted. So I don't have to stand around in my birthday suit, they give me a set of pajamas and a robe. I won't give them my jungle boots or my lucky boonie hat, and they let me slide again.

I still have tee tee bits of metal debris in my eyes, but the doctors and nurses are done with me for now. After they tape my right eye closed, I take a stroll down the hospital hallway. There's still a lot of activity dealing with all the guys wounded this morning. Some guys are still waiting to go into the operating room. I'm looking for friends, and I find Steve right away.

He sits right up to chat, and he is concerned because he heard the wounded NVA talking as they wheeled him by. The NVA was claiming to be an ARVN. I assure Steve that they know he's an NVA, and I tell him about the incident on the dust off flight here. But I tell him I will talk to someone to make sure they know he is NVA.

Steve goes on to tell me something I didn't know. Our CO is here in the hospital too. As soon as it started to get light, he led the First platoon towards our RON to help us in the firefight. Since they were in a hurry, they didn't mine sweep. The CO's P.C. was in the lead and hit a land mine. The P.C. was thrown up boo coo high in the air from the mine blast. His foot is severely injured, and the doctors think he might lose it. Xin loi, Cap'n! Steve didn't know if his foot injury was from the explosion or from landing on it after being blown into the air 20 or 30 feet.

I'm still on High Alert, but I only got four hours sleep the last few days, and then last night I didn't get much more, considering I was awakened early. It's about 10:30 a.m. now. After all the excitement, I am suddenly feeling completely exhausted .

Steve is being wheeled into the operating room, so I assure him I will go right now and make sure it is known the wounded guy is NVA, and I do. They knew it already, just as I thought.

I head to my assigned ward, and when my one good eye sees my assigned bed, I can't get to it fast enough. It is so clean and white, and it smells so wonderfully fresh. So unlike our sleeping bags. After stowing my jungle boots and my lucky boonie hat in the compartment of my bedside table, I climb into the bed and bury my face in the pillow, and I am asleep in seconds. So far so good. And no bugs!

*June 29, 1876*
*Thursday*
*Valley of the Little Horn River*

*Today very pleasant although looks like rain this afternoon. Wrote to T.C.H. No sign of steamer yet. Six Rees Indians with a scout from Powder River came in this afternoon with the mail from below us. Our Captain told him it was no use to go any further as we expected the command in every day now.*

*Soon after the Rees came in a shot was fired on the other side of river. A boat was taken across and brought over a courier from the battlefield. We then heard the whole story. He told us after the command left here they kept along the river pretty close until the 26th of June when Bobsticks, one of our guides, was sent in search of Gen. Custer and command but had not gone very far when he was run back by Indians. Then he tried another direction but no sooner had he got to the top of a high bluff when he saw Indians in every direction toward the Little Horn River so he gave it up and went back. General Gibbon had went into camp during the night. One of our Crow Indians that had been with Gen. Custer came in and told Gen. Gibbon who General Terry was with that Gen. Custer had a fight and himself and five companies were all killed and that Major Reno with I Co. of the same regiment was on a high hill from which the Indians were trying to dislodge him.*

*The next morning we broke camp early and started for the scene of action. About 10 o'clock a.m. we reached the valley of the Little Horn River and the battlefield. Here the sight that met our eyes that begs our description. Dead men, horribly mutilated, covered the ground. Their horses were laying with them.*

*We could not believe it was Custer then, thinking it might be part of Gen. Crooks command who were thought to be in that part of the country but Lieut. Bradly came riding back with a blood stained vest with the name of Lieut. Sturgess on the lining who is known to be an officer of the 7th Cavalry.*

*The search then became general. General Custer was found on the top of a high bluff with his brother, Tom Custer, and his brother-in-law with several other officers and fifty or sixty men with their horses. All were dead and mutilated as the rest were on the bottom. Gen. Custer had two bullet holes in him, one through his head and another through his breast. Tom Custer had*

*his heart cut out and was otherwise mutilated. The soldiers, some had their arms broken, others legs and all were in a state of putrification from laying in the sun for two days.*

*Hearing some cheering at the upper end of the field we found it came from Maj. Reno's men who were stationed on a high bluff at the upper end of what had been the village. Here we found forty-two wounded and more killed. A great many were killed trying to get water which the Indians guarded carefully. Reno's men had made breastworks out of hardtack boxes with ground thrown up against them.*

*It seems Gen. Custer finding where the Indian camp was he directed Reno to take I Company with the pack train and attack the upper end of the village while he (Gen. Custer) would take the lower end. Maj. Reno after parting with Custer says that was the last he saw of Custer or ever heard of him until we came up with him.*

*In the meantime Maj. Reno made a charge intending to go through the lower end and supposed Gen. Custer was coming toward him but the Indians were so many that he had to fall back. He then tried from another place but was driven back by overwhelming numbers. A company came out with 14 men, another company was altogether annihilated. Maj. Reno then retired to the bluff and proceeded to build breastworks hearing nothing of Custer, he supposed he was in the same predicament as himself.*

*The day after he went to the hill he found the Indians had increased in numbers. They charged him several times and killed some men but they had to fall back. There Reno stayed until we arrived when the Indians dropped everything heavy and fled, setting fire to the wood so they would not be followed.*

*(As I was not there myself {was at another part of battlefield}, I got this account from a friend of mine which I consider as good as if I were there myself.) He says the Indian village was about 6 miles long and from about one half miles to one and a half miles wide. Dead Indians we found in some tee pees and in one was a white renegade sewed up in a blanket. He was a gray headed man with a long beard but was stone dead as the rest in the ravine. Close to the battleground were found dead Indians piled up like cord wood and it is supposed they carried off a great many more. One chief was found on the field dead. He had broad German silver bands on his arms and was wrapped in a fine buffalo robe.*

April 7, 1970
Tuesday
Hospital at Dong Ha base camp
Quang Tri Province

When I wake up, the clock on the hospital ward wall indicates it's a tee tee bit after 2 a.m. I can see around the ward in the dim night lighting. Normally I prefer pitch dark for sleeping, but tonight I find the night lighting boo coo comforting. As I lay in my bed, I feel number one, with the one exception that I still can't see out of my right eye. I'm trying to figure out why I feel so good. But at the same time realize I am ravenous.

When was the last time I ate, I think? First I have to think of what day is today. Let's see, I think, we got hit on Monday the 6th so if this is the next day, it's Tuesday the 7th. The last time I ate was supper on Sunday. No wonder I'm starving.

I lift the tape off of my right eye and have a look. Still swirls in all shades of red, and I quickly start to feel motion sick. I tape my eye closed again, and I feel number one almost immediately. I sit up and decide I'll try to find the mess hall, as it's possible it's open 24 hours a day.

I'm still trying to not let my guard down, so I get my jungle boots out of the storage compartment of my bed side table. Hospital or no hospital, it's still The Scary Time. The last time I was here at base camp we took some incoming, so I put my boots on. I don't have any socks, so I have to rough it and go bare. I'm almost fully awake now, and I realize why I feel so good. I'm not hot. This place is air conditioned, and it feels number one.

Everyone else on the ward is asleep, so I walk softly out and into the hallway. My ears, while not ringing loudly, are still ringing. I can't try to listen for some activity and go in that direction. I decide to walk around rather aimlessly and use my sense of smell to find the mess hall if it's open. I walk around for a while without any luck. I pass a nurses' station so I step inside and ask if the mess hall is open. The nurse's lips are moving, but I still can't hear anything. I tell them I can't hear and could they just point me in the right direction.

When I speak it sounds to me like I have my head inside a big metal can, and my voice seems to echo. Maybe that's where the term "Tin Ear" came from. One of the nurses takes pity on me and walks me to the doorway. She points down the hallway and then with her hands indicates a left turn at some

point. That should be good enough. Once I get close, I'll be able to sniff my way there, I am so hungry.

When I get close, sure enough I can follow my nose and there it is. I had forgotten about aromas like this. While it's an army mess hall, it actually smells like there could be some decent food here. I can see 4 or 5 of the mess hall staff sitting around a table, as it's obviously a slow time. But it must be open because as soon as they see me, they wave me over and ask me what I want. I follow one of the cooks to the serving line, and he goes to the other side.

"What da ya got?" I ask and then I add, "Could you speak really loud cuz I can hardly hear."

"We have just about everything. Eggs, hash browns, bacon, sausage, and toast, you just name it," he says, not quite yelling, but close.

"I'll have all of that. Eggs over easy," I reply. “Got any S.O.S?"

"Sure do," he says. "You want it on toast or biscuits?”

Toast or biscuits, I am just about to swoon. Toast or biscuits? I can't even remember the last time I had any bread.

I can't decide so I just say, "Both! Hey man, can I have a couple of slices of just plain bread while I wait?"

"You sure can," he says. He hands me a tee tee plate with two slices of bread on it. It looks like ambrosia. And a plate, a real plate, not paper!

"Were you with that group of guys they brought in yesterday morning?" he asks me.

"I think so," I reply, as I'm not really sure what day it is.

While he gets started making my breakfast, I walk over to the milk dispensers while I slowly savor my two slices of bread. They are number one! The bread reminds me of the Real World. Maybe I really do have a Million Dollar Wound. That would be number one million. I smile. I try to not make myself sick drinking too much milk before my breakfast is ready.

When the cook is done, my breakfast completely covers a huge tray. I take it and sit down. I can hardly believe what is before my eyes. But after I get started eating, I am in heaven. Eggs! Real eggs that are cooked to perfection just the way I like them. I still can't get over it, as I never really liked eggs before. There's one whole plate with both biscuits and toast with everything covered with SOS. The wonderful aromas of real food are almost enough, but I easily polish off the entire tray of food. I am so full I think I might have to call for a wheelchair to get back to my ward. After a couple of healthy burps,

I feel I can make it back on my own. Then I look over at the coffee urns.

A cup of java could be number one right now. But after that awesome meal, it would have to be a good cup of coffee. As number one the food is here, the coffee would be *army coffee*. I think I could sleep some more now that I've eaten, and coffee will just keep me awake. It's just after 3 a.m., so I decide to saunter back to my ward and try to sleep some more. When I get back to my ward, my bed feels as number one as when I first crawled in, and I quickly fall asleep. Falling asleep seems so effortless when you don't have to continuously fight bugs off.

It's early morning but full light outside when the noise from activity on my ward wakes me. I luxuriate in my bed for a tee tee while. When I'm fully awake, I decide to take a shower. They cleaned me up pretty well yesterday, but it wasn't even a sponge bath. When they assigned me my ward, they also gave me a bag with a razor and a toothbrush and some toothpaste, soap, and shampoo. I grab it and head for the showers. Wow! Real showers, clean and spotless. Each cubicle is a private tiny bathroom. There seems to be unlimited hot water and big fluffy towels. I feel like I'm at some swanky hotel after camping out in the bush for three months. Everything is so clean and smells so fresh. No stinky, smelly guys farting non-stop. Man, I could get used to this boo coo quick.

My beard is boo coo awesome, and that's why it has to go. I'm in the rear now and all the army rules apply here, so my beard will be a problem. They take things like shaving and saluting seriously. It is a major ordeal trying to shave my beard off with a double edge razor. I really need to start with scissors, but I have none. It takes me about a half an hour to finally get it off. I hardly recognize myself, plus half my face is tan while the other half is lily white. I take my shower now. When the hot water hits me, I could stay in here all day. The hot water never runs out, but after a while, a long while, I have had enough. I dry off with one of the big fluffy towels. The tape over my right eye came off in the shower, so I have to keep it closed on my own. After drying off and putting on my hospital garment, I slip back into my jungle boots. I'm still roughing it without socks. I hate that. Even though it's light out, I decide I can't be too careful.

I go back to my ward and sit on my bed for a while. When the ward nurse stops by, she gets me another piece of tape for my right eye and I'm feeling number one again. Someone comes into the ward and looks around and then leaves. He returns shortly with the ward nurse, and she points at me. He

comes over to me and says my doctor wants to see me. The confusion, he says, was because they told him to bring the guy with the beard. It's number one that I already shaved it off, as it was going to cause me grief.

I follow the orderly to my doctor's office. My doctor has me lay down, and he puts something in both of my eyes to numb them. Then he starts to pick tee tee bits of bullet fragments out. There are so many pieces of bullet fragments that I have to periodically close my eye so I don't get to motion sick and barf all over my doctor. All I see when I try to look out of my right eye is red swirls that quickly make me nauseous. I have to ask him to stop so I can close my eye and compose myself quite often so I don't puke. He seems miffed and tells me I am being a sissy. I don't like needles, and I especially don't like needles being poked into my eyes. I'd gladly trade places with him so we can see who the sissy is. He does finally finish with me and allows me to didi, so I go back to my ward and sit on my bed.

As I look around my ward, I can barely make anything out. I have to keep my right eye closed and my left eye makes everything look fuzzy and wavy from the near constant watering. I can see the beds all in a row along two walls. The air conditioning makes it feel boo coo good in here. When the stuff my doctor put on my eyes wears off, I am in boo coo pain. Both my eyes feel like someone took sandpaper to my eye lenses and cornea. I have to find the ward nurse for some tape for my right eye, because after my doctor took it off, he didn't give me another piece. It hurts whether my eyes are open or closed, but when my good left eye is open, it tears continuously so I can hardly see. It does feel a tee tee bit better when I keep it closed, so I just crawl into my bed and close my eyes and after a while I fall asleep.

*July 2, 1876*
*Sunday*
*Valley of the Little Horn River*

*This morning the wounded were taken off the boat and placed under a large tarpaulin erected tent fashion. Some of the worst we put in the large hospital tent.*

*Command came up on the other side of river and the work of crossing them over was commenced and all were soon over. The day being warm, water had to be put on their wounds continually.*

*The boys were all very tired and suppose they had a hard time of it. Some*

*days along the road they suffered greatly for water. Day pleasant but warm. Our camp getting larger. 8 Co. of cavalry and 6 of Inftry.*

April 8, 1970
Wednesday
Hospital at Dong Ha base camp
Quang Tri Province

I wake again just after 2 a.m. according to clock on the wall in my ward. My left eye feels better, and I can look out of it without it watering. That's number one. When I remove the tape from my right eye, it's still all swirls in different shades of red. I re-tape my right eye closed.

I'm hungry again, and now I know where the mess hall is. I put on my jungle boots, just in case, and I sky for the mess hall. The same night crew is there, and they recognize me only because I have tape over my eye as I'm sure I look quite different without my beard. I go for the same breakfast as yesterday, just about everything they have. While they make it up, I content myself by drinking several glasses of ice cold milk. It is number one.

I don't even remember liking eggs, but I love them now. Once again, I finish everything on my tray and everything is number one. I thank the cooks for an exquisite meal, and then I return to my new best friend, my bed.

On my way back to the ward, I pass the nurses' station I got directions from last night. Since it has been a boo coo long time since I've been around round-eyed women, I stop in for a chat. I interrupt their conversation, but they are still nice to me. I would be content to stand here and gaze at them with my one good eye, but that would be rude, so I attempt some conversation. Now that I have been wounded, I've had my own personal epiphany. I realize I am no more special than the next guy, and whether or not you get killed or wounded is just a matter of luck. Good or bad luck, but luck all the same.

I stupidly ask them if they were aware that people have been getting killed and wounded around here. They, who see the consequences of this war on a daily basis, are kind to me, as one of the recently aware. They don't laugh at my question, but just quietly acknowledge they are aware of people being injured and killed as they gently shoo me out of their station and send me back to my bed.

My bed looks and feels as number one as it did when I first saw it. After

taking off my jungle boots and stowing them in my bed side table compartment, I bury my face in my boo coo soft pillow. It doesn't take long, and I am in blissful and undisturbed sleep again.

My blissful sleep ends around 6 a.m. as the ward I am on starts its day of taking medication and being awakened for doctor appointments or physical therapy. 2-7 Tango Charlie, the TC that got wounded in the back on my birthday, is on my ward. When he is healed up, it will be back to the field for him. They have him propped up as if on all fours with his back and his wound exposed. I suppose so it will heal faster. His shrapnel wound is a nasty looking gash about six inches long. It's been stitched up, but it still looks serious. Xin loi, 2-7 Tango Charlie

Everyone is turned out of their beds so the bed linens can be changed. I'm not that hungry after my late night meal, but since I have to be out of bed, I decide to check out the mess hall. Lots of activity in the mess hall and people are even standing in line. Despite my prowess at line standing, I decide to forgo the line and sky for the milk dispensers for a couple of glasses of ice cold moo juice.

I saunter back to my ward, and when I arrive, all the beds have been stripped down and re-made. The ward nurse tells me my doctor wants to see me, so I sky to his office. When I get there, my doctor has me sit down. He removes the tape from my eye and has a quick look at it.

He sits down and starts writing something on a pad while he says to me, "Your eye looks good, so I'm sending you back to your unit tomorrow."

"There's just a tee tee problem with that, Doc, because I can't see anything out of my right eye. When I try to look out of it, I get motion sick, and if I don't close it I'll puke."

He insists my eye looks fine to him. After my continued protest, he finally seems to believe that I can't see with my right eye. As they don't have the equipment here to check my eye, I'll be sent to another hospital in Da Nang this afternoon.

At about 3 p.m., I and several other patients board a chopper, and we fly to Da Nang.

The Nam is so exceedingly beautiful from the air with all the terraced and green hillsides and rice paddies. It looks like a such a tropical paradise with every kind of vegetation and all the shades of green imaginable. Up here and looking down, it seems impossible that a war rages down there. But rage it does.

Although the army hasn't figured this out yet, this war is over for me. Now I just have to wait for them to realize it. Something I'm well practiced at. Xin loi, Army!

# *Afterword*

I stay from April 8th until May 2nd at the Army hospital in Da Nang under the watchful eye of some Lifer E-7 and a Spec 4 WAC. During my stay, they both seemed more focused on how they could turn my therapy of complete bed rest into some sort of punishment. Lifer E-7 reasoned that *complete bed rest* was really *confined to bed* and threatened to have me sent to LBJ if he caught me out of my bed. It's worth noting that during my twenty-five day stay that neither Lifer E-7 or his assistant Miss Spec 4 ever offered or brought me any food or drink. They certainly never brought me a bed pan.

My doctor in Da Nang was waiting for my eye to clear enough on the inside that he could diagnose my problem. After two weeks, my eye had cleared enough that my doctor was able to observe several small metal fragments in my right eye.

The question now was what were the fragments made of? It is well known that ferrous metals (metals containing iron), if left inside the eye, will destroy the retina in 30 days. It has not been 30 days for me yet, so I'm hopeful. To test the fragments in my eye, my doctors held a high powerful magnet next to my temple. While observing the fragments in my eye with a special machine, he energized and de-energized the magnet, closely watching to see if any of the fragments moved or aligned with the magnet. He did not detect any movement, so it was decided not to pop my eyeball out at this time.

Although my eye had cleared enough for my doctor to diagnose my problem, it had not cleared enough so that I could actually see. I spend until May 2nd in Da Nang, waiting. My doctor waiting for my sight to come back, and Lifer E-7 waiting to catch me out of my bed so he could send me to LBJ. War is weird.

When my sight had not returned by May, I was sent to another Army hospital in Japan. The hospital in Japan was enormous. I would guess at least twenty stories high. The entire hospital compound is surrounded by an eight foot high cyclone fence topped with concertina wire. The concertina wire is probably there to make guys like me right at home.

The hospital is so large that every time I walk around by myself, I get lost and need help to find my way back. I'm in the Ear, Eye, Nose, and Throat ward. Most guys here have eye wounds, most of which were self inflicted. Self inflicted, but not on purpose. Unless you are behind something bullet proof, you cannot throw a grenade far enough away that you won't be wounded by it. From the number of guys here with the exact same eye wound, it is sadly a very common occurrence. The metal fragments from an exploding grenade are nasty looking shards that mess the eye up boo coo. Because grenade fragments are ferrous, the eyeball has to be removed to get the fragments out. Of course the eye is put back in, with some surgeries more successful than others. Xin loi.

Interestingly, after my sight eventually returned to my right eye, the army's focus immediately turned from restoring my sight to popping out my now healed eye. They

would not give me a reason or any rationale for wanting to pop my eye out, other than they could if they wanted too. I was military property and as such, if it was deemed necessary to pop my eye out, there was nothing I could do about it.

Eventually from Japan I was sent to another Army hospital in Valley Forge, PA. After a month there, I was given a 60 day leave and then sent to Ft. Lewis, Washington, where I served out the remainder of my time. At Ft. Lewis, the Vietnam vets were treated worse than prisoners of war rather than the decorated war heroes many of them were. In reality, we *were* prisoners of war.

*Of No Value*, the story of my time in the army after being wounded in Vietnam, is now available on Amazon.

US - UK - CA

Sylvester Waltz made it back to Ft. Shaw on October 6th, 1876. It was a grueling 800 mile walk back to Montana from the Valley of the Little Big Horn. A long and scary walk back, I imagine, as they were deep in Indian territory and were witness to the annihilation of Gen. Custer, whom they thought invincible.

Sylvester finished his four year enlistment at Ft. Snelling in Minnesota. While he was stationed at Ft. Snelling, his fiancé traveled by train to Minnesota so they could marry, which they did. A near scandalous journey for her at the time. When his enlistment was up, they returned to Ohio. He and his brothers were homebuilders for many years. Sylvester, who incidentally went by the nickname Wes, was also a realtor. He was born in 1855 and passed away in the 1920's.

# *Thank you*

My journey continues in *Of No Value*, now available on Amazon:

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Thank you for reading my story. If you enjoyed *Boys for Men*, please consider leaving a review on Amazon.

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# *Glossary*

A.I.T - advanced individual training
AP - ambush patrol
Army cliques - Heads, Juicers, Lifers, Soul Brothers, Chicanos
Article 15 - non-judicial punishment awarded for a minor disciplinary offense
ARVN - Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (South Vietnam)
Biff - to hit something
B.O. - body odor
Bolo - (noun) a trainee who has failed a required proficiency test, such as the marksman test. (verb) to fail a test. Example: *He boloed the marksman test.*
Boo coo - very much, very good, a lot, many. Corruption of French *beau coup.*
Boonies - the field in Vietnam, considered the boondocks
Breaking brush - to break a new trail off the road. Done mostly so mine sweeping isn't necessary.
Brother - short for Soul Brother, African-American
Bug juice - insect repellent
Bustle rack - an open framework storage rack on the rear of the tank's turret
Butter bar - Second Lieutenant
C-4 - plastic explosive
Camo - camouflage
Canister round - 10,000 fleshettes or finned nails are packed into a "can round".Very deadly at close range.
Charlie - short for Victor Charlie,V.C., Viet Cong
Cherry - someone who has not been in and survived a firefight
Cherry juice - hydraulic fluid for use with the tank's main gun recoil system. It only looks like cherry juice, it is otherwise vile.
Chieu hoi - (pronounced *chew-hoy*) Vietnamese for "with open arms". A program to entice the NVA to defect to South Viet Nam. Leaflets touting the program were dropped by air into North Viet Nam and parts of South Viet Nam
Chuck - food
Claymores - claymore mines
Clips - ammunition magazines
CO - commanding officer
Coax - coaxial machine gun. Tanks have a machine gun mounted in the turret, and it is zeroed with the main gun, meaning both guns are aimed at the same target. When the main gun is being re-loaded, the area can be swept with coax gun fire without having to re-aim.
Crash - go to sleep

C-rats - c-rations
DRO - dining room orderly
D.T.s - delirium tremens. Shaky hand and body movements of alcoholics in withdrawal.
Dead track blocks - damaged tank and P.C. track blocks that need to be replaced
Deuce and a half - 2 1/2 ton truck
Didi - (pronounced *did-dee*) slang Vietnamese for “go”, “leave”, “go away”
Didi mau - (pronounced *did-dee-mow*) slang Vietnamese for “to leave quickly”
Dinky dao - (pronounced *dink-ee-dow*) slang Vietnamese for “crazy”
Dinky dao tobacco - marijuana
Dog robber - someone who gains rank advancement or special treatment through nepotism or cronyism and not through actual merit
DMZ - de-militarized zone
Dropping a dime - to turn someone in for doing something illegal. A reference to when a payphone call was a dime. Guys would say, "I'm gonna drop a dime on your ass!"
Dust Off - rescue helicopter
ETS - estimated time of separation. The day you get out of the military, a date most G.I.s know by heart. It also means you aren't a lifer, which for a draftee was a big deal.
ETS'ing - getting out of the military
FNG - fucking new guy
First Shirt - the First Sgt. in a company
Fragged - to be injured or killed by a grenade
Frags - fragmentary grenades
Freeze out - to be exposed to extremely frigid conditions
FTA - fuck the army
Fubar – fucked up beyond all recognition
Gook - VC or NVA
Ground pounder - infantry
Grunt - infantry
Hard five - E-5 Sergeant
Head - pot smoker
Higher - officers
Higher-Higher - radio frequency used by officers
Higher-Higher-Higher - radio frequency used by the upper echelon officers
Holding - to have some illegal drugs
Horn - communication radio
Hot LZ - landing zone under fire
Huey - nickname for several types of helicopters
Huey loach - Huey L.O.H., light observation helicopter
Hump - to carry heavy loads
Incoming - artillery or mortar shell being dropped on you. Saying “incoming” is enough that you don't have to specify what kind of incoming, because all incoming is number ten.
Juicers - alcoholics

Klik – 1000 meters
KP - kitchen patrol
L.B.J. – long binh jail, a U.S. military stockade located in South Vietnam
Lifer - people who stay in the military for their life's career
LP - listening post
LRPs - long range patrol rations, freeze dried food in pouches
LT - Lieutenant
Lume - illumination mortar rounds. The rounds are shot up in the air and contain burning phosphorus, which lights up the area at night, much like the trip flares. Small parachutes keep the rounds in the air longer, as they float slowly to the ground.
LZ - landing zone
Little Joe - the biggest wrench in our tool box on the tank. Little Joe is over two feet long and weighs at least fifty pounds.
MPC - military payment certificates. It's what we got paid in, and what we used for money. We weren't supposed to buy stuff from the locals with MPC, but we did.
Mad Minute - Everyone gets behind their gun and lets loose for a full minute. Officially the mad minute was to check the firing capability of each weapon. In actuality, it was to show off our awesome firepower.
Mamasan - Considered a term of respect for elderly woman in many Asian countries. Roughly translated, it means Grandmother.
Mechanized platoon - a platoon of tanks and/or P.C.s
Mexican Standoff - two people pointing loaded guns at each other, but neither one will pull the trigger first
Mike-Mike - Phonetic slang for the Mad Minute
Million dollar wound - widely used term in Vietnam for any minor or non-life threatening wound that required evacuation back to the United States
Missouri River boat ride - any uncontrolled ride on a river
Neutral steer - tanks and other track vehicles can make one track move forward and one in reverse. The result is the vehicle sits in one place and spins around on its axis. Very useful for turning around in tight circumstances.
Number one - the best
Number ten - the worst
NVA - North Vietnamese Army
O.D. - Olive drab, the shade of green of many military garments.
O.J.T. – on the job training
P.C. or A.P.C. - armored personnel carriers. We just called them P.C.s, as their armor was a joke compared to tank armor. M113 was its official designation.
Pee bringer or bringing pee - something scary or bad enough to make you pee your pants
PFC - Private First Class
PJs - pajamas
Punji stakes - sharpened bamboo stakes, usually in a camouflaged hole. The V.C. usually urinated on the bamboo to insure infection for anyone who stepped on it.
R&R - rest and relaxation trip earned if you last 6 months in Nam

ROKs – Korean soldiers (Republic of Korea)
Razz – to tease someone
Redball - hardtop road, usually asphalt. Short for Redball Express
Regs - regulations
REMF - Rear echelon mother fucker. A soldier far from the front line.
Re-up - to re-enlist in the military
Rock and roll - automatic firing mode
Roger - yes
Roger that - yes, I agree
RON - re-supply / overnight defensive position. All track vehicles in a circle, front pointed out.
RPG - rocket propelled grenade
RPG screen - rocket propelled grenade screen. The screen is a couple of engineer stakes and cyclone fencing.
Same-same - the same
Shake 'n Bake - A E-5 Sgt. just out of NCO School
Shithook - Chinook helicopter, essentially a flying crane
Short - to be short on time left in Vietnam, usually less than 90 days. Usually pronounced "sheee'yort".
Short-timer - someone with little time left in Vietnam.
Sitrep - situation report
Sky - to go
Sky up - to go quickly
Slicks - helicopters with two M-60 guns, no doors, and room for 5-6 guys and their gear
Slide - to be given a pass to break a rule or regulation without fear of punishment
Snarf - to eat something just short of inhaling it. Typically, the way most dogs eat.
Smart Aleck - a wise guy or someone acting cocky
Soul Brother - African-American
Strack - sharp appearance of military uniform and personal hygiene
Strack troop - someone who went all out for their uniform appearance. Spit shined boots, military creases on their shirts, shiny belt buckle, clean shaven, and close cropped hair
TC - tank commander, track commander
Tee tee - a little or a little bit. Probably a corrupted use of the French phrase *ti petite*
Templer - non-drinkers of alcoholic beverages as used in Sylvester Waltz's journal. Probably a misspelling of Tempelers or followers of the Temperance movement.
Thumper - M-79 grenade launcher
Toke - to smoke marijuana
Toking - smoking marijuana
Top - a company's First SGT, usually a E-8 lifer. You had to be on the "first shirt's" good buddy list to address him as "Top", especially in the presence of others.
Track - any vehicle with tracks, i.e. tanks, A.P.C.s, and dusters
VC - Viet Cong
Videttes - a mounted sentry or guard

VTR - tracked recovery vehicle
Xin loi - (pronounced *sin- loy*) Vietnamese for “excuse me”, but used as slang by GIs to mean "sorry about that"
XO - executive officer
Z - short for DMZ, de-militarized zone
Zero or zeroing - adjusting and setting the sights on any type of gun
.50 Cal. - a .50 caliber machine gun
60 - M-60 machine gun