

6TH BATTALION, 11TH ARTILLERY

Hawaii



Viet Nam

On Time, Sir!

From Georgia to Viet Nam Section 13 On LZ San Juan

by Clenton Thomas, B Btry, '68-'69

“OH’ BY THE WAY”

Our BC would receive in various Directives, for every position on the LZ. He would read them and pass them on to whoever would be effected by it. I would receive some concerning medical, Lance and Ramsey concerning their jobs on the LZ. The best way to describe what the Captain would do is give you an example. One day the Captain called me over to his hooch, and gave me a one sheet Directive that he had already read. The Directive instructed me to put lime around the urinals, to help with the smell and for health benefits.

Do not think of a urinal as one of those seen in the men’s bathroom in the States. We made our own, it was a piece of 4” PVC pipe stuck into a hole dug with hoe diggers at a slant. The setting of it, in a slant kept rain water from filling it up. It stuck up out of the ground some two feet and under the ground four to five feet. There were several scattered around the hill. The one in the Command area was left of the trash dump facing the valley with a river running through it. So as we were standing there doing our business we could enjoy a scenic panoramic view of our part of Viet Nam. We also had us an outhouse, with two holes in it, it was more modern than the one that I grew up with. It didn’t have a Sears and Roebuck catalog in it, nor any corn shucks or corn cobs. Nobody wanted to get caught in the outhouse when receiving, mortar rounds, it would not be pretty. If that happened we would most likely have to move off the LZ. Although if one was constipated it sure would solve that problem.

Anyway the Captain told me he had ordered a couple of bags of lime and when it came in I was to put lime out around them. He must have been holding the Directive for a couple of days before showing it to me for the lime came in on the next resupply chopper. And as soon as it arrived I put one of the bags out. And was going to wait a month or so and put the other bag out. Two days later while passing the Captain’s hooch he called me over and we talked for a few minutes and I was starting to leave when he says: “Oh’ By The Way” you know that you’re supposed to put lime around the urinals don’t you? And I’m thinking like yeah didn’t you

see that some had been put around them a couple of days ago? Anyway this was a standard saying of his to everybody that received a Directive.

Kicking Heels?

One day I was sitting on the wall that circled around Gun One, talking to Big Bad John. It was on the other side of where the opening into the Command area was. When the Captain walked up to John and I, he chit chatted with us for a couple of minutes then said: "Oh, by the way Doc". When the last word came out of his mouth, Charlie sent a mortar round over our heads. Mortar's made a high pitch whistling sound, (*like the old tea kettles did years ago after it built up enough steam*), when they passed over you, and everybody would take off to find cover. I don't know where John went but the BC did a 180 degree turn and took off for his hooch in the Command area. He had long legs compared to mine and was several feet ahead of me before I could come up off the wall and head for my hooch to get my aid bag in case of anyone being hurt. It didn't take me but a few seconds to catch up with the Captain. And I began kicking his heels as we both entered into the Command area. I don't know if my kicking his heels slowed him down or he just could not run fast. Whichever I finally got to a wide stretch and passed him. Went into my hooch grabbed the Aid Bag and returned outside to listen for my call. As far as I know we only had one pass over the hill. I didn't see the Captain and he didn't ever bring up the subject of what the "Oh! By the Way" was about on that day.

Jump Back Jack!

Ramsey, came up with this idea of how to blow the Captains mind, but he would need Lance and me to pull it off. So one Thursday evening, he got with us and explained his idea. It was a simple plan, he reminded us that every inspection the Captain did he found our hooch in a mess every time. What he proposed was that the next Saturday morning we all get up early and clean the hooch up, putting everything in its place neat and orderly. And we all three would dress to regulation and when he came in we would stand at attention, salute and the whole nine yards.

We were all in agreement that this would be what we would do come next Saturday morning. Friday night we drank in moderation and gathered up all the cans and trash before we went to bed. Early Saturday morning we were all up getting dressed and doing any last minute straightening up. By the time the Captain was due to come to our hooch, it was in tip top shape. Through the window on the entrance side of our hooch we heard them coming. So we lined up in front of Lance's bunk with the entrance door to our left. As normal Sgt. Hattacher was the first to enter, when he pulled back the curtain and saw us standing there all dress out he kind of paused and did a little half step back, I thought he was going to go back out and see if he was in the right hooch. With a shocked look on his face he

glanced around the hooch and a small grin appeared at one corner of his mouth. He had figured out what we were up to.

Stepping on into the hooch, he held the curtain aside and called us to attention. We all came to attention and saluted and held it while the Captain entered in, now remember he was a tall man and had his head bent down as he came into the hooch. When he was in and lifted his head up he too took a short step back in shock. Seeing us at attention and saluting, he returns our salute. Sgt. Hattacher told us at ease, and we stood at parade rest while the Captain looked around. He was trying real hard to find something wrong and had taken a few steps on into the room. To his left we had our water canister (*the one that had a sign on it that said "Not for use with milk or dairy products"*) and he looked at it for several seconds, before moving on with his inspection. Finding nothing to fault us with, he kind of nodded his head like he was pleased with the shape the hooch was in and turned to leave. Sgt. Hattacher called us to attention, and we saluted and was saluted by the Captain and was still at attention as he left. Just past the water canister, he stops half turns toward us and says: Oh! By the Way" *you know that you're not supposed to put Milk or any Dairy products in this canister?*

While he's telling us this, I'm thinking. Duh! As long as I've been on the hill we ain't never had any milk nor dairy products to put into it. When all of a sudden Ramsey broke into my thoughts and was saying: **Yes Sir! We know, we can read too, Sir!** I don't know about the other two, but it took all of my control, not to burst out laughing. The Captain continued on out of the hooch followed by Sgt. Hattacher, although Sgt., half turned just before letting the curtain close and shot a big wide grin at us. Not too long after this Sgt. Hattacher, tour of duty was over and he went home, or least wise, back to the States. In his place (and I still can't remember his name) the Sgt., we called Blivet Belly took his place.

When I was passing out the beer's and soda's two of each to each man, Blivet Belly would come and pick up his and the Captain's. Some of the guys that were in FDC pulling the night shift told me that late at night he would come back, unlock the door and get more beer for himself and the Captain. I took up a habit of checking my stock, after I had passed out to the guys there allotment and sure enough, when I looked again there was some beer missing. Wasn't anything we could do about it, but it ticked us all off. We have a saying in Georgia: "What's good for the goose, is good for the gander". Or in other words what we were limited too, should also be what all were limited to. It's the same beef that we have with our Congress, what Laws we have to follow, so should they have to follow, yet they exempt themselves from following a lot of the Laws. Enough said about that! Moving on!

One morning I got a telephone call around six A.M., Lance and Ramsey were both up, and out or they were still on Guard Duty. It was the BC and he told me

that we were receiving incoming rounds (mortars). I quickly put on my cut-off shorts and shook my boots out, quickly tied them and grabbed my Aid Bag and headed outside. I stopped in-between our hooch and the shower to be somewhat protected and also to look around and listen for any sign of being needed. Nothing that I could see or hear indicated that we were receiving any incoming. I look over the battery area and at first did not see anyone moving about. In about a minute or so I saw Big John walking around in Gun one area, and he was moving as if nothing unusual was happening. He glanced my way and noticed me and acknowledged me with a slight wave.

I was just half awake and decided that I'd sit on top of our hooch, and see if something happened. After some five minutes and nothing had happen, I took my Aid Bag and using it as a pillow, curled up on top of the hooch and went back to sleep for several minutes. Woke up own my own and still nothing was going on so I decided to go to the Captain and see why he had told me there was incoming. I walked over to his hooch, him and Blivet Belly (BB) was standing on the second or third step coming out of the BC hooch. Just high enough that their heads were above the wall on each side of the entrance. I asked the Captain: Sir, I thought you told me we were receiving incoming! His reply was that the infantry had called him and told him we were. I was just about to say, that they must have been mistaken, when a mortar round hit our Conex building where we stored our beer at. Both of them ducked down and was turning around to go deeper into the hooch, when I leaped frogged over the wall right on top of them. We all hit the floor in a tangle of arms and legs. Did you know you can't run laying down?

I had just gotten into a sitting position, when I heard the call I didn't want to hear, "MEDIC, -- MEDIC, -- MEDIC! I had left my Aid Bag on top of my hooch and would have to run back to get it and return, then on to gun one's position where I had five wounded men waiting. While doing this I heard more calls for a Medic. The Conex building was close to Gun One position on one side and Jack and Big John hooch on the other side. There was a man in FDC that was close to us and he would often be on top of our hooch with Lance and Ramsey when they were sun bathing. His name was Dennis Burt, and I don't know if FDC assigned him to me or he just did it on his own. But anytime I had a call for a medical emergency, he wasn't far behind me and he was an asset to me. All I had to do was tell him what I needed and he was off to fulfill my request.

When I arrived into Gun One's area, with several people standing around I had to ask who was hit? The five that had received shrapnel from the mortar spoke up and four said I needed to look after the Gun Chief, first, he had got hit in the right eye. He had a piece of shrapnel about a quarter of an inch embedded in the center of his right eye. I had to fight down an urge to take a pair of tweezers and remove it out of his eye. But my training kicked in and I remembered that they had said that if there was a piece of foreign material in the eye to leave it there and transport

to the nearest hospital. I had noticed that Burt had come up and I asked him to get me a Dust-off. My concern was that, the eye naturally blinked and that any movement off to the side the eyes naturally shifted in that direction. The shifting could be controlled and I told him to look directly at me and pay no attention to anything else.

To help with the blinking, I took a piece of surgical tape and lifting his eyelid, I taped it up to his forehead. Remember now, it's been almost 50 years, but I believe I also put a piece of tape on the bottom also, I didn't stretch it where it would be uncomfortable, but to keep it from doing more damage to the eye by blinking. I took a large bandage and fixed it where the center budged out and taped it to his face. By then the dust off was coming in and Burt popped smoke and brought it onto our pad. I told the Gun Chief to keep his eye on the back of my head and I led him to the chopper.

Putting him on the chopper, I told the onboard medic what was wrong with him. If we would have had two medics on the hill, one of us would have rode in with him, but I was the only one and I had other wounded to see about. I later learned that he was sent to Japan, and I don't know if he lost the eye, or if they could repair it. The other four had minor wounds, one of them had a piece of shrapnel about the same size as the gun chief had in his eye. But his was in the forearm, and I took my tweezers and removed it. These four had what I call band aid wounds, I cleaned them up and put a band aid on it. Orton, replaced the wounded gun chief.