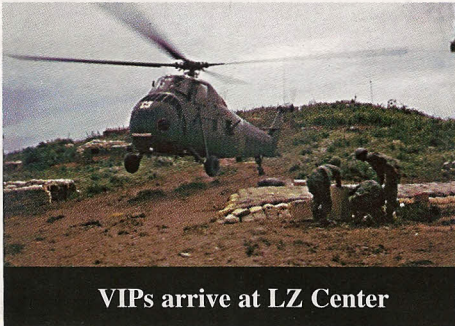


## Best Battery Busts Butts

By Thad Lindquist

The 11<sup>th</sup> Artillery was formed at Schofield Barracks in April 1967. Most of us took our artillery training at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. It was at least a month before we had a howitzer to look at. If I remember correctly we used a picnic table for a 105 howitzer until we actually got one.



VIPs arrive at LZ Center

Battery C owed its good training to the Vietnam veterans of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division that had just returned from Vietnam. We also owed our good training and preparation to our battery commander, Captain Percy, and our battery executive officer, Lt. James Rys.

The members of the 25<sup>th</sup> Inf. Div. who got us ready for Vietnam did not go there with us. Five of our six gun chiefs were draftees as was our ammo chief. The only person in our battery that had any combat experience was Captain Percy. He had served a previous tour in Vietnam.

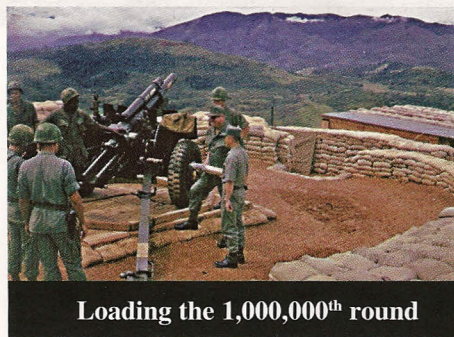
It was the excellent training by the NCOs of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry, the leadership of Captain Percy, and the quality of the personnel that enabled us to be prepared for combat and for being awarded the best firing battery in the Americal Division for 1968.

On August 22, 1968, my unit, Battery C, 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 11<sup>th</sup> Artillery, received the award at LZ Center. The commanding general of the Americal Division, a general from the Republic of Korea (ROK) command, brigade commanders, other staff officers, and the media attended the ceremony.

The one millionth artillery round fired by Americal Division artillery was also fired at the ceremony. We took a white phosphorous round, polished the brass canister, and labeled it the one millionth round. Our centerpiece 105mm howitzer was given the distinction of firing the round.

The section chief was Gerry Smith from Renton, Washington. He instructed the two generals how to fire the howitzer for the ceremony. The two generals were to pull the lanyard to fire the specially marked round.

Captain Raebeck, our battery commander, told Sgt. Smith to demonstrate to the generals how to pull the lanyard and not to jerk it. Sgt. Smith first gave the generals verbal instructions on what to do. He then proceeded to give the generals a by-the-numbers demonstration. What Sgt. Smith had forgotten was that the special round had already been loaded into the howitzer. When Sgt. Smith gave the demonstration, the round fired.

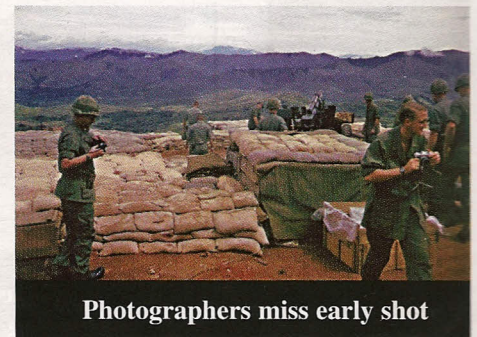


Loading the 1,000,000<sup>th</sup> round

There was stunned silence on the LZ. None of the photographers were ready to take pictures and the generals were caught by surprise. The round landed several thousands yards away and exploded. It seemed like there was about thirty seconds of silence. Our battery commander undoubtedly could see his military career coming to a quick conclusion.

At that point the commanding general of the Americal Division exclaimed in a loud voice that Sgt. Smith had fired the round and the general started to laugh. The ROK general started

to laugh as did all of the other staff officers. The battery commander started to breathe again. The Americal Division commander really thought it was funny.



Photographers miss early shot

The news photographers and the rest of us got some belated pictures but I don't think anyone got a picture of Sgt. Smith firing the gun. The rest of the ceremony went off as planned. For the next several days our battery commander was absolutely convinced that Sgt. Smith had fired that round to intentionally embarrass him or damage his career.

But that was not the end of the saga. In late October and we were on LZ Thunder just south of Duc Pho. The Americal Division had recovered a 105mm howitzer that had been taken from the South Vietnamese by the NVA and then subsequently buried by them. The howitzer was recovered somewhere around Chu Lai.

A special ceremony was held to fire the gun back at the NVA. The commanding general of the Americal Division sent his personal helicopter to transport Sgt. Smith to the ceremony. He had Sgt. Smith fire the 105 howitzer. We encouraged Sgt. Smith to try to talk his way out of the field until we went home in December. But he came back to LZ Thunder and finished his tour of duty in Viet Nam with Battery C.

**Editor's note:**  
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