

# 6<sup>TH</sup> BATTALION, 11<sup>TH</sup> ARTILLERY

Hawaii



Viet Nam

*On Time, Sir!*

## "Whatever Became of 'Bravo'?"

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

I hope that I can remember these events correctly! Some will be second-handed accounts and some are from my personal experiences. One thing I'm not sure of ..... was "Bravo" a male or female dog? I'm thinking female.

I was told that "Bravo" became a member of B-Battery due to one of our Medics. It seems that this Medic was visiting Duc Pho, or another local village, one day. He came across some Vietnamese children that were playing a cruel game with a small puppy. They had tied its feet together around a stick and were tossing it up as high as they could into the air and letting it fall back down. They had done this several times before he got to them. This Medic took the puppy away from them and, to insure that they did not do this again, took it with him.

"Bravo" hated Vietnamese people with a passion. Any time some came onto the LZ, she would become very agitated and upset. Barking and carrying-on she would let it be known that she was not pleased that they were on "her hill". "Bravo" won the hearts of every one of us who came in contact with her.

Lance Olson told me this; "While on guard duty one night around 2 AM he was sitting on the sand bags outside the front of the bunker when all of a sudden something cold and moist pressed to the back of his head. His first thought was that a VC had snuck up behind him and put the end of his rifle against his head and was fixing to blow his head off. He said he almost had a heart attack. It was "Bravo". She had quietly come up on his backside and stuck her nose against the back of his head. He realized it was her when she started licking his ear".

Sometime in September or October of 1969 I had decided that I would extend my tour in Viet Nam so I could get an "early out" from the Army. If you had six months or less coming out of Viet Nam you could do this. I had

to go up to Chu Lai to do the paperwork. I figured that I could catch a ride with our resupply chopper to Duc Pho and, from there, catch a cargo plane up to Chu Lai.

I went to the office to do the paper work on extending my tour then stopped-by a supply area to pick-up a case of beer to take back to the LZ. (It was a request by several people that when I got back with the beer we would have us a party). If I'm remembering right, each week we were entitled to two beers and two sodas. Now, some of us would trade our two sodas for two beers to someone else who didn't drink beer. (Now, I was the person who passed out the beer and sodas each week, so I would be the one making the trades.) After picking-up the beer, I would catch a cargo plane back to Duc Pho and spend the night. Early the next day I'd catch a resupply chopper back to the LZ. If all went well, I'd be gone around 24 hours. Well, some of it went well, and some didn't.

When, I got to Duc Pho the cargo plane wouldn't leave until 4 PM. This was going to put me in Chu Lai too late to see about extending my tour. The cargo plane did not have any seats in it so I would have to sit on the floor and hold on to some cargo belting hanging on the wall. The pilot started the plane before he raised the rear door. Sitting there on the floor looking out the rear door I realized why he was not raising the rear door. The Viet Cong, (Charlie) was giving us a farewell party. His intent was a party that we would never come back from. I sat there watching the mortars walking their way closer and closer to us. And I'm thinking, "if this pilot don't get this plane out of 1<sup>st</sup> gear we're going be in a world of hurt. My feet was saying, RUN! My mind was saying, where to? If I went out the back of the plane I'd be kissing a mortar round. The pilot must have read my mind because I felt the plane lifting off. As we gained altitude, the rear door began closing".

At Chu Lai I checked-in with the Sergeant at the Artillery bunker. This was sort of like a hotel for Artillery personnel who either had business there or were headed home from Chu Lai. The second set-back was that the Sergeant informed me that the office I wanted to visit to extend my tour would not receive me until 2 PM the next day. After my appointment, I caught a plane back to Duc Pho around 4:30 PM. I made my appointment on time and extended for a month and a week, this would give me "boots on the ground" for four hundred and nine days. Perhaps, I would be home for Thanksgiving.

I had picked up a case of beer that morning and had everything ready to go. When I returned to the bunker and was getting my gear together the Sergeant came in and told me there was no plane. It had to leave early with a rush cargo. It would be late tomorrow before I could leave. The Sergeant could tell I was disappointed. He left and, in a few minutes, came back and told me to grab my stuff. He was going to take me to the chopper pad and I might be able to hitch a ride on a chopper headed that way. We got there and there was a Colonel headed my way. He was asked if I could catch a ride to Duc Pho and he agreed that I could. So, with my steel pot, M-16, overnight bag and a case of beer, I boarded the chopper. All the seats were taken by high ranking officers. So I sat in the middle of the chopper's floor with my gear and beer. I could feel the eyes of every one of them on me as we took off. They were probably wondering, "what's a Medic doing with a case of beer?" Early the next morning I was at the chopper pad, with my case of beer, to catch the resupply chopper back to LZ San Juan Hill.

When I landed on the hill, it wasn't long before Lance was telling me about the sapper squad that had hit the hill while I was gone. Our Captain had arranged for one of the Infantry Medics to fill-in while I was gone. We had no one injured though.

I believe that there were three of them. Two were killed and one was captured. They had crawled into the perimeter wire on the East side of the LZ. There was a large rock thirty to forty feet from the Infantry guard bunker which was around ten feet from our (Lance Olson, Thomas Ramsey, and my) hootch. They hid behind that rock from late in the afternoon until they would hit us the next afternoon. Lance said that they, especially him, should have known something was amiss. "Bravo" was going crazy; she was running around and barking. Even late into the night, and the following day, and nobody paid her any attention. In her own way she was trying to warn them of the danger. The gooks split up, one would go south, another one went north. One stayed behind the rock. The northbound one would be crawling toward the Artillery guard bunker. The southbound gook would crawl around behind our trash dump and attack from there. When the attack began the Infantry sent out a team to make a sweep around both sides of the hill. Ford, one of our guys, grabbed up an M-60 and went on top of the hootch. The Infantry on the south side was making their sweep and some of them had come level with the dump site when the gook pops up and levels to fire. Ford hollered "Hit It". The Infantry team dropped to the ground as Ford

opened up with the M-60 cutting the top of the gook's head off. His action saved at least one man's life. He was awarded the Bronze Star.

I don't remember who this person was, but one of the guys loved smoked oysters. He had received a tin of smoked oysters, similar to a sardine can. One that the lid with a key would roll back to open it up. Well, he opens it up and takes a smell of them. They didn't quite smell just like he remembered them. So he was a little leery of eating them. He called "Bravo" over and set the tin on the ground in front of "Bravo". Well, she smells them, backs off a few steps, circles around to the back side of them. Where the lid roll was, she picked it up, took it six or seven feet to an area with less rocks. She set it and the can down, dug a 6" hole, picked the tin up, places them in the bottom of the hole and covers them up then goes on about her own business. I don't know if she ever dug them back up or not. But we sure didn't. Some things should be left buried, smoked oysters are one of them.

We had a couple of sayings on the hill: "Army uniforms, were pretty good, except when receiving incoming rounds. Then the buttons would hold you too high off the ground" and "If you ever saw "Bravo" running for cover you had best be doing the same". We didn't know how she would know; it might have been a keen sense of hearing but she would be running before the mortars got there.

When each one of us would leave the LZ to go home, we would shake hands with our friends telling them to be careful and to go home safe. Without an exception, each one of us spent some time with "Bravo" giving her our goodbye. She was special, we would give a great big hug to her and, with some, even a tear or two as we bid her goodbye.

As promised by the Sergeant at Chu Lai, I was home for Thanksgiving, November 27, 1969. As a matter of fact, at around 12:00 PM, I was knocking on my Sister's door. When she opened the door, with two words, I spoke volumes, "**I'm Home**".

So, in closing, I'll end with the same question as in my opening. Does anyone know, "**Whatever became of "Bravo"**"?

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