



Attached are the documents of the event on 15Feb71.

I retyped as much as possible. Misspellings and wording typed as recorded.

David Russell and I were trying to put together other after-action reports before he passed away.

**Ed Kictarek
Silver Spur Scout Crew Chief**

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION – 15 February 1971

On February 15th 1971, elements of Troop "A", 3rd squadron, 17th Air Cavalry, distinguished themselves by exceptionally valorous actions during a heliborne reconnaissance mission near Quinn L???, republic of Vietnam. At approximately 1400 hours a visual reconnaissance team consisting of an AH-1G gunship and an OH-58 light observation helicopter discovered an enemy bunker complex and a large cache of rice near Quan Trang. The OH-58 was piloted by 1LT Robert E. Mills with observer SP4 ???? Montague and crewchief SGT Phillip Taylor. ?????????? CW2 C. Hodge and the co-pilot/gunner was WO1 ???? ???.

The reconnaissance team relayed the information to the "A" Troop commanding Officer Major David P Russell, who elected to insert the Aero-Rifle Platoon into the area to develop the situation. An artillery barrage was preplanned to prepare a nearby clearing to be used as a landing zone, while the Aero-Rifle Platoon was notified and three UH_1H crews were scrambled. The reconnaissance team returned to Quan Loi airstrip, where they refueled and returned to the bunker complex.

Major Russell arranged for a quick reaction force of ARVN's from the 6th ranger group to be ready at nearby Tonle Cham. He then flew to the bunker complex in an OH-58A scout helicopter as co-pilot, with pilot WO1 Scott A. Evans.

The three lift helicopter crews raced to their revetments, cranked up, and hovered to where the Aero-Rifle platoon was already assembled to load. The lead UH_1H was piloted by CW2 Darby Kirkland, with lift Platoon CPT Clarence ?vio as co-pilot, SP4 Vernon Grantham as crew chief and SP4 Donald M?lott as door gunner. The second ship was piloted by WO1 Richard A. Flener, with co-pilot 1LT Paul D. Schneider, crew chief SP4 John E. Marshall, and door gunner SP4?????? Washington.

The first squad of the Aero-Rifle Platoon consisted of 1LT John P. Kelly, Platoon leader; SP4 John Morrison, point man; PFC Clyde Edwards, M-79 grenadier, SP4 Herald T James, radio operator; SP4 Tualo, M-60 machine gunner; and Bui Tung Dinh kit Carson Scout. The second squad was led by SGT Michael D Davis, with PFC Bruce Dykes, machine gunner; SGT James O. Rolyea, grenadier; SGT Turner L Reynolds, demolitions; and PFC James L. Horace, radio operator. The third squad leader was SGT Johnny Sit?? With PFC James Hake, machine gunners SP4 Joseph Slebodnik, grenadier; SGT Phillip Hatcher, rifleman and rear guard; PFC Larry J Abbott, radio operator; and Kit Carson Scout Ha Van Loo was in the rear guard.

The three squads boarded their helicopters, and were soon on their way to the landing zone. CPT Ivie radioed Major Russell that the ships were on their way.

Then he was informed of the lift ships time of arrival, Major Russell called in the preplanned artillery barrage. Fifty rounds of 155 and 105 MM howitzer were adjusted onto the bunker complex and the landing zone by CW2 Hodge, while 1LT Mills circled at a safe distance.

As planned, the last artillery round impacted just as the lead lift ship was on final approach into the landing zone. CW2 Hodge and WO1 Delucien in their Cobra fired rockets and turret weapons into the tree line to suppress enemy fire while the Aero-Rifle Platoons leaped out of their three ships. The three ships then flew to Troul Quinn, where they stood by to transport the lift ?????? ?????? off Arvn Rangers if necessary.

The Aero-Rifle Platoon formed a defensive perimeter, and when 1LT Mills flew overhead to direct them, they moved into the jungle toward the bunker complex. While they made their way through the jungle, a fresh reconnaissance team of helicopters arrived on station to replace 1LT Mills and CW2 Hodges' ships.

The scout helicopter of the team was piloted by CPT Robert DeCelle, Scout Platoon Leader. His crew chief was SP4 Edward Kictarek, and his observer SP4

Otis Southerland. In the AH-1G gunship, CP Alfred Seidel was pilot, and the co-pilot gunner WO1 Charles Barr.

1LT Mills and CW2 Hodge thoroughly briefed their replacements, and then left for Quan Loi to refuel and rearm. CW2 Hodge was forced to leave for fuel before 1LT Mills finished showing CPT DeCelle the bunkers and possible enemy positions but 1LT Mills was only a few minutes behind him.

The Aero-Rifle Platoon came upon a large bunker, and after covering both entrances, fired their weapons and threw grenades into it. The received no immediate response, so Bui Trung Dinh, the Kit Carson Scout with the first squad, stepped into one entrance and emptied his rifle into the interior.

Dinh backed out of the entrance, and stood next to SP4 Tauala. Both men had just reloaded their weapons when an estimated company sized enemy force opened fire from inside the bunker and from numerous positions in the jungle. Dinh courageously returned fire before being killed by a bullet in his face. SP4 Tauala was mortally wounded, but stood his ground and delivered suppressive machinegun fire. His volume of effective fire enabled the first squad to take temporary cover, but he soon ran out of ammunition, and he dropped to the ground where he lay on his face bleeding. SP4 Morrison, also with the first squad, was lightly wounded by grenade fragments. He fought his way to SP4 Tauala and helped him when the platoon withdrew.

The second squad at the other bunker entrance, took heavy fire also. Every man was injured by bullets and grenades, but SGT Davis, the squad leader, directed retaliatory fire from his wounded men, and managed to link them with the rest of the platoon at a lull in the firing. His machine gunner PFC Bruce Dykes, ignored broken bones and shrapnel wounds in his foot and leg to fire his machine gun into the enemy till it jammed, killing two of the enemy. He then began to throw grenades. SGT Relyea, the grenadier, received seven severe shrapnel wounds in his head, back, arm, and legs, but continued to use his grenade launcher with telling effect. SGT Davis himself was bleeding from his face, right arm, and back, but continued his expert leadership, and helped with the firing. SGT Reynolds, the demolitions man, had shrapnel wounds in

his stomach, neck and right arm. He also had a gunshot wound completely through his right thigh. His injured arm was useless, but he continued to fire with his one hand and carried his own demo bag when the platoon withdrew. The radio operator, PFC James L Horace, had shrapnel wounds in his buttocks and back and a piece of flesh was torn from his left arm by a grenade fragment.

SP4 Joseph Slebodnik, through his belonged to the third squad, was near the second squads locator, when the fire broke out. He was wounded in the foot, shin & knee by grenade fragments, and though his boot was full of blood he continued to use his grenade launcher while the platoon was pinned down, and during the move back to the landing zone.

CPT DeCelle's OH-58A Scout helicopter was damaged by enemy fire when the platoon was ambushed. He was mortally wounded in the chest, but managed to set his ship down in the southern end of the landing zone. His crew, SP4's Southerland and Kictarek, quickly helped their wounded pilot out of the stricken aircraft, and set up a defense against the enemy fire directed at the ship.

At the outbreak of enemy fire, CPT Seidel radioed the emergency to A Troop headquarters, and rolled in on the enemy positions. He was unable to fire till the Aero-Rifle Platoon had marked their position, but then delivered his rockets with deadly accuracy onto the enemy positions. His suppressive fire was a protection for the downed helicopter in the landing zone, as well as to the rifle platoon.

1LT Kelly, the platoon leader, directed retaliatory fire at the enemy who were only a few feet away from his own men. At a lull in the firing, he regrouped his men and delivered suppressive fire that allowed the platoon to withdraw. At one point, 1LT Kelly was forced to throw a grenade at an enemy only a few feet away in order to protect himself and his platoon and adjusted rocket fire from the gunship overhead. His radio operator, SP4 James, coolly relayed the information, adjusted fire, and arranged medical evacuation.

1LT Mills had heard of the contact on his radios, and had immediately returned to the landing zone to extract the mortally wounded CPT DeCelle. Fearlessly exposing himself and his aircraft to enemy fire, he landed in the bullet swept landing zone next to the downed aircraft. His crewmen assisted SP4's Southerland and Kictarek in putting the wounded man aboard 1LT Mills' OH-58A, and his observer, SP4 Montague, elected to remain with Southerland and Kictarek to help in their defense, and to help secure the downed ship. SP4 Montague's courageous actions were instrumental in saving the lives of the two crewmen for whom there was no room on 1LT Mills' small helicopter. 1LT Mills flew the wounded CPT DeCelle to Quan Loi, where a 334th Avn Co helicopter and a 5th SFG medic flew him to Long Binh and medical attention. CPT DeCelle died of his wounds a few days later.

At the outbreak of the battle, CPT Seidel had radioed A Troop headquarters for assistance. MAJ Russell and WO1 Evans were refueling their helicopter when they received the message, and they immediately left for the contact area. Two Cobra gunships were scrambled, and the lift platoon was notified to pick up the reaction force at Tonle Cham. CW2 Hodge landed at Quan Loi at about this time, and began to refuel and rearm his ship.

The first of the scrambled gunships was piloted by CW2 Michael Billow, with co-pilot/gunner 1LT Dennis L Patterson. Their faster ship arrived at the contact area before MAJ Russell, and immediately began to fire into the enemy positions. The second gunship arrived a few minutes later. CW2 Charles Normand was the pilot and the co-pilot/gunner was CPT Lewis B Gunn. The also began firing rockets and replaced CPT Seidel's ship, which returned after rearming. CW2 Normand took charge of the gunship operation directing fire from several cobras that eventually arrived to help.

CW2 Billow was recovering from his first rocket run when his ship was hit by enemy fire. The co-pilot instruments, the turret weapons, and the rockets all ceased to function, but CW2 Billow continued to dive at the enemy to divert their fire from the besieged Aero-Rifle Platoon.

The three lift ships arrived with the ARVN Ranger Ready Reaction Force, and CW@ Billow made low passes to divert enemy fire while the droops disembarked. The third lift ship, piloted by WO1 Richard A. Fleenor, hovered through the perilous landing zone to where the downed helicopter rested, and picked up the three men who were defending it and their position. Though SP4's Montague, Southerland, and Kictarek laid down a base of suppressive fire, the aircraft took a hit in one rotor blade before the three men were successfully extracted.

Major Russell and WO1 Evans undertook the command and control function of linking the ARVN Rangers with the Aero-Rifle Platoon. Though they were over the contact area for only a few minutes, their aircraft took five hits before the troops were linked up. When they flew up to a nearby road and made a precautionary landing, CW2 Billow made low passes to draw enemy fire from their ship. After a quick inspection, Major Russell and WO1 Evans flew the damaged OH-58A to the firebase at Quan Trung, where they landed and made a more complete survey of the damage. CW2 Billow flew his damaged gunship to Quan Loi, where he exchanged it for another ship, and returned to the contact area.

CW2 Normand and CW2 Hodge's gunships were on station over the battle. They covered the medical extraction of the Aero-Rifle Platoon's wounded, of whom one had died. They were assisted by gunships from A and B Batteries 2/20th APA, and E Troop, 1/9th Air Cavalry. CPT Seidel's ship also returned.

In the jungle, the third squad of the Aero-Rifle Platoon had performed an aggressive rear guard action while the platoon withdrew, and their suppressive fire was offensive that no further casualties were taken. When the troops had linked up with the ARVN Rangers, the medevac helicopter landed and picked up the wounded men and the dead SP4 Tauala. SP4 Joseph Slebodnick, the grenadier from the third squad, refused to be medivaced, reasoning that his support would be needed during the move through the bullet swept landing

zone to secure the downed OH-58A. SP4 Morrison also ignored his painful shrapnel wounds, and assisted the platoon during the move.

During the move down the landing zone, the platoon was halted three times by the heavy volume of hostile gunfire. When they and the ARVN Rangers reached the downed ship, a defensive perimeter was set up around it. The helicopter appeared to be airworthy, so it was decided to attempt to have it flown out rather than rig it for extraction.

CW2 Billow and 1LT Patterson had returned in a second Cobra, but when they attempted to fire rockets, it was found that the rocket system was defective. As the turret was operational, CW2 Billow decided to circle the landing zone at low level while 1LT Patterson fired the minigun into the treeline to protect the ground troops. Their suppressive fire also protected the recoveries from rocket runs by the other gunships in the area.

Major Russell and WO1 Evans had found their ship to be safe to fly, and they returned to the landing zone. They flew to the downed aircraft, where WO1 Evans jumped out of the hovering aircraft and ran to the downed ship and began to inspect the damage. SP4 Slebodnik was ordered by 1LT Kelly to get on Major Russell's helicopter, because of his bleeding shrapnel wounds. 1LT Kelly kept Slebodnik's grenade launcher and ammunition for use in suppressive fire. WO1 Evans quickly completed his inspection, started the damaged aircraft and under the cover of CW2 Billow's Cobra, and protected by suppressive fire from the ground troops, flew out of the landing zone to Quan Loi. Major Russell flew his ship to Quan Trung, with the wounded SP4 Slebodnik.

CW2 Billow continued to circle the landing zone while the lift helicopters landed through enemy fire to extract the remainder of the Aero-Rifle platoon, and part of the ARVN force. The lift ships unloaded their troops at Quan Trung and returned to the landing zone for the remainder of the ARVN force. No hits were taken on the two lifts, thanks to the suppressive fire from the helicopter door gunners, and the gunships.

After returning to Quan Trung, unloading the ARVN's and picking up the Aero-Rifle Platoon, the three lift ships flew back to Quan Loi, with CW2 Billow's ship as cover. CW2 Normand, who had acted as command and control for the armed helicopter operation, also returned to Quan Loi. CW2 Hodge and WO1 Delmoier ?????? on section over the bunker complex, and adjusted artillery fire into the area ??????? till dusk found them to ??????

The following day, elements of the 6th ARVN Ranger Group marched to the contact area, and in their reconnaissance of the area, found 11 bunkers. They also found old, unuseable, equipment, such as bolts, ponchos and clothing, a 15 foot well; bottles of medicine in U.S. and Chinese containers; 40mm grenades, M-16 ammunition and magazines, and a V.C. frag grenade; a saw and several cooking pot; some claymore mines with the explosives removed; and several pounds of short grained Cambodian rice. The bunkers were about ???? ?????? ?????? waterproofed with plastic sheets, and had been lived in by ?????? ?????? ?????? of at least 50 persons. The body of the Kit Carson Scout, Bui Trung Dinh was uncovered, plus several U.S. and enemy weapons. Then the ?????? ?????? and the presence of enemy weapons, it was estimated that there were at least eight enemy killed in action, by ground troops and helicopter fire.