

# Who We Are:

## Stories and Letters by Members of Charlie Company, The Original Boat People



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### Lens of a Nineteen Year Old

I don't know how many of you think about various specific times during the Vietnam War. I relive Soui Tre many times and often wonder what other perspectives guys had. I have talked to **Captain White** and **1 Lt Frydrychowski**. My lens is from that of a 19-year-old, squad leader drafted in the US Army with a bunch of guys and sent off to a place I read about in the newspaper, forty years later. **C/2/22 Mechanized** had trained at Fort Lewis for almost a year before arriving in Vietnam.

The night of 20 March 1967, we were told to remain in the tracks as we may be trying to provide support for **2/77 Field Artillery** and the **3/22 Infantry**. So we put out some LP's in front and waited. We listened to constant artillery and air strikes during the night, then air assault gun ship Hueys at dawn. We were told that **2/22 Recon** was trying to find a way through the bamboo to get to **LZ Gold** and would be doing so during the night. The **2/12 Infantry Battalion** was also trying to get there, but was running into a lot of contact. (We had never done stuff like that at night with the APC's). At

morning twilight Captain White had us moving in the fog. My track was last of the Charlie Company column on that morning. Abruptly we were halted and everyone did an about face, putting my track in the lead. Roger and Recon had made an opening through the bamboo. We were w/o a platoon leader for specified reasons and Sgt Sammy Kay who had been in my track switched the night before, was now switched over to Sgt Joe Dietz's, 31 the second track. Kay was the acting PL.

We followed our tracks back and came to a place where Recon had made a way through the bamboo. **There was an urgency that years later would be debated who would get there. There was no river.** Just mud and bamboo. It was thicker than a dog infected with ticks.

We were told that the LZ was being over run and would go in guns blazing. I am 19 years old and not related to John Wayne. A lot of things were going through my head at that point. One of the first things on my mind was, I have the rest of Charlie Company coming in right behind me, and probably the rest of the battalion. Later we would find out 647 VC/NVA were killed and we had 37 KIA with about 130 WIA. **Forty years later I learned Lance Crum was hit WIA, round to the head, and has had trouble receiving a purple heart.**

We found Recon about 100-200 yards to our rear with one of the Recon guys standing there and pointing to his left for us to turn in to their path through the bamboo. Recon's engines were smoking and they had pushed the bamboo aside and were resting the tracks on top of some of it. I remember seeing Roger in his APC on the radio to my left as we went by.

Some one from the 2/77 or 3/22 came over to my track and I asked him which way should we go? He said "Anyway you want." I remember he had on a green T shirt with a helmet. Today I wish I would have had him climb it. Like to meet him.

I told **Larry Mason** my driver. "Go fast and don't stop until I told him to, about 75 yards and pull a 90 degree right into the sun, and hold." As we did I saw the 105's off to my left with some of the barrels laying flat to the ground and the faces of some GI's with a sign of relief on their faces I hadn't seen before. Their Quad fifty was further to the north with no one on it.

We started taking rounds from our front and right. They were ricocheting off the track. **Dan Morris**, my 50 gunner could see the VC crawling and opened up. We also were handing grenades to him with the pins already pulled as the fifty had jammed. He threw them, and said they were coming back. We brought up the M-60 on the right side of the track and opened up.

It was at this point the track became hung up and both tracks were spinning high off the ground. My concern was an RPG hitting with everyone in the APC. I told Larry and Dan we were getting out and to get a bump off of the high ground and find us. When we opened the hinged door in the ramp more rounds ricocheted off the door but soon started to stop. I believe rounds ceased off of us today was because the VC/NVA might have been caught in somewhat of a crossfire as the rest of the company was doing business with them. We faced somewhat towards the entrance Recon had made. An eleven-man squad inside the track seemed to never exist, and we got out with our squad of four. The four of us got out in front and to the left in the open with 30-40 yards between us.

**I remember checking out an LP with the legs of three Americans sticking out, all KIA. We were moving forward towards the east.**

Forty plus years, and how long an engagement occurs in combat define my sense of time here. I

think it was 30-40 minutes at most for us. We faced the sun coming up to the east. We checked out the bodies as we passed them, VC and making sure they didn't roll over on us. We arrived at the edge of the bamboo that encircled the LZ and proceeded a little further. We came upon a huge termite mound with feet sticking out from behind it, two sets. As we came around the mound, they looked like they were asleep or praying. I poked one with my M 16 and checked his pulse...none.

At this point, my track C 34, Sgt Kay, RTO Dalpez, and Sgt Dietz's C 31 track pulled up beside. Neither of the VC had a mark on them. They were pristine. Shirts were beige muslin with clean black bottoms, long black hair. I took their pulse at the temples and they were cold with no pulse. Some one said the older one, maybe about 25, had a wedding ring on and to cut his finger off and take it. The other one looked about 14. I said if you want the f-----ring come and get it yourself. Those who were there remember who said that. Lynn Dalpez and Roger Borgheinck. I thought the VC were medics they were medics. I do not know what their back sides looked like.

Larry Mason, my driver, caught up with us about this time and the rest of the morning was policing bodies, as Chinooks and Hueys were coming and going. We had shot up most of our 50 ammo and were concerned about resupply. That was when I saw the first tank coming across the LZ as C 34 was more center to the LZ. The 2/34 Armor had arrived also and interspersed between us.

At this point Sgt Kay said third platoon would be used in support of Recon going out to recover a body of a pilot in a OE 1 Bird Dog that had been shot down. Lt Frydrychowski and his Recon platoon led out about 3k, and we halted and waited for 5-10 minutes half way out, when they came racing back with the recovered bodies 2 (KIA) from the plane. Roger personally knew the killed pilot.

It is difficult to remember 24/7 from 40 years ago and little things come back with conversations with guys. Today, 6-17-2009, after talking with **John Mersinger**, his squad turned left as they entered the zone and after the last red smoke there no Americans were still in fox holes. When the VC/NVA saw the APC's, the jungle came alive with black pj's hauling ass, and going down like dominoes. What a waste of life. I do not remember anything about red smoke.

A lot of brass decided this was a good time to fly around and come down to see what went on. Safe NOW!

As we left the LZ the next day, the last image I have is the Anti-aircraft gun sitting tucked up in a corner of the LZ coated with napalm.

I would like to know who was the colonel of the **271 and 272 VC Regiment** that kept trying. First **Soui Tre**, then **Burt**, then **Dau Tieng**. Larry, a few years ago, met the commander of the 271 VC Regiment on his trip to Vietnam and he wouldn't talk about that day. LTC Ralph Julian also on a trip back met him and talked to him. I do not know the results of that conversation. Larry said the VC LTC lived in Nui Ba Den for most of the war.

Norm, you were right. We really pissed them off at Soui Tre. Norm was not at **Soui Tre**, but later was a Squad Leader at LZ Burt January 1968. The movie "Platoon" by Oliver Stone is based on LZ Burt. Stone was in C Company during that time as was Peter Holt, San Antonio Spurs owner and owner of Caterpillar Inc.

At the Seattle reunion Joe Engles told us; 1. We felt we had 5 minutes to live before we would have been completely overrun.

2. We didn't know you were coming....silence in the room. Really hard to hold back the tears here for me.

In Pittsburgh, Aberdeen, and Colorado Springs in September 2012, men and perhaps some women from the 22nd Infantry will meet for our annual national reunion. Been to Nashville also now with many from Alpha's and really big guns guys 175mm and 8 inch artillery.

## **George Dahl**

March 21, 2012.....what a coincidence. Since the originally writing I have come across two guys at the Minneapolis VA who were also at Soui Tre. Stewart from Cloquet, Mn was with the 196th LIB, and said they came in the following morning and did patrols from Soui Tre and came up with a further body count of 200 more, found in and around the jungle and bamboo leaving blood trails all over the place.

John Bauer from Northfield I met in the Blood Lab at the Mpls VA, stopped me, extending his hand, staring at my hat, embraced me and said "you saved our lives". He was in 2/77 that day. He saw Soui Tre and the 22nd Infantry crest on my hat.

That crest is an opener for any meetings with guys, and always will for me. Today, there are as many perspectives of those days as there were men present. I was pleasantly welcomed by A Company in Pittsburgh this year 2012. They are a great group of guys. Gary Haart, Terry Castro and wife and others....Dwight and Betty Brenneman.

Branson Reunion 5-7-14 Just returned from reunion in Branson, MO and now know why no one was behind me going into Soui Tre. In a conversation with Lynn Dalpez, RTO in the 31 track, he told me Sammy Kay, acting Plt Leader, each time we stopped when in column going Southeast, had Sgt Dietz dismount his squad out of the APC each time we stopped. They had to remount the APC ( taking time) and then move out. I in C 34 had the message to find Recon and was gone, reversing 180 degrees and now leading the column, creating a 100-200 yard gap between me and the rest of the company, resulting in C 34 sitting in LZ Gold by ourselves taking small arms fire until the company came in. This information has come to me via Lynn Dalpez, the platoon RTO riding in Sgt Diet's C 31 APC, 48 years later, me never knowing why? We sat shooting 90 degrees perpendicular to the column entry. Told George White about it in Aberdeen. He didn't know anything about it. I now think that there was a cross fire for a short while while the rest of the company came into the LZ.

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## **HAPPY VETERANS DAY**

Fifty years ago most of you having recently enjoyed the pleasures of basic training and, in particular, those who had "volunteered" to spend that time with me at Ft. Lewis, were graciously allowed to join GOTUSA, "Grunts of the US Army". Your acceptance into GOTUSA came only after you had achieved the required proficiency in weapons and latrine maintenance, efficiency in the folding of underwear,

physical prowess in military pilates, qualification in burnishing the bucket for non-dry-use aka canteen cup and, high level of efficiency in avoidance of officers and first sergeants (Specialty MOS 42R9F [gaws]: Getting Away With S....tuff The passing of these 50 years has only strengthened the bond among us, all of us the living and the dead. It will and must continue. I have said it before but repetition has not lessened its strength: serving with and commanding you has been the proudest experience in my life. You should be righteously proud of your service. You were soldiers, combat soldiers and are now veterans. You deserve the honors today and every day from the citizens you served so damn well. Happy Veterans Day to each of my veteran friends. Be well. Be safe. Enjoy.

Respectfully, Roger (Lt.)

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Hi Jim,

I meant to send you guys dad's obituary. It can be found on the following website link:

<https://www.cremationsocietywa.com/obituary/morris-moe-johanson-10182016/>

Mom realized after it printed she had the year of his Vietnam injury incorrect. It should be 1967. Just thought you might want to share with anyone who asked. I submitted death notices in the Chehalis Chronicle and Bellingham Herald since most folks had already been notified.

Thank you again to all of you for your support and I look forward to see you soon and at the service.

Have a good evening,

Cherie Johanson

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**Michael Doolittle**, I would like to ask all those who see it to help identify those in the picture, I am the one in front on one knee.. Also if anyone knows of any "Next of Kin" brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews etc of those who were lost that day.... As this is to honor them I was hoping that some might want to come for this Memorial Ceremony...

