

January-February, 1966

Operation Double Eagle
(Or, my welcome back to Vietnam)
One Marines recollections
Echo-2-3 By John Duncan

Our platoon was brought ashore by the old, green, grasshopper, choppers and they dropped us off on a ridge beyond the beach. We set-up a perimeter and began digging our foxholes. After about a half hour, of two of us digging out the same hole, we had dug down about seven inches into the rock. Everyone else was having the same luck, so we did not feel so bad. There was a stream at the bottom of the hill, which meandered between the mountains and then on to the sea. The tranquility was interrupted by a rifle shot and we were told that someone thought he had seen a VC next to the stream and had fired at him (way down there). Hey, we are Marines and all of us fired Expert didn't we. We also heard (in a loud voice) what the Lt. told everyone about holding their fire. Just before dark, we received several incoming mortar rounds and everyone dove for their indentation (foxhole).

I do not remember who my partner was, I believe it was Rongholt, but both of us were trying to get into the same six foot by four foot by seven-inch deep hole. There isn't a lot to do while you are waiting on the salvo to stop. I remember thinking that I might be able to get a little lower in the hole if I didn't have my belt buckle on or the buttons on my shirt. The rest of the night was uneventful. Later in the operation we took up positions not far from the beach.

I remember the sand was so fine that it got into everything. Anything that had oil on it, had sand stuck to it, including the Ham and Lima Beans. Our squad was chosen to go on a patrol. It was to run parallel to the beach and about a mile inland. In addition to our radioman, we also had an artillery radioman. The squad was not assigned anyone from weapons platoon, as well as I can remember. It was not a bad patrol, as patrols go.

I do not recall seeing any civilians in the fields or in the huts that we passed. Maybe that should have told us something. We found a few holes and closed them up and kept moving. Later, the patrol stopped and the word came back that the point had spotted about six VC in the village that we were approaching; they were sitting in front of a hut. The plan was to move into position and then open fire at the same time. Before we could move up, the point opened fire on the VC. None of them were hit and they scattered. It was not going to be a nice day after all. We then moved onto the trail that went through the village and came under fire. We returned fire and in no time we had two Marines wounded and one possibly dead. We were now pinned down. They were in front and to the left side of us. We would later learn that they had tunnels everywhere.

The squad leader and radioman were working feverishly to contact air evac for the wounded, but the site was too hot for them to land, the first two attempts failed. The pilots radioed us that they could see more VC converging on our position. The chopper was finally able to land in the rice paddy between our position the hedgerow and the wounded were dragged across the opening and shoved inside. You could hear the rounds hitting the chopper. Those pilots, sitting high in that chopper, must have had nerves of steel, among other things. Have you ever thought about what it would have been like over there with out the med-evac helicopters and the Huey gun ships?

While all of this was happening we were still trying to get word to Echo Co., that we had a problem. With the help of our radioman and the chopper pilots relaying messages, they were finally able to contact our company. I was unaware of this at the time and was somewhat concerned about my future at that point. My fire team was covering the rear flanks. I had continued to fire into the hedgerow area (approx. 300 feet away) as the choppers picked up the wounded. I had now used up about all of my extra ammo, as had the others members of the squad. (After this, I carried extra, extra ammo)

Since the wounded were now evacuated I expected that we would try to move back toward the beach and find better cover. Keep in mind that this is not happening as fast as I am typing. I never did understand why they did not come at us from the right flank. Maybe they were waiting on their reinforcements to arrive. Just I was running out of promises to the Lord, if he would get me out of there, when several amtracks came busting

through that hedgerow. The platforms dropped and out poured Echo Co.. John Wayne has never made a more exciting entrance. If it had not been detrimental to my health, I would have jumped up and cheered. The company quickly moved into position and pushed forward. Part of the company was online with the CO, while others were cleaning up behind us. Our squad was on the trail just behind the CO. There was a trench that ran along the left side of the trail and it was well maintained. The CO said for someone to check it out, so I jumped in. The left side toward the paddies was lower than the side next to the trail and I could see the company moving forward. The right side, I had to look up to see the squad. As I moved along the trench I noticed an opening, on the right, going back under the trail. I yelled that we had a possible tunnel just ahead. The CO said to keep the line moving and to have the fire team behind ours check it out. I heard several Marines jump into the trench, about a hundred feet behind me.

I approached the tunnel and as I moved by the entrance, a Marine stood above me to my left, watching the opening. I could see that it went in to the left and then sharply to the right. There were bare footprints just inside, and all along the trench. I had not gotten more than ten or twelve feet away when a rifle went off twice. I ducked and turned around. There, behind me lay a VC just outside the entrance of the tunnel. He had come out behind me and the Marine on the trail had shot him twice in the back. I can not tell you that Marine's name today, but I knew it then and I remember using his name, saying thanks and then moving on down the trench as if it was just another day in the paddies. If you were that Marine, I apologize for forgetting your name and thanks again.

Marines watching out for other Marines. We came to the end of the village path and someone had put up a bamboo barrier. All of the firing had stopped. The barrier was checked and removed. We only went a short distance from there and then waited on further orders. Some of the huts had caught fire and the CO passed the word to make sure it was not our men doing it. The tracks came up and we got on board. I crawled up on a tank for the ride back to the beach. An hour earlier I was lying on a path, concerned about my butt sticking up too high and now here I am sitting high on a tank smoking a Pall Mall. Life is good. I did not know until two years ago, when I received my records that we went back on board the Valley Forge on my birthday, Feb. 26. Heck, I doubt if I even knew it was my birthday then.

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