

OPERATION DOUBLE EAGLE

BY TOM WALSH

The Night Before the Operation Began I was on a troop ship, I don't remember it's name now and the USS Valley Forge was off our port side. At sometime around 2400 or, 0100 hrs we, Hotel Company, started down the nets into the landing craft to transfer over to the Valley Forge. I don't recall thinking the sea was rough that night while on the deck of the ship, but I sure as hell was thinking it going down the net.

We were crammed into the LCVP like Sardines and I was right beside the port gunnel, we were in full combat gear, packs and all. I remember we were really rocking and rolling and when we listed to port the water came just about level with that gunnel too. It seemed that between my first tour overseas and now this, that I had done this a thousand times and to be honest this was the first one that scared the hell out of me. Well, we managed to plow our way through the water over to the Valley Forge, which had her courtesy ladder down with the small platform at the bottom, which we pulled up next to.

The old gal was pretty well lit up and I could see Marines watching us from the hanger deck. Meanwhile you could only classify what we were doing as riding an elevator. The damn boat must have been lifting and falling back again about a good 30 feet, if it wasn't, it sure seemed that far at the time. We would stand one man up on the gunnel in a crouch with a couple of guys trying to balance him from behind. He'd ride the boat up and upon reaching the height of the platform he'd hand his weapon to the men standing on the platform and would ride the boat back down. Upon riding the boat up still perched on the gunnel, when he reached the height of the platform again, he would jump, with the help of a shove from the guys balancing him, into the arms of the guys on the platform. About the only thought going through my mind as I recall was, "Ohhh, we gotta be crazy!" What amazed me was the fact that everyone made it. Years later, 1997 at our first reunion to be exact, a couple of the guys called me over and asked, "Hey Tom, do you remember watching those poor bastards they brought over to the Valley Forge the night before Double Eagle? We thought they were all gonna be killed!" I replied, "Yeah, I remember, I was one of those poor bastards and I thought we were all gonna be killed!" We laughed that night, but I sure as hell wasn't laughing the night it took place. We slept on the hanger deck with our gear that night.

During the night I had the same dream three different times. I remember it like it was last night. I was sitting on a couch with my sister in law talking when I felt someone standing behind me. When I turned to look, it was the Grim Reaper. I tried to call out, or scream, whichever, but nothing came out and I'd wake up. The third time it happened, I must have made some type of noise, when I was trying to call out and it woke me up I noticed a sailor who seemed to have stopped in mid stride looking down at me. It was a look of like, Jesus, that kid must be scared. In the morning, I figured the dream was an omen, so I took Del Marshal to the side. I handed him a piece of paper that I had written on. He looked at it and asked, "What's this?" So I told him, "Del, I'm not coming out of this one and I want you to write my family and tell them how I died." It seemed to set him back some, but Del tried to reason with me that it was just a dream, nothing more, but I couldn't shake the feeling I had. He finally promised me he'd write my

family for me. A little later he handed me a piece of paper and asked me to do the same for him, if he bought it. I slipped the paper into my breast pocket and nodded.

The next morning we formed on the flight deck in heliteams to begin the assault. We would be dropped inland at an LZ and be the blocking force for the guys hitting the beach. No was to get into, or out of the beach head area. We were to hold until the guys hitting the beach moved inland and linked up with us, as best as I can remember it. The bridge of the ship looked like a scene out of W.W.II, it was mobbed with reporters and brass of all types. It was after all the largest amphibious operation since Inchon Korea, up to that time during a war.

The choppers were warming up with their rotors going and I remember this one sailor, I'll never forget him. He was standing with a buddy and it seemed to me he started to cry. He started to turn away and he said to his buddy, "I can't watch them go in, some of them are going to need me and I won't be there." He was a black heavy set Corpsman. It's funny, how you try to take it all in, remember it and hold it close to you for some reason. Finally, the signal was given and we started our run to the choppers, this was it.

We piled into the chopper and it slowly lifted from the deck and moved out over the edge of the ship. We climbed up to the formation and started towards shore. Combat, our little mascot, was making the trip in with us. I don't remember if he was in our chopper, or another one, but the little guy was going to war with his Marines. I remember I couldn't help thinking that I wouldn't make it out of the chopper when we reached the LZ, but I wasn't really scared for some reason. Odd how you can just resign yourself to something that way. I looked down as we passed by the ship, she looked about the size of a postage stamp from up there. I had seen her like this a number of times and it was always the same. I was amazed at how small she looked.

I don't recall anyone talking on the way in. Maybe they were all doing what I was doing, looking around out of the corner of my eye at the other guys that I was with and always having the nagging thoughts in my head. Will I get it through the skin of the chopper, in the door, how will I get it? I somehow came to settle on getting it in the door on the way out. I guess I figured they'd let me almost make it and then take me out. It was a long ride in, but not long enough to suit me. We're there, we're going in, as we close with the ground everyone is tense as we get ready to touch down. Just before the wheels hit the ground we're running in a low crouch for the door. There are a number of guys ahead of me and a few behind me. As I approach the door I can see the guys who are already out running towards their spot in the 360 perimeter. Any second now, I'll feel the impact any second now, probably in the chest. Suddenly my feet hit the ground and I'm running! Now you bastards are in trouble, now you'll play hell killing me!

My thoughts had changed, I wasn't framed in the door of a chopper anymore. Now I was a Marine on the ground, they had their shot and they blew it. I took Del's gun team to our place on the perimeter just as it had been rehearsed on the island of Mindoro in the Philippines. I don't recall it being a hot LZ to the best of my recollection. I could be wrong, but that's the way I remember it.

We had finally moved out of the LZ as more choppers came in and unloaded their Marines. I don't recollect anything more until that night. I have no idea where in the hell we were. I remember getting to one area and there were some bushes with small clearings among them and there was some conferring of sorts going on, or something. The next thing I remember is the

artillery fire on our left flank in the trees. Don't ask, I don't know, ours, the Navy, theirs, I have no idea. I seem to remember it going on for a long time though.

The next day we moved to a road, which was our blocking position. Our brothers would be hitting the beach this morning, we had no idea if they were experiencing a hot, or cold landing, if they were taking casualties, or not. All we could do was dig in at our positions and wait. I had Del's gun covering the road, but I don't remember where we had Butch Yobbies gun.

I'll relate three fights to you. I can't tell you what chronological they came in except for the fact the fight in the valley happened on phase 2. I think this one happened on phase 1, but I can't be positive. We were on a company patrol one day and we had a South Vietnamese Marine with us. We were coming up the path to (what we used to call a road) to a village, don't ask me the name of it, because I don't think I ever knew it. To our left front was a somewhat small white masonry temple as I remember it. On the right there was a slope up to a large open field facing the village on a large front if my memory is serving me right.

As we approached the village this supposed to be monk came out of the temple. I Remember him as being kind of young with basically well trimmed hair. By young I mean he wasn't exactly middle aged, or something like that. He was probably older then some of us though. This guy was asked for his papers and questioned at length. Everyone knew he was a VC, but there was no proof. His papers were in order and I guess his answers to the questions were good enough to get him by. We were letting him go. A couple of us asked the Skipper why we were letting him go when he so obviously a VC. The Skipper basically said the same thing I just told you above, but added, don't worry about it. Well, we pretty much knew what that meant. As we began to continue our patrol Del Marshal and I were walking past this guy looked him in the eye and said, "See you in the morning Charlie." Damned if he didn't look right back at us as if to say, "Yeah, see you in the morning guys."

That night the Skipper held a plt sgts and squad leaders meeting. The gist of what he said boiled down to the fact that we were going back to that village in the morning. We would be online across the field to the village. I would have one of my guns on the road on the left flank. Yobbies gun would be up on the field attached to another squad. I remember the last thing the Skipper said very clearly, as if he were saying it to me right now. "If we take so much as one shot from that village, I want the SOB that fired it run down and beat into the ground with a #\$\$%&\$\$# butt plate!

At approximately 0700 hrs we were online behind a long rise that hid us from being viewed in the village. When the Skipper assured himself that everyone was online and ready we moved out online up and over the rise. I took the gun team onto the road. We walked steadily forward until we reached the temple, which we had been told to check out. I walked into the temple and found what appeared to be every woman, child and old man from the village in there full of fear. I remember telling one of the guys to get outside and tell them we were walking into an ambush! At the same moment someone came running into the temple telling us the same thing and that they had found a Willie Peter (White Phosphorus) mine in the field. We were to move back until the Engineers blew it. We got outside and facing the village in a crouch we began to back up the road so that Chuck Jenkins and the other Engineers could take care of the mine. We hit the deck as the whole front of the village opened up on us.

Someone called from up on the field, "Gunsup!" Just as we began to rise some silly bastard fired right up the road at us. I had to check to reassure myself that my head was still where it was supposed to be. I started timing his shots and when I thought it was right we all went at once. We virtually hurdled a post and rail fence alongside the road and race up the slope to the field through a field of fire. We got online with the rest of the guys.

What I remember next is the first charge across the field to the village. We went online at a dead run with the VC pumping rounds at us. Funny, I don't remember that mine being blown, it's a hell of a thing to think of now, but I don't think it even entered my head then. At the time, I think the run across the length of that field seemed like the longest run of my life and all I was thinking was run faster, goddamn it, run! As we finally made the fence everyone was diving face first into a prone position.

I turned my head to look to the rear and much to my surprise saw mortar rounds landing away behind us. I think the first thought I had was, "Christ, how the hell long have those been falling?" I turned back toward the vine covered fence facing forward when two rounds came through tearing two leaves off the vine within an inch of either side of my head. All I could see was those two leaves twirling in the air next to each eye.

Now I'll tell you, hearing rounds being fired at you and seeing them for the first time are two completely different things. It's enough to turn your stomach and it did mine. I thought I was going to puke my guts up. Was I scared, you bet your life I was scared! What happened next was that I got mad, even indignant, you might say. What went through my head then was simply, "Why the @#\$% are you to try to kill me? Stupid question and reasoning in the middle of a fire fight, in a war, but that's what I thought none the less. I started to stand and as I did so I saw everyone else was getting up also.

We came up from behind that fence firing like hell, everyone was squeezing rounds off. I noticed the tall palm trees to our front and pumped some rounds into a few of them just to make sure there weren't any snipers in them. I then saw someone run behind a haystack to our front and yelled, "VC behind the haystack!" as I pumped some rounds into it. At some point during this time our plt sgt, I don't remember his real name, but from this day forward we called him "Pyro", had run forward and lit the damn village on fire.

The fire spread pretty quickly through the village. I remember some yelling, "Grenade!", from my right. We ran to our left and there was an explosion behind us. A VC had run for the fence to throw a grenade and SSgt Valdez killed him with his Carbine. I believe the grenade blew the VC's head off, as I recall.

The gate in the fence needed to be blown so the engineers were called on once again. Everyone was moved back right and left of the gate and were to rush through and fan out to both sides when it was blown. This is where it gets a little confusing for me, and maybe if the other guys send in their memories it'll help to clear the confusion up. I know there was the first fence, but I think there was a second fence also after we got through the first one.

When the gate in the first fence was blown we charged through it we on the left side fanning out online to the left and the guys on the right doing the same so that the middle linked up and we became a solid line again. I seem to recall the Skipper giving the command to charge. So we made for the second fence. I remember yelling to the gun team to stay in the smoke, but to

watch out for the burning thatch falling from the hootches. In my memory it seems that this whole part of the village was on fire and there was shooting and yelling everywhere around me. I don't know at which point it happened but someone ran to a small bamboo corral that a water buffalo was in. He was near panicked from the fire and smoke. We saw this VC was making an effort to let the buffalo out and save him. So, we all started to yell, "Don't shoot him, let him get the buffalo out!" Well, he let that big SOB out ok and he lowered his head and came charging right down the path, at our line, like a freight train.

There were five Marines as I recall it, two in the kneeling position and three standing behind them, or vice versa. Anyway, they were also in the middle of the path and had decided for some reason that they weren't moving for any goddamn buffalo, or anything else. One of them opened up with an automatic and ripped that buffalo from neck to backside right up the back. As the rounds hit him a fan of blood flew into the air, but he never even missed a stride, let alone slow down. All five Marines were hitting him with everything they had and that animal just kept coming and those Marines weren't budging an inch. Those of us close enough to see what was happening also turned our weapons on the buffalo. I remember aiming to hit him just behind his front shoulder trying to get a heart shot, or at least to break the shoulder, so he'd drop. Even with the rest of us hitting him he wouldn't go down. We never stopped firing on him. As I think about it now, I think even the VC stopped shooting to watch this test of wills. What I was thinking then was, "He's going to trample them, they won't move and he's going to trample them!"

Finally the buffalo fell sliding forward on his chest and chin and stopped with his nose within what looked to be an inch of the two kneeling Marines boots. All five rifles were pointing straight down at the ground in front of them. I leaned my head towards the ground and took a couple of deep breaths and felt a wave of shame wash over me. We had just killed the most magnificent animal I would probably ever have the privilege of seeing in my life, but it would get worse before this was over.

We went on the attack again and the volume of fire increased again. From my left rear "VC in the bunker!" followed by "Grenade!" I hit the deck just as the explosion went off. Palm fronds and all sorts of debris was falling me. I remember I was pushing some palm fronds off myself when Del came over and gave me a hand up. I heard someone say, "Drag them outta there!" They did and it was an old man and an old woman. They had been kneeling in this bunker facing forward when the grenade was tossed in. The blast and shrapnel took them from behind, they were still alive. The Corpsman checked them out and said there's nothing we can do for them. At which point someone fired an automatic rifle into them. I remember everyone being pissed off about that and yelling at him asking why the hell he had to shoot them. His reply was a simple one, "To put them out of their misery, they were suffering and there was nothing we could do about it."

I also remember the poor guy who had tossed the grenade sitting there with tears streaming down his face. As each of us passed him we put our hand on his shoulder and said, it's ok, it wasn't your fault, you didn't know. We got back on the line again and fought our way to the second fence.

What I remember here is a Huey came in and they were throwing red smoke grenades down on VC positions. All of a sudden it was just out in front of me a little to the right with this crazy

bastard standing out on the skid. He had his revolver out shooting down on them. I could hear him screaming at them, "Get off them; get the @#\$% off them! The front of the Huey had turned facing me when I first saw it, so I had a real good view of this guy. The thought struck me, "That SOB is crazy!" He emptied his pistol opened the door to the chopper and climbed back in and the chopper pulled away. The next thing I remember happening a little later as we were still there fighting was the sound of another chopper coming in from behind me. I turned my head for a look. It was another Huey (might have been the same one, I don't know) low to the ground. It passed me on my left and swooped up over the trees and did a 360 and nose dived into the trees with a loud crashing sound.

We were ordered to go out and get them, with a rifle squad and the gun, before the VC got to them. By the time we got there a squad from the other platoon was already there and had gotten them out. I remember sticking my head inside the chopper to take a look, it was a mess. Everything was smashed and broken. We went back to the line again. I remember we were past the second fence and they were yelling, "Get on line, get on line!" I took my bayonet out and put it on my rifle and ordered the guys in the gun team to do the same. I tried to find a way to say good-bye to Del, just in case, but I just couldn't seem to do it. So, I just looked over at him and said, "I'll see you on the other side." He replied, "Yeah, on the other side, Walsh."

The Skipper came through the trees behind us looked around and asked if everyone was on line and ready. He raised his arm into the air and brought it down pointing forward and yelled, "Charge!" We rose as one walking forward spraying rounds as fast as we could pump them out in an arch to our front firing from the hip. We were still walking toward them when we suddenly all broke into a run whooping and hollering and giving the rebel yell. I don't recall anyone giving an order to do it, I guess someone started to run and everyone just took off with him. Well, they broke and hauled ass. I remember getting to the edge of the trees and we went crashing through some brush into the open. we were running diagonally to the left. Del and the gun team were just behind me, right on my heels. I turned my head to take a glance back at them over my shoulder. What do I see, this little black pajammered (sp?) conical hat SOB running like hell off to the right. I yelled, "VC right, kill him, kill him!" I saw Del spin with the M-60, throw it to his shoulder without having time to brace himself, pulled the trigger and cut loose. The gun drove him backwards and the barrel was kicked skyward. When he stopped shooting Del yelled, "did I get him, did I get him?" I laughed and said, "If he was a @#\$%&%# duck, you did!" Now we were sweeping forward on a walk.

There was some concertina wire with a baby boo tangled up in it and the mother standing on the other side, she was a big one, this one was. We had to get by them, but knew she'd probably charge us. I raised my rifle to shoot her. Eddie Rosier said, "Don't shoot her, I'll untangle the baby." I told him to go ahead, but if she drops her head, I'm gonna drop her. He moved down and started to try to get the calf free. I was aiming at her thinking of that other boo wondering how the hell I was going to drop her with one shot, because that's all I was going to get at her. If I hit her in skull the damn round is probably going to glance off of it. Well, she lowered her head and I squeezed the round off. I was back on target fast enough to see her eye disappear into her head. Her four legs came up under her and she dropped with a thunderous crash, let out a deep breath, shuddered and died. Eddie got the calf free and it wondered over to it's mother sniffing her and wailing.

Eddie was yelling at me, "Why'd you shoot her, I almost had it free?" I told him she dropped her head and I couldn't take the chance, I had to shoot her. We must have went back to the front of the village at some point. I remember SSgt Valdez telling me to take a man and go into a patch of tall grass and find a dink that was in there, I think it was elephant grass and I hated that stuff. It was like going into a razor fight without a razor, it sliced the hell out of you. I know it was taller then I was anyway. I took Del with me. I was using my bayonet to part the grass and the sweat was pouring down my face like someone had turned a faucet on. We were only part way into the grass when they called out that they had him. When we got back out we saw it was a dead VC with no head. I wish someone had told us we were looking for a dead VC when we went into the grass! I must have walked away from the scene, because I remember walking toward it again later. Only this time one Marine was slamming his butt plate into the chest of the corpse and another was sticking him with either a bayonet, or a K-bar (Combat Knife).

I asked them why they were doing that. The guy hitting the VC with his buttplate said, To see the blood squirt out of his neck. The other said he wanted to see how it felt to stab someone. I also remember someone driving his K-Bar into the back of a chicken in a tight bamboo cage saying, "That's one @#\$\$%*%\$ chicken they won't eat!" Well, after 30 odd years that's the way I remember this fight. At some point in the operation we were brought back to the ship. What sticks out most in my mind about that is that they had the sailors steam clean our rifles. I should have known something wasn't right when that happened. I was to tired to give a damn at the time though. About all we had to do was run over the weapons with a brush, some oil and run a couple of patches down the bore. I don't know if it was one two, or three days before we went back in, but, back in we did go. It's odd, I don't actually remember going back in.

What I do remember starts at a chopper base. A couple of us were talking to a Corpsman. We'd never met him before as I recall, but we learned that night that he came from the Kool - Aid capital of the world, as he put it. He was a heavy set guy a little taller then me I think. We talked for some time and it was the last we saw of him for awhile. I don't know if it was that night, or another that I was on watch. When the watch was over I was walking back to the area the rest of the guys were sleeping on the ground at. Some mortars started landing on the far end of the base, but they were far enough away as not to present a threat to us. We had Del's Birthday at this chopper base.

One night before dark Butch Yobbie and Del snuck into a nearby ville to get some beer. Well, we had to celebrate Del's birthday didn't we? It had gotten dark before they got back. It wasn't hard to hear them coming with the bottles clinking in the pack they had as they crawled back to the position before they called to us. I believe that's the night it rained like hell. All we could do was lay in the mud in our ponchos with the rain beating us into the ground. Del got sick that night, he must have gotten a bad beer, or something. The Valley Accurate, or not I have a memory of 2nd platoon, Hotel company, which I was attached to and some other platoon being thrown together and being called a company. We separated from the rest of the outfit and headed out on a patrol.

I remember the area we were in when we stopped, it was heavily treed with a path. We were on both sides of the path in the trees waiting to make contact with the Army, the 101st I believe it was. We were chowing down on C-Rats when they came through us on the path from the opposite direction in which we were going. We saddled up and headed down the path in the

direction they had come from. I don't know how far we went before we took a right onto a smaller path on our right, which sloped down into a smaller valley.

The path was crossed by another that had a dirt wall shielding it from the valley below. Some of the guys had reached the valley floor as we were just approaching the dirt wall. All hell broke loose, the whole valley opened up on us. I ran forward and dove behind the dirt wall with some of the other guys and those behind us were diving behind trees. I looked to my right and the poor guys on the path had no alternative, but to just lay flat where they were. I sat up with my back against the wall and looked right. I could see the guys in the valley had formed a line and began trying to fight their way across the valley, but it seemed as though they got pinned down. Some SOB across the valley from where we were started popping off rounds at the wall we were behind. He hit the wall behind me at the top several times and the dirt he kicked up kept falling down the back of my neck and into the back of my shirt. One round hit the tree Elroy Sayers was leaning against with a thwack. I looked up and Elroy's eyes were as big as silver dollars! Then he started to hit the wall again.

I don't know why, but eventually he really pissed me off knocking that dirt down into my shirt. I was smoking a butt and I put it on the ground took my rifle and started to turn myself against the wall. One of the guys asked me what I was going to do, I said, "I'm gonna kill this son of a bitch!" I started to inch my way up the wall. I just got my eyes over the top edge of the wall when this bastard almost took my head off. I turned around slid down the wall into a sitting position, picked up my butt and said, "@#\$\$% it, let him shoot." The next thing I remember is a call from down below, "Gunsup!" Looking down the path all I could think was what the hell are we going to do trample these guys? So, I told them to spread eagle their arms and legs so we could run between them. We got ready and then took off down the path. I was so busy trying to run picking my way through arms and legs that although I heard shooting I don't even know if they were shooting at us. My heart was beating so hard I thought it would come through my chest, but we made it to the bottom.

We ran to this huge rock the skipper was behind and got behind him just as someone went out around the front of the rock. Someone there said a Corpsman was hit out there somewhere. The Skipper called in arty on the far treeline. All I recall was three rounds coming in. I also remember some of the guys took two prisoners who had their uniforms wrapped up in neat little bundles, they were NVA. Someone came back around the rock from the front. It was the Lt., He was hit in the hip. He sat on a smaller rock and opened his pants, it looked like a deep flesh wound. I assumed he might have been the one that was going out when we got there, he was also one very pissed off Lt. judging from the look on his face! I told the gun team to strip their gear off we were probably next. The Skipper told us to go in after the Corpsman. I said, Yes sir, but I'll take them in that way pointing behind us. I called out to Butch Yobbie to see if he could hear me. He called back saying he could. I told him we were coming in and that when I gave him the word to open up and cover us. He yelled back, OK. Some SSGT came running in from that direction saying, "Come in this way." We started running I yelled to Butch to open up and the ssgt led out. As we came out of the trees we took a sharp right running behind our line. I heard a lot of firing, but I wasn't sure who was doing most of it. I was too busy running for my life to notice. We finally made it to the Corpsman. It was the guy we had talked to at the

chopper base that night. His shirt was wide open and it didn't look good. My heart sunk when I saw his wounds. He had been hit high on the right side.

I could see the entry wound and the very large bruise covering his side. There was an exit wound on his left side at his waist and I think it had hit him in the wrist when it came out. I also believe he was hit in the ankle too, but I'm not sure. We rolled out the yellow plastic, or rubber, stretcher on the ground and rolled him on to it as gently as we could. The Doc let out a groan of pain. He wasn't saying anything and we thought he was going into shock, so we started talking to him. I said, "Hey Doc, you're going home man, talk to us."

Del said, "Yeah Doc, back to the Kool - Aid capital of the world!" The doc replied to us with, "Goddamn it, I'm a @\$%&\$\$ Corpsmen, I know better then to go into shock!" I was still worried about him though and softly said, "Ok Doc, but stay awake okay? Just talk to us some." I don't remember hearing any firing during all this, for some reason, until we picked him up and started running with him. As I have said before, the Doc was a big guy, but did I mention heavy? We started running with him to where we saw the choppers landing and we had to run up an incline, trying to keep the Doc level. We got him to the chopper and lifted him into the door. I never saw, or heard from him again. I did hear later that the round had run along his rib cage without touching a vital organ and that he'd be ok. How true that was I don't know. I don't even know who told us that. The next thing I remember is that we had gotten to the other side of the valley. At this point the fighting seemed to have stopped for a time. I think the Skipper was talking things over with the platoon leaders, or something. From here the valley bottled necked up into a ravine with hills on both sides. I remember a few of us were talking and I said to someone, "If we go up in there it's going to look like Custers last stand, because none of us are coming back out." The decision was made to pull back across the length of the valley. At some point they opened up on us again, it turned into a fighting withdrawal.

I remember being under very heavy fire approaching the end of the valley and I told Del to set the gun where we were to cover the withdrawal. I went to a small stream so I could cover the guns withdrawal. The fire was really intense and as the last guys came through me I stopped one of them and told him to help me get my gun team out of there. I heard another gun open up and spun around to see where the hell it was, I thought it was a VC gun. What I saw was a gun on a knoll to our left. It was the other platoon. Their gun set up and was firing straight over Del's gun team to cover them, God bless em. I yelled to Del to get the hell out of there. We opened up to cover them also. Del was just getting up, he had one hand on the gun and the other on his canteen. I saw his arm get knocked back wildly and kind of twisting as it was.

I remember yelling, "He's hit, Goddamn it, he hit!" They were running back towards us as we continued to fire and finally made it to where we were. I asked Del if he was hit. He said he thought he was hit in the butt, because he could feel something warm running down the back of his leg. It turned out that he wasn't hit at all. The round had gone through his canteen and it was the water he felt running down his leg. We joined up with the rest of the guys. We entered a much smaller valley and took cover behind trees and what have you waiting for choppers, as the NVA kept sniping at us. The choppers came and took us out under fire. I don't know how many guys were hit in the valley outside of the two I told you about. I know at least one was hit coming out of it.

I believe it was the next day we were sent back into the valley. They had the Army beating the bush trying to drive that battalion of NVA back towards it. We got up onto the hills waiting for them. We spent the whole night there among the mosquitoes and tree leeches waiting. The next morning we were told that the NVA had escaped and we pulled out again. That's the end of the valley fight. The last fight I remember was the smaller of the three. It took place at a river. The battalion was being pulled out. We were dug in on the river bank a little higher than the river. I think there was only a squad and the gun acting as a rear guard. I had just finished cleaning my rifle and I must have walked over to talk with SSGT Valdez and this other Sgt, because that's who I was with when they opened up on us. The three of us hit the ground and started crawling for our rifles. The only trouble was in the excitement we forgot where our rifles were. I remember the rounds buzzing over us like angry bees. We were crawling around and the three of us burst out laughing at the situation we were in. I remember Valdez laughing and saying, "Goddamn it Walsh where'd you put my rifle?" The other Sgt said, "Yeah Walsh, what'd ya do with our rifles?" I replied, "You're rifles, where the hell is mine?" We kept crawling and laughing.

Finally we found our rifles and crawled back to the line. Now I don't know why, but instead of getting into the holes we just sat right up on the bank and started firing with the rest of the guys and we were still laughing and talking. Finally the 81 mortars joined in exploding in the jungle to the rear of the VC and began walking their way back towards them. Well, that did it, the VC took off. A patrol was sent across the river to check the area out and it was clear. We then found out that one of our Marines on the left end of the line was killed. He was hit in the chest with one of the first rounds fired. I don't know who he was, I didn't want to know. I just walked away from it. That's where Double Eagle ends for me. I hope after almost 34 years my memory hasn't exaggerated any of the events I've told you about. You have a tendency to worry about that when telling these stories to someone. The last thing in the world you want to do is make it sound worse than it actually was. I've given you the best that my memory could come up with, I hope to God it's accurate.