

# Did you ever kill someone?

*by* Steve Glines

Well, yeah but no one that wasn't pointing a gun at me, mostly. I shot *at* a lot of people but there were only three times when I can honestly say I know that I blew someone away.

The first time we were humping up a trail towards an LZ that was too hot to chopper into. I was in the lead working my way very slowly and quietly looking for booby traps and signs of an ambush.

Ambush was our greatest fear so we all carried a weapon specifically designed to stop people from firing at you. Some guys carried sawed off shotguns with buckshot loads. I had a World War II grease-gun. A grease-gun fires the same .45 APC ammunition used in the .45 pistol except the grease-gun has a 30 round magazine. The barrel is unrifled so you couldn't hit a target at more than fifty yards, hell, make that 50 feet, you couldn't hit the broad side of a barn but you could knock the barn down if you accidentally hit it. Which was the point. If you get ambushed you can make the bad guys duck pretty quickly if you empty a 30 round magazine of .45 APC in their direction and the tree he's hiding behind gets knocked down.

Anyway I'm inching my way up this trail when a VC comes jaunting around a bend. He had his AK-47 over his shoulder. I had my weapon ready with the safety off. Before he could swing his weapon into firing position I brought mine up and put one round into his chest. It sent him flying about ten meters, dead instantly.

The funny thing is, we were only about ten meters apart. We both made eye contact and when he saw that I was going to get a round off before he could he just looked at me and nodded as if to say, it's OK, if it were the other way around I'd pull the trigger too. He was a true warrior. It was the only time I ever felt bad about pulling the trigger. It's almost like he gave me permission. I wish I knew who he was because I'd like to thank his family. Does that sound weird ...?

Another time we were sent to relieve an ATC (Air Traffic Control) squad at a small Army firebase. We had a 500 meter runway, long

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enough for C-130's to land and re-supply the base. It was an easy assignment, on paper. We took in two, maybe, three, C-130 flights a day, depending on how many rounds of 105mm we fired and a few Hueys looking for fuel. Our base had one battery of six 105mm howitzers and an equal number of 81 mm mortars which was three more than normal. I think the Major stole them from someone. It turns out the mortars were a good idea. In Vietnam if you didn't improvise you were dead.

We were there for a month before we caught some real shit. Every once in a while we'd get a few incoming mortar rounds, mostly when a C-130 was landing or on the ground. We always made sure the turnaround was quick. But it was never much. Occasionally some pissed off VC would let go of a clip of AK fire in our direction but the returning fire would chill his ass. The Major put a .50 cal machine gun at one end of the runway and one of his M-60's at the other. Someone told me he took the .50 cal off a burned out M113 armored personnel carrier. Anyway the firebase had been turned into a pretty good fortress.

As I said we had been there for about a month when a battalion sized unit of NVA (North Vietnamese Army) hit us at dusk. The first I knew about it was when we got hit with 10 or 12 mortar rounds just as a C-130 was landing. I told him to get the hell out of there but he touched down just a mortar round put a divot in my runway. The C-130 landing gear hit the crater, which was only a foot or so deep, and spun him around enough so the tip of his wing hit the ground and broke off dumping fuel all over a mortar pit and a pallet of mortar rounds before the C-130 burst into flames. I don't know if he was hit by another mortar round or not but he went up in a big ball of flames as he fell off the end of my runway. Believe it or not the pilot and copilot walked away. Or I should say ran away from that crash. The crew chief wasn't so lucky, he got toasted.

Lucky for us the NVA had decided to attack us from the end of the runway that was now occupied by a burning C-130 cooking off 105mm rounds. After a few minutes they disengaged. Not a place you want to be.

It took them three hours to regroup and this time they decided to attack us directly. I mean, we were arranged in a box but our strongest axis was perpendicular to the runway. That's the direction the NVA had decided to attack us from. Each side of the box had about 50 men but with manning the mortars and 105's there was really only a squad dug in and shooting, ten to fifteen men: One M-60 machine gun, a couple of thumpers, guys with 40 mm grenade launchers, and eight or ten guys with M-16's. That's not a lot of fire power against 6-800 North Vietnamese Regulars determined to rush your position.

The firefight lasted all night. We received a couple of hundred incoming mortar rounds and sent as much in return. The howitzers were firing at maximum elevation but it was clear they were overshooting the NVA who were between 400 and 1200 meters from our perimeter. The 105's minimum range for indirect fire was about 1200 meters. The crew of one gun jacked it up so as to increase the guns elevation but they couldn't hit jack shit. The Major tried direct fire and that was a little more effective but it did more to suppress our fire than the enemy. I mean you can get knocked over at fifty feet by the muzzle blast of a 105 and you sure as hell are going to be deaf but it's better than being dead.

About midnight I could hear on the radio that the boys on the far side of the strip were having a rough time. One mortar pit was completely out of mortar rounds and guys in another foxhole were running out of M-60 ammunition. My job was to call in air support but there wasn't much to be had just then so I jumped up, grabbed 600 rounds of M-60 ammunition and a box of mortar rounds and ran as fast as I could across the runway. I made that trip about half a dozen times before I got whacked by some incoming mortar shrapnel. It hit my arm and the side of my head with enough force to sent me flying. I felt the concussion of the explosion but I didn't realize that I'd been hit so I just got up and continued across the airfield to the mortar pit. There was a medic there already because two of the three guys there were already in bad shape.

Anyway I got bandaged up and fed the mortar as fast as I could while the artilleryman did the aiming. We ran out of mortar rounds pretty quickly so I grabbed an M-16 and took a look over the sandbags. Shit! I mean the shit was pretty thick and I saw that one foxhole was about to be overrun. There was only one grunt still active and he was yelling for help. Now I'm a good shot, I mean I passed the marksman test pretty quickly and moved up to expert. I took soldering pretty seriously so I practiced whenever I could. You know, being a good shot can save your life if you're in combat. That's why I practiced.

There were about 10 NVA crawling up the hill. That's ten I could see. At 100 yards they were an easy target so I popped each one with a single shot. I could only pop five at a time because that's all I could manage before the parachute flare burnt out. Fortunately the VC fired three or four flares at the same time that lit the place up like daylight so I was able to target every gook crawling up the hill. Even from 100 yards you can see a .223 round hit. It's got a hell of an impact. Anyway I knew there had to be more that I couldn't see so I jumped out of the mortar pit and ran forward towards the foxhole where the guy had been yelling. When I got there everyone was dead and that pissed me off so I set my M-16 to full auto, jumped out and ran down the hill towards the NVA. I hit three more gooks with short bursts fired from 10 meters then I ran face to face with two gooks charging towards me. I guess they had run out of ammunition so they got up and ran towards me with bayonets. I blew their fucking heads right off. One shot to their head from fifteen feet. Their heads just exploded, poof. I mean they just exploded. Man! I still get nightmares from that, ... still.

I must have run out of adrenalin or blood about then because the next thing I remember was feeling queasy and passed out. When I woke up it was past dawn and I realized I had shit myself and the Major was looking down at me. Awkward. He ordered a couple of grunts to hump me back up the hill to my dugout. My boys managed to find some air cover and that made the NVA back off.

I wasn't hurt badly but the major insisted that I get a dustoff. I guess I was lucky. The outfit suffered 25 dead, another 10, including me, wounded and the NVA body count, and you can take that with a grain of salt, was later listed at 350.

I got a Purple heart and a Silver Star out of that. They said I killed 25 NVA but I think it might have been more like ten probably a lot less. I only really know that I did kill 2. I don't know. The Major said that I stopped the VC assault all by myself but I really doubt that.

The only other time I killed an SOB intentionally. It was when I was tower chief at Da Nang and I was trying to bring in a C-130 gunship that had been badly shot up and only had enough fuel to make the runway. I cleared him to land but a South Vietnamese Air Force pilot cut in front and landed without permission. I lost the C-130, he pulled up at the last minute and crashed. All 12 GI's were killed. I walked out of the tower, went down to the flight line and put a .45 slug right into that Vietnamese pilots god damned head and walked up to his commanding officer and told him that if that ever happened again I would hold him responsible and I put the barrel of my .45 to his head and cocked the hammer. I was seriously tempted to pull the trigger then too. Funny thing is, we became very good friends, that is the South Vietnamese Air Force Colonel and I. I almost married his widow, Lon Nol, when he was killed by the VC.

