

How did you get your second Silver Star

by Steve Glines

In Vietnam there were Hueys, you know helicopters, everywhere and I think they were shot down as fast as they could bring them in country. Anyway, I was on my second combat mobile team assignment. That is we were going to be dropped some place in the jungle and we had to create an instant airfield. Hey, I was, technically, just an air traffic controller but somebody had to bring the choppers in, and get them out again, when there was any kind of assault. We had to get there first.

Sometimes they'd drop a 20,000 lb shock bomb in the middle of the jungle, then a couple of bulldozers, then us and we'd have to build the airfield. The funny thing is this: If you drop a bomb that big everyone for 50 miles around knows you're there and since we were, technically, non-combatants we always took a lot of shit from the VC. Of course the cool thing was that as an ATC I could call some real heavy shit down on anyone that gave us trouble. You know, like a squadron of F-4 Phantoms loaded with 500 lb bombs or napalm. Do you know you can smell the difference between burning jungle and a couple of hundred burning but dead Vietnamese.

Anyway I got sidetracked, no one told us that the LZ, that's the landing zone, was already hot and the last Combat Mobile Team had already been shot down and killed. No, no one told us that. So when we came in below about 500 feet I began to hear that "pitit" sound of AK-47 rounds going right through the fuselage of the Huey. Hell, a pea-shooter could put a hole in a Huey and a bb gun could bring it down. We all wore flack jackets and I always brought an extra to sit on. I don't know why more people didn't but then most of my guys on this mission were brand new in-country and didn't know any better. I should have told them.

I think the flight crew had been hit because when we were still about 100 feet in the air the Huey lurched sideways then nose dived in to the ground. We were lucky enough to land, or crash behind a dyke next to a river. Our intended landing zone had been a rice paddy just beyond the dyke. If we'd landed there we would all have been killed by concentrated fire from the wood line. I'd guess there was at least a company of VC there.

Fortunately we were behind the dyke and a good 150 meters away from the bad guys. I could hear hundreds of rounds hit the top of the Huey and hit the earthen dyke with a thud. It kicked up a lot of dust which was good.

The Huey crew was killed outright, The pilot and copilot, rammed into the ground with full weight of the Huey behind them. I didn't even try to get them out. The door gunner had been thrown out and kinda mangled in the blade which pretty much cut him in half. Of the other eight guys, I was the only one that wasn't hurt. My ass was sore from half a dozen rounds that almost penetrated the flack jacket I was sitting on though. The other guys weren't so lucky. Four guys on the inside were already dead or beyond anything I could do for them but the other four guys were pretty badly shot up. Two of them right through the ass and the other two through their legs. Only one of them wasn't completely in shock but none of them could walk so I had to pull them from the chopper one at a time. I put all four of them behind a log that had washed up on the bank so that no one could see them from the other side of the river. I didn't know who was on that side.

By the time I got everyone out that I could see the VC crossing the rice paddy towards us. Apparently they thought we were all dead or so incapacitated enough that we couldn't or wouldn't fight back. I know this because they didn't spread out but rather walked in line, about 30 of them, across the paddy, single file, on the small berm that separated the paddy fields. I grabbed the M-60, machine gun and about 1200 rounds of ammunition and set up shop about ten meters away from the crashed Huey. I set up so that I could command both sides of the berm the VC were walking on. I think

they were about fifty meters away when I opened fire. I went through about 600 rounds before I stopped to look. Hell I had to stop before I melted the M-60 barrel. Anyway, there wasn't a single VC standing, sitting or moving.

By the way M-60 ammunition was never in short supply, I had about 6,000 rounds between what the Hewey carried and what my guys carried and there was at least that much or more in the crashed Hewey fifty yards down river from us.

Things were quiet for a while. I tried to use the radio but it was broken, both ours and the one in the Hewey. Shot to pieces. I pulled out a smoke grenade and immediately set off a red one. This was to indicate that there were people alive and that we were under fire. As soon as I set it off we started receiving incoming AK fire again. That's when I realized there was a whole company of VC's, 200 or so people shooting at us. Man that sucked. I ran upriver about 50 meters behind the embankment so that I'd have a better shot at the far edge of the rice paddy and to get away from where they were concentrating their fire.

Just then I noticed about fifteen VC trying to cross the river upstream from me. I got them all, like shooting ducks in an arcade. I put a couple of 40mm grenades in the bushes where the VC had come out. I could see the rest running away and I put a few hundred more M-60 rounds into their tail. They didn't try that again but if they had they could have killed us all from across the river. I don't know why they didn't try again further upriver. I would have.

The VC on the other side of the paddy were making so much noise they didn't see or hear the action going on a hundred meters upstream. I guess after a while they stopped shooting and at some point they must have figured that they got us all again because they started marching across the paddy again but this time very slowly and spread out. It's funny how you can spot an officer almost anywhere. In the case of the VC they were the only ones looking behind them, I guess to make sure there were no slackers.

I took down five officers with a short burst from the M-60. I looked for the NCO's too but they were harder to spot and since the

lot of them were still moving towards me I figured I didn't have the luxury of taking them out one at a time so I just opened up for effect. I panned from one side to the other, adjusting my range after every couple of passes. I went through about another 800 rounds when the barrel over heated. It was bright red.

Fortunately the VC decided to abandon the fight and retreat to the jungle when they heard another Huey coming. You can't miss the Whop-whop-whop sound of a Huey approaching. It was the gunship that was supposed to have escorted us in when we landed about an hour earlier but it was late. He circled us then blasted the far side of the rice paddy with everything he had which wasn't much, 14 rockets and a few hundred rounds of .30 cal. Then he turned and headed home.

For the rest of the afternoon we took light fire from the far side of the paddy field. One or two VC would start shooting in our direction. I replaced the barrel on the M-60 but decided to hold back firing that because I wanted to keep that for a real assault if it came and I assumed it would that night if not sooner. Instead I used my M-14 rifle. I always carried an M-14 rifle and 2 empty clips. The M-60 and M-14 used the same .30 cal ammunition as I said there was lots of ammo everywhere from crashed Hueys. Also the M-14 was a better rifle than the M-16 for long distance target practice. So I loaded up my M-14 and fired, one round at a time, at the muzzle flashed of the AK-47's.

The cat and mouse game went on all afternoon. At one point two Vietnamese Air Force Skyraiders strafed the woods with their 20 mm guns. After circling for a while they too left. After the Skyraiders hit the VC they pretty much melted back into the jungle and we stopped taking incoming AK rounds. I knew they'd be back that night so I figured I had to get off that beach before they came back.

Down river from us, about five clicks, was a provincial capital but more importantly, about three clicks down river from where we were the river widens and on the far side was a riverine base with a lot of firepower. I don't think those riverine boats could have gotten as far up river as we were because it was pretty shallow and with some

rapids. I didn't know if they were even looking for us or even if they knew about our problem but I resolved to drift down river that night and make it to that base or the town below.

I patched up the four guys in my squad that were still alive. I'd stopped the bleeding and gave them all enough morphine so that they thought my idea was going to be fun. One kid even got a case of the giggles. Hueys have this webbing that's used to keep cargo from shifting in flight. I used it to make a sling that would hold my boys to the log that had washed ashore. All they had to do was to keep their heads above water and all of them did. I pushed the log into the water and put what was left of my squad in the sling and pushed off just as the last light of the sun was fading.

We were only a couple of hundred meters down river when I saw some flairs pop over the beach we had been at, followed by mortar rounds and small arms fire. We just quietly drifted down river and watched the fireworks. It took us about an hour to reach the wide part of the river where it slowed down. I kicked and swam the log across the river for another couple of hours to the far side and was just about to land the log when a riverine craft put a spotlight on us. Man, I nearly shit myself when that light came on but they had been looking for us so they didn't shoot. I learned later that a spotter plane had watched us push off the beach so the Navy was waiting for us.

Those first boys in my first squad got shipped home but I got an even better assignment, I got the airbase at Hue. Anyway about six months later I was lying on my stomach in Tokyo with shrapnel peppering my back when some Brigadier walks in and pins this Silver Star on my bed. Apparently the guy in the Hewey gunship hung around long enough to get me that medal. He happened to be a Major. Yeah, lucky for me.

