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My first Combat Patrol

I had completed my Special Forces Officers Course on May 12, 1968 and I had received my Green Beret. Of the 200 hundred or so officers in my class, only about fifty had completed the course and graduated. Several captains and majors with Vietnam experience didn't make the cut, and I thought that they were very fine Army officers, but Special Forces didn't want very fine Army officers. They wanted very fine Special Forces officers. There was and is a difference. The Army has written field manuals for everything, Special Forces writes their manuals in pencil.

We had to undergo a week of written testing of intelligence, language aptitude, psychological evaluation, verbal skills, problem solving, land navigation problem solving, weapons knowledge, and leadership skills. The final day was a two-hour interview with three Special Forces officers who had our personnel files in front of them. They had our initial Army class scores, our college grades, our OCS scores, our recent Special Forces examination scores, and, in spite of my many sins and failures, I became a Green Beret officer. I hated jumping out of airplanes, didn't like being in the Army, didn't like authority, and I was always asking "why?". But I had scored high in foreign language aptitude, strategic and tactical problem solving, land navigation problems, weapons knowledge, personal courage, and leadership skills.

Two weeks later, I received my orders for Vietnam for deployment on December 11, 1968. I was not going to the 5th Special Forces Group in Vietnam, but rather to a Provincial Advisory Group in Vinh Long Province in the Me Cong Delta. I was not pleased. I picked up the phone and called Special Forces Personnel Office and asked to speak to the major in charge. I asked him why I was not going to the 5th Group. He said that the 5th Group has only slots for four Signal Corps officers and those slots would be filled by the time I was scheduled for deployment, but effective immediately, I was no longer a Signal Corps officer. I was now a Green Beret officer in an advisory

position in the Me Cong Delta. He said, "Make the most of it, Lieutenant. We believe you will be more comfortable as an advisory officer than as a Signal Corps officer based of your evaluations." That's why they paid him the big bucks. I really looked forward to be an infantry advisory officer in combat with Vietnamese troops. My orders stated that prior to Vietnam deployment that I had to complete: A jungle land navigation course in Panama, a Military Advisory Training and Assistance course in North Carolina, and a Vietnamese Language course in El Paso, Texas.

My roommate at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, didn't make the cut. His orders were for the 101st Airborne in Vietnam. I believed that he had all the makings of a really bad officer. He retired from the Army as a Lieutenant Colonel. Either I was wrong or the Army was wrong, and I am never wrong.

After receiving my orders to be deployed to Vietnam, I spent many hours at the Methodist College in Fayetteville, North Carolina and at Texas Western University reading all that was available concerning the people, history, and culture of Vietnam which was rather minimal. After my service in Vietnam, I became rather obsessed with Vietnam and, I no doubt still am, therefore I read everything I could regarding the history of the country and why 58,000 s American young men and women died for an unjust, unnecessary war. I have learned that they died because of the years of lies perpetrated on the American people by successive governmental administrations, both Republican and Democrat. These leaders knew in 1963 that we could not win the Vietnam War, or as the Vietnamese call it, "The American War."

In the MATA course, I met several officers with prior Vietnam experience and I constantly asked them of what to expect in Vietnam. One young captain once replied, "If you are assigned up north, you have the badass jungle, the badass mountains, and the badass NVA, if you are assigned to the Cambodian border, you got the badass jungle, and the badass NVA, if you are assigned around the Saigon area, you got the badass jungle, and both the badass Viet Cong and the badass NVA, but if you go to the Delta, you only have the badass Viet Cong and sometimes the badass NVA, but you are always going to be wet and the only happiness you might have in the Delta is a dry fart."

At Vietnamese Language School at the Defense Language Institute, we were assigned into three classes of 12 officers in each taught by Vietnamese instructors in a total emersion environment. We were not allowed to speak English from 6am until 2:30pm; plus, and we had three hours of language lab every night. It was extremely difficult. And when I was deployed in December, 1968 to the Me Cong Delta, I quickly learned that the Vietnamese population in the Delta spoke a completely different dialect.

Later in 1969, I met Captain Conner who was one of my language school classmates while at an airfield where both of us were trying to catch a ride back to our respective operational areas. Captain Conners informed me that three of our classmates were killed in the first month upon their arrival in Vietnam. One, whom I remember, was Captain Roberts, who was on his second tour, was shot through the head during his second week in Vietnam while crossing a river while serving as a district military advisor. He also informed me that another of our classmates, Captain Putnam, who was being treated for a chest infection while we were at the language school in El Paso, died in August, 1969, of breast cancer at the age of twenty-eight.

In the third week of December in 1968, I was leading a patrol through a rice paddy outside the hamlet of An Phouc when we were ambushed by an unknown and unseen Viet Cong patrol. We by chance had run into each other. It was my first time under fire. A Vietnamese sergeant turned to me and asked in Vietnamese, "What are you going to do, Troung Uy?" I didn't have a clue of what to do. I just figured that I was going to die. But I was a Green Beret officer who had been trained for what to do in every situation, but the overall terror, the overwhelming deafening noise, the total chaos, the constantly changing confusion of ground combat had robbed me of reason and sanity. I stood up, deployed my patrol and ordered an assault on the Viet Cong position as I had been trained. By the time we got in there, the Viet Cong had disappeared. They were gone! They were like ghosts or phantoms in a dense fog. They were always there, and then they were never there. It was like that for twelve months. When we returned to the outpost, I sat down on my cot and began to cry, and I vowed that I would always have an answer for, "What are you going to do, Troung Uy?"