

A day in 1/9

### **A day with Delta Co.**

It was November of 1965, I had been in Vietnam for only a few weeks, and I wanted to see some action. After all I had reenlisted after being out of the Corps for just over two years, and I felt that I had been cheated, not having had a hot war while I was in the Crotch the first time. I was determined to make up for lost time. My MOS was 2111 Armor assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 9<sup>th</sup> Marines in the Supply Platoon and not likely to see much action. I was volunteering for every opportunity to get out of the Old French Fort we were occupying at Marble Mountain; I wanted to see for myself what was going on. MAG 16 had been overrun a month earlier and they were still short of helicopters. The Battalion was re-supplying the grunts in the field with Am tracks as much as possible, trying to take some of the load off the helicopters at MAG 16. The VC were starting to plant mines on the roads at night, denying Highway One to us south past the water point. When an Am-Trak showed up at our little French Fort and was being loaded for a re-supply run to Delta Company who was operating in the Horse Shoe Lake area, about five miles south. I jumped at the chance when a lieutenant who was the track commander asked for an extra rifleman to come along. As rifleman go, I considered myself among the best. My father gave me a single shot 22 when I was eleven years old. Being a farm boy in south Texas I had lots of opportunity to shoot and I was very good with that 22, soon moving up to a 45/70 when I was fourteen. In boot camp I was the Outstanding Marksman with my M1, placing first out of 120 marine boots, not bad. I frankly felt a little sorry for the VC if they tried to pull anything while I was there. My lieutenant said OK when I asked to be the extra rifleman, he seemed happy to get rid of me for some reason. We loaded the Amphibious Tractor with C rats, water and ammunition for Delta Co. and in addition we had candy and toys for the Vietnamese kids. The plan was to take Hwy One to the water point and turn east for about a half mile to the beach and make the five mile leg of our trip south on the beach, because it was hard for the VC to plant mines in the wet salty sand. The lieutenant said they had gone that way before and the only problem he anticipated was the leg of our trip from the beach back to the west to locate Delta Co. The trip to delta was as he said it would be. A nice ride on the beach and when we turned west we were not quite sure where we were in reference to Delta and stopped to radio and fire a flair for recognition. They could not hear us or see our red star cluster flair, so we pushed on for another half mile and tried again. This time they said they could hear us at a distance and gave the track commander a rough heading, we located them soon enough. We were at the headquarters section of Delta with one Platoon and they were positioned on top of a small hill where the officers had a bunker of wood constructed in the sandy soil at the top. The hill was about 30 feet above the surrounding terrain and was almost void of vegetation. They had some Concertina wire and fighting holes on the small parameter, not much to look at but at least they had the high ground. Well we were there for about three hours, and after we unloaded the track I had some time to look around the place. While talking to the grunts I was told about an incident that happened a few weeks ago. As told to me, "the platoon commander came over to their Squad Leader who was in charge of that part of the line and told them that there will not be any firing into the dark just "stay awake" he said. If you do some

shooting, you better have a body to show me in the morning, and don't be shooting the parachute flairs, we are almost out of them. During the night they begin to here sounds that sounded like someone was trying to get through the wire. The sound was so faint that they were not at all that sure they were not imagining it. They were short on flares and the Lt had said he would have there asses if they used the flairs just to see some imagined enemy. They listened for a definite indication that some one was in the wire but all they heard was some faint and not distinct sound. After a while the Squad Leader said, to hell with the lieutenant and fired a parachute flare into the air and nothing was there, nothing but a lonely little bush all by its self just inside the wire. The flair was swinging back and forth causing shadows to dance in the dark, and as the flair came down the shadows began to get longer and the marines started dreading the lieutenant's reaction in the morning. The flare was beginning to sputter its last breath when the Squad Leader said, "what the hell, we are already in trouble, shoot the bush". All eight marines of his squad opened up with their M14s, all at the same. In a blink of an eye other marines around the little hill started shooting out in all directions and popping flairs and it was a sight to see while it lasted. The firing stopped as quick as it had started and all that was heard was the Lieutenant shouting from his bunker that you bastards better have a body to show me in the morning. It was a long night and the marines began to talk about what happened saying things like "what the hell, what can he do, send us to Vietnam"? We have a right to see if something is out there when we hear the cans in the wire jingle, isn't that right? The next morning they went down to the wire to check and found to their surprise the body of one screwed up dead little VC with about 20 holes in him and two Chicom grenades. They were so happy to have found this poor little guy that they grabbed him by his feet and dragged him to the command bunker to show the Lieutenant. He came out and said to this group of very happy marines, "good work" and ordered them to dig a hole and bury him. He disappeared back into his hole and his order did not go well with marines who thought they had just done a good thing. His order seemed more like punishment. One of them complained "we just finished digging the hole for the 4 hole craper and now we have to dig another one. A light came on and they all looked at each other at the same time; no one said a word as they began to drag this little sapper over to the 4 holler. They worked as a team, no one had to say anything when they got to the 4 holler the two lead marines lifted the top off and four marines dumped the body in feet first causing him to fold up in the setting position half in and half out down in the muck, back on goes the top and they slink off to their fighting holes, hopping no one noticed. Looking back after reaching their side of the hill they see a line already forming at the 4 holler. Marines were starting to try and bomb the poor guy. They heard things like, "wow I got him in the head and hurry up, let my try". The lieutenant never found out where they buried the VC and never asked. Perhaps he didn't want to know. One thing is for sure, if you screw with Delta Co. 1/9 you can end up in deep shit".

After hearing that story I will never set on a 4 holer without thinking about Delta Co. As I was looking at the area around the hill I was impressed by the beauty of the surrounding terrain when I noticed a H34 helicopter heading toward our position, getting closer and I realized the thing was going to land on this little hill. The helicopter kicked up a sand storm while landing and when the dust settled I saw a beautiful blond women standing in the door wearing a mini skirt and hi heal shoes. One of the officers came

running out of the bunker to help her out of the helicopter. She jumped from the door and her feet sank deep into the sand, as she stepped away she lost her hi hell shoes disappearing under the sand. More officers came out laughing and talking and they all disappeared back into the bunker as fast as they came out. Not a word was said and no one had to use their imagination to figure out what was probably going on in that command bunker, officer's prerogative I guess. Next out of the H34 came some hot food containers of shrimp, lobster, baked potatoes, hot coffee, and coolaid. We soon forgot about the blond, and we ate all we could. After finishing this fantastic lunch I was licking my lips and asked "what's the occasion". Someone said, it's the Marine Corps Birthday, I had no idea. It was November 10, 1965 and marines all over the world were celebrating the Marine Corps Birthday. In about an hour we loaded up the Chopper blond and all, except for her hi heel shoes and off they went back to Da Nang.

As soon as the helicopter left I was on the Am Track and we were heading east, on a different route back to the beach. It was early afternoon and the cool breeze coming off the South China Sea felt great and we were in a relaxed mood. The big V12 engine was making so much noise that you could not hear yourself think, even so, after my ears got num enough the ride was actually enjoyable. The driver was in his seat with his head and shoulders sticking out of his position at the front left side of the track. The commander was inside with his hatch open and the two other crew members were on top with me. The janitor (nickname given to the track mechanic) was setting in the center with his legs hanging over the front of the track his 45 cal. grease gun in his lap when a single round from the sand dunes came over the drivers head and hit the janitor in the left temple exiting out the right temple. He fell back, blood spurting out all over the toys. We came to a halt, the Lieutenant started trying to revive the janitor and instantly realized that he was dead and it was useless to try. Another round came past us from the sand dunes, this time he was shooting at me. I felt the round passing the right side of my head with a popping sound. The lieutenant was mad as hell and ordered the big machine turned toward the dunes and he said "let's get the bastard". As the track started moving he ordered us to open fire, the machine gunner in the turret started firing. I could not see what to shoot at but started firing into the direction I thought the sniper was when both weapons jammed. With the only fire power we had on top of the Am Track out of action the lieutenant ordered a quick turn back north. As we sped away we started taking a very large volume of fire from the sand dunes. It was obvious the sniper was not alone and they had apparently held there fire hopping that we would go into he dunes where they had plans to do us in. As I looked around I saw the hatches were closed and I was the only one left alive on top. I was on my own, so I took cover behind a role of steel cable. I laid flat on my back using what little cover the cable provided. I turned my head to the right putting it flatter on the steel deck, trying to expose less of myself. As I looked out into the surf I saw lots of water kicking up in the surf from the fire we were taking. I could hear rounds hitting the side of the track and it sounded muffled like rain because of the overwhelming noise the big V12 engine was making at full power. We were soon out of range and tried to report to radio Battalion but the radio was not working, so we made our way as fast as we could to the water point where we knew a land line would allow us to report the incident to battalion. Later back in the Battalion area, the Am Track crew counted over a hundred hits on the left side of the big vehicle, and we also received word from Delta Co. that they sent a platoon to investigate the fire fight as soon as they heard

it. They reported finding evidence of a U shaped ambush in the sand dunes estimated to be about platoon sized.

Investigating the weapons I found a faulty magazine that caused my M14 to jam and the light 30 on the track was caused by improper head space. I am sure the VC would have killed us all, if we were to have charged into the trap they set up. You have to wonder about small things that cause the outcome to be as different as night and day. All I can say is, luck was on our side this time, except for the janitor that is. My marksmanship abilities were not of any value at all and even if my M14 had worked perfectly I didn't see anything to shoot at. I had a lot to learn in this war, that is the plain truth. Back at the old French Fort I had a talk with my friend Paul Vanover like me he had reenlisted and asked for Vietnam. We both went to our platoon leader and volunteered for infantry duty. He relayed the request to Battalion and they said they needed Scouts. We both accepted the offer.

George Strodman S2 Scout