

Boot to Boot

COMPANY D
1ST BATTALION
12TH CAVALRY
VIETNAM, 1965-1972



FOR HE TODAY THAT SHEDS HIS BLOOD WITH ME SHALL BE MY BROTHER FROM THIS DAY TO THE ENDING OF THE WORLD

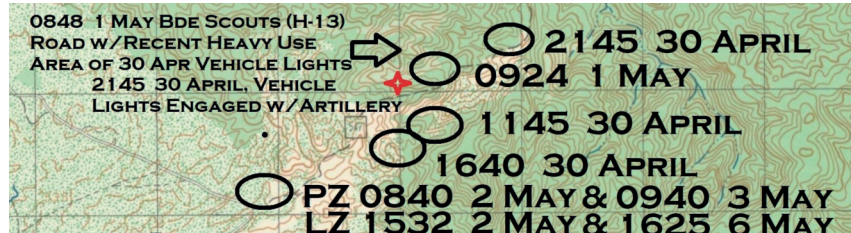
VOLUME 6 ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2021

Cavalry Raid: Operation Delaware, Part 2

And then there was the time we got bombed without beer in the A Shau Valley

Continuing to search southeast along Route 548, Delta reached the junction with Route 547, running northeast toward Hue on 30 April. Moving up 547, into the higher terrain of the east valley, we found many signs of enemy activity before establishing a night defensive position at YC448974. Lieutenant George Davey, 1st Platoon, remembers, “The company started off the main road and into the mountains. It was a new road made by NVA engineers with track and wheel marks in the fresh dirt. That night we set up along the mountain cut at a place the enemy had once had a big gun dug into the side like a u-shaped cave. Lieutenant Tom Kjos (3rd Platoon) and I explored it as the men made their night positions. Very scary in the gloom.” The weather deteriorated into fog and rain, so our resupply that night was flown by volunteer pilots, the crew kicking out C rations and ammunition while hovering. At 2145 we observed lights of about ten



vehicles moving east a kilometer west of our position. Lieutenant John Kirby, Artillery Forward Observer, engaged with artillery. The targets, now apparently fewer, moved back toward the west. The following morning, a Brigade Scouts H-13 observed an unmapped road with evidence of heavy traffic within 24 hours in the area the lights were seen and engaged. At 0924, in the same area, Delta found a truck that had been destroyed by artillery. At 1138, the company came across an abandoned 37mm anti-aircraft position.

(Continued on Page 4)

2021 DELTA REUNION OVERVIEW

Monday 27 September

HOTEL CHECK-IN, DELTA REGISTRATION, WELCOME RECEPTION

Tuesday 28 September

HOSPITALITY SUITE, ENJOY LAS VEGAS

Wednesday 29 September

BUSINESS MEETING, MEMORIAL SERVICE, BANQUET

Thursday 30 September

HOTEL CHECK-OUT, OR STAY ANOTHER NIGHT, SAME RATE

Contents

A Shau Valley, Part 2.....	1
Delta's 2021 Reunion.....	2
Other Reunions.....	2
Fiddler's Green	3
First Commander's Corner.....	3
Web Site Update.....	4
Secretary's Report.....	5
Book Review.....	6
Seven Reasons.....	7
Contact Information.....	8



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at <https://tinyurl.com/Delta-Rooms> Group Code: **DCO0924 (DELTA REUNION)**

For those desiring to travel and stay in a motorhome, ***Oasis RV Resort***, with full Hook-ups, WiFi, On-site Security, and Cafe, is just minutes away. Information: <https://www.oasislasvegasrvresort.com/>

ON THE PROGRAM

BUSINESS MEETING - PRESIDENT JOHN GERGULIS (65-66) AND DELTA BOARD MEMORIAL SERVICE

CHAPLAIN - Reverend Robert Duke (71)

ROLL OF HONOR READERS - Delta Veterans

BANQUET

MASTER OF CEREMONIES - John Coleman (68-69)

CHAPLAIN - Reverend Robert Duke (71)

WELCOME & RECOGNITION - Johnny Gergulis (65-66)

KEYNOTE SPEAKER - Gary DeRigne (69)

BAGPIPES - Darrell Calvillo

FLAG DETAIL - TBD

The 1st Cavalry Division 2021 Reunion at Fort Hood, Texas 22-26 September 2021 will mark the 100th Anniversary since the Division's activation at Fort Bliss, Texas on 13 September 1921.

The 12th Cavalry Regiment Association Reunion, Rescheduled to 31 May-6 June, 2021 at the Welk Resort, Branson, Missouri. Details: Tom Crabtree at email mmctlc3@aol.com or call (432) 853-4851

January 2

FIDDLER'S GREEN

Since our last issue of *Bent to Bent* we learned these Brothers are deceased.

GENE HELGESON

JAMES SPEED

ROBERT STURDIVANT

JAMES GARNOW*

*Misspelled "GARNOW" in the October Newsletter

For errors or additions, please contact Delta's webmaster at delta@catrack6india.com

First Commander's Corner



We had just sat down to put words to paper when we learned of the passing of Delta Brother 1st Sergeant Gene Helgeson. Previously we'd heard of the passing of Robert Sturdivant, with us at Fort Benning and company XO in Vietnam. Then, this past August, Wally Speed was added to the roster in Fiddler's Green. Wally commanded Delta in 1968-69. Rest in peace Gene, Bob, and Wally.

Gene and Wally had attended previous Delta reunions, and were looking forward to enjoying the company of their Brothers again. As Gene's wife Wanda wrote, "God had other plans for him and it was not to be." We will all reach Fiddler's Green some day. We want to believe, "I'll be around for a while yet," but realistically, there will not be many more opportunities to share the memories of a half-century ago with the few men who truly understand it all. No veteran regrets time with his brothers-in-arms at a Delta Reunion. Thank y'all for staying in touch and for being there for each other! You'll never know how

much a note, text message, card, or email means to a Brother. These are very stressful times that we, each of us, confront with dignity and distinction. As we did those years ago, we will be there for whatever fight requires us!

Brothers Tom, Doug, and the Delta Board have been busy planning another grand Delta Vietnam Reunion for September in Las Vegas. Send in your registration now, and make your travel reservations soon. See y'll there!

With a new year ahead, it's long past time to forget the negativism, be positive, and Drive On with determination! All else is destructive to ourselves, Our Delta Family and Our great Country.

We hope this newsletter finds you and yours healthy and safe. Stay in touch with each other, and please visit your Delta website at: www.catrack6india.com from time to time. Remember...we love you, Brother!

"THE TRUE SOLDIER FIGHTS NOT BECAUSE HE HATES WHAT IS IN FRONT OF HIM, BUT BECAUSE HE LOVES WHAT IS BEHIND HIM." - G. K.

CHESTERTON *Blessings & "Bent to Bent"*

Johnny Gergulis

Gene Helgeson, 91, Delta's 1st Sergeant 1966-1967, passed away January 14, 2021, from COPD and COVID-related complications. His wife, Wanda, wrote, "He was so proud and honored to have served with the finest and had wanted to see everyone at the reunion in Vegas."

Robert Sturdivant, 80, Delta Executive Officer, and acting Commander in Vietnam, passed on November 30, 2019 after a years-long battle with multiple sclerosis.

James (Wally) Speed, 79, Commanded Delta October 1968 to March 1969. Wally, who attended our 2019 Benning Reunion, passed away August 21, 2020 after a short struggle with glioblastoma.

Website Update - 2020 In Review

Happy New Year to all. In the past year the Delta Company website was again very active. Viewership continued to be very high with over 950,000 hits and 60,000 visits, similar to 2019.

During 2020, 845 more photos were added to the website. Fourteen new sets of photos were submitted by Delta Brothers. The total number on the website is approaching 4,000. Each set of photos represents a powerful and unique personal story of a trooper's time "in country." You are encouraged to continue to submit your photographs.

On the **Photo Index** page there are now five new videos posted during 2020. They continue to document Delta Company's experience in Vietnam. The Cambodia Invasion, and Music videos Part 1 and Part 2 are the most popular. All include historical images and video of Delta's Vietnam experience. They were viewed 2,752 times during 2020 and the number of views is increasing.

The website continues to be a catalyst for newly "found" Delta Troopers with several checking in after finding the website while browsing the Internet. If one searches "delta first cav" our website is the first to be shown, primarily because it is the most popular. That popularity is because of the excellent photos and stories that have been submitted by YOU. So please keep it going.

Major events of our history have been added to the **Firefights** page. Several important blanks have been filled in with content that documents our experience in Vietnam. These pages have been very popular during 2020, as has been the Newsletter repository page.

Thanks for all your inputs during 2020, and I am looking forward to talking with you in person at the Delta Company reunion in September.

BRING PLENTY OF AMMO. CATTRACK6INDIA...OUT *Bob March* (360) 627-0918

(**Cavalry Raid** from Page 1) On 2 May we made our first in-valley air assault at 0840, to a "green" LZ 5 1/2 kilometers west. Moving east we found a living area, tank parts, and tank repair facilities. Lifting off from 392963 at 1510, the company returned to its morning location north of LZ Lucy (Ta Bat).

D Company was back in the air again on 3 May, landing at YC390942 at 0951. "We had been air assaulted into the [west] side of the valley to pursue an NVA unit that had been in earlier contact with A Company," remembered Delta commander Captain Richard Kent in a 2003 letter. "I deployed 1st and 2nd Platoons on the ridges with the mission of moving quickly to cut off the enemy. I was moving with 3rd Platoon in the center to hit the enemy in the rear. Weapons Platoon (4th) followed in reserve. All was going well..." FO John Kirby, in notes made after the 1st Cavalry Association's 2007 reunion, "[Upon



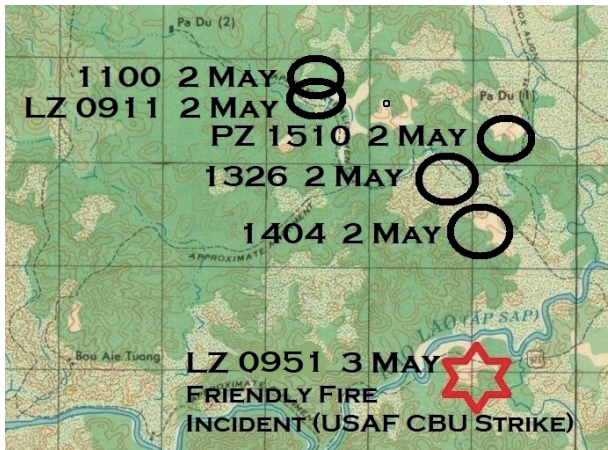
Grass Hilltop - Air Assault 3 May - John Kirby Photo

landing on a hilltop] we had to jump from the helicopters as the [elephant] grass was too tall for them to land...As we were moving down the fairly steep hillside [now out of the elephant grass into the open], a white phosphorus marking round (rocket) from a Forward Air Controller (FAC)...hit about a hundred meters to our right front, further downhill.

January 4

(Continued on Page 5)

(Cavalry Raid continued from page 4) I was fearful of what might be happening, and immediately got on the radio and attempted to contact any FAC in the area or on the radio net...no response. I called my headquarters [2nd Battalion, 19th Artillery] to get help, just as a second WP round hit, closer than the first..." Kent wrote, "Thinking it was an errant artillery round...I told the Artillery FO to call a 'check fire.' About 5 seconds later, I saw two F-100's headed right at us."



Not unexpectedly, with multiple observers, and many years later, the story gets confused. Kirby seems closest to consensus: "I looked in awe and horror...as a United States [Air Force] jet was making an attack run on our company as we moved down the hillside. The jet screamed in and dropped CBU's—cluster Bomb Units—in a wide swath that started just before our troops, and cut right through the middle of us. I remember seeing the earth exploding, and the swath of destruction cutting and rolling its way toward us, and then through us..."

Captain Kent: "Suddenly, but as in slow motion...the F-100 released a cluster bomb right

in front of the company. You could see the two sides of the bomb casing separate and hundreds of the yellow bomblets head right towards us. I watched in horror as there were hundreds of rapid explosions throughout the company." (Continued on page 6)

Secretary's Report - 2020 In Review

Since March of 2020 we have had our normal lifestyles disrupted. Dining out, taking in a show, attending a sporting event, visiting family and friends, handshakes, hugs all put on hold. How many times have you said to yourself "I'm bored stiff"?

Your Secretary kept himself from an even worse attack of boredom by making phone calls, first in regard to the scheduled, postponed, and then ultimately canceled 1st Cavalry Division Association Reunion, and then in continuation of Delta's **Outreach Project**.

In regard to our Outreach, we completed searches and follow-ups for the last of those for whom we have Social Security numbers, increasing our "accounted for" from 53% (768 of 1,425 who served), to 63% (904 of 1,445). That left, at the end of the year, about 200 for whom we have only Service Numbers. The effort by Senator Carper's office disappeared into the VA bureaucracy without achieving anything, so we enlisted the help of our President, Johnny Gergulis, who gave us another—promising—Veteran's Administration contact. Johnny has friends in high—or at least good—places.

Speaking of phone calls, the Late group will hear from me or Paul Marling soon (the Early and Middle Era groups from Doug Christ, Jerry Fell, Bob March and others) about getting registered for the Las Vegas Reunion. Better yet, register now and beat us to it! And, the next time you feel bored look through the website roster, pick out a buddy and give him a call. I'll bet he's bored too. According to Dr. Anthony Fauci, "You cannot contract COVID-19 from a phone call."

Boys, it's a New Year, stay safe, get your shots and get to Vegas.

GOOD HEALTH

Fred Mac Lennan

January 5

(**Cavalry Raid** continued from page 5) Lieutenant Davey, whose 1st Platoon had landed first and quickly moved off the hilltop down a ridge and into a gully, remembers, “Suddenly a deafening blast knocked us down, shaking leaves off the trees and bushes around us. Due to our location I had but two hurt.” Now the second jet was making a wide turn, lining up for the next run. “Remarkably, the second jet was just starting its attack run when one of our gunship helicopters flew right in its path, in a blocking maneuver, and the jet swerved off to avoid hitting the helicopter, and did not complete its bomb run,” remembers Kirby. That action undoubtedly saved many more troopers from wounding or death. We heard the crew was awarded for valor—Kirby wrote them up—we hope it was so.

Lieutenant Kirby asked the gunship and aerial rocket artillery (ARA) choppers accompanying the air assault to help medevac the wounded. Dick Kent recalls, “We had [many] troopers wounded, some horribly. I was heartbroken, but every available helicopter in the area came in quickly to evac them for treatment.” The “butcher’s bill” for that day was 22 wounded, 15 of whom were evacuated. Luckily—surprisingly—no one was killed. (Continued on page 7)

BOOK REVIEW

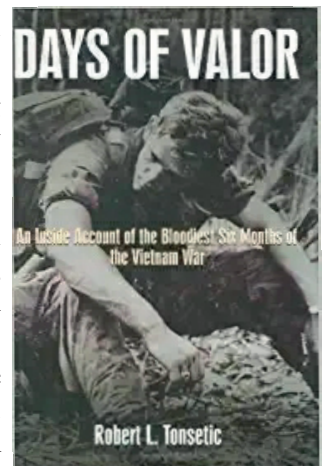
DAYS OF VALOR

Robert L. Tonsetic

Days of Valor tells the story of the 199th Light Infantry Brigade in Vietnam from December 1967 through May 1968, a time the author quite rightly describes as “the Bloodiest Six Months of the Vietnam War.” Many know this as the period in which the People’s Army of Vietnam (NVA) was infiltrating into position to launch the Tet Offensive, continuing through the North’s May Offensive, the so-called “mini-Tet.” The fighting in Hue dominated US headlines, and now is pretty much all that remains in the memory of Americans. The reality is there was hard fighting from one end of the Republic of Vietnam and to the other throughout those six months. In Delta and in the 1st Cavalry, we remember the battles that filled those months for us: Tam Quan, Tet in Hue and Quang Tri, Khe Sanh, and A Shau.

This is a vivid account of a brigade far to the south, in an AO we would see for ourselves when the Cav moved there from I Corps in November of 1968. Our mission a year later would be the same one the 199th had during the period covered by this book: to interdict the NVA corridors of attack from its Cambodia sanctuaries, in the case of the 199th, closer to (and sometimes in) Saigon. The three battalions of the 199th represented three of the Army’s most famous infantry regiments: 3rd, 7th, and 12th. Activated at Fort Benning in June of 1966, the brigade arrived in Vietnam the same December.

The author commanded an infantry company in the 199th, but this is a history, not a memoir. Backed by National Archives documents, Tonsetic uses first-person testimony from the infantrymen to paint a picture of almost nonstop combat action. The result is a gritty story of combat, on firebases under attack, in the foxholes of company defenses, of attacks on bunkers in deep jungle, and of house-to-house urban fighting. The enemy prefers the cloak of night and the jungle—urban and natural—and when in the defense fights from carefully planned fortifications. The companies of the 199th are often in the attack, and the combatants are often literally mixed together. It’s personal combat, soldiers having each in direct sight. Many of the vividly described figures in this book do not make it to the end. This is a rare book that will resonate most for those who have actually lived it. -TWK-



SEVEN REASONS TO REGISTER & BOOK DELTA'S REUNION EARLY

- 1 It helps the Delta team plan and to make this reunion the best yet.
 - 2 Air fares are cheap now. With COVID vaccinations underway, that won't last long.
 - 3 Planning to travel with your motorhome? There is no "block" reserved at Oasis RV Resort.
 - 4 Our hotel room block is not unlimited.
 - 5 Listing you and other Brothers as "registered" encourages others to attend. (Be a leader.)
 - 6 Your hotel deposit is refundable*; airlines (for now) are not charging "change fee."
 - 7 Delta Company refunds in full, no questions asked. Just say so and done.
- *First night deposit with booking, refundable, free cancellation up to 72 hours before scheduled arrival.

(**Cavalry Raid** continued from page 6) We have limited information about the wounded. 1st Platoon was apparently the least impacted. The disposition of the platoons at the time of the strike, and other information, points to 2nd Platoon, on the right flank of the company, being the most impacted, with the 3rd Platoon less so. Gary Downs, in the 3rd Platoon, at the center of the company formation, remembers, "I was in the middle of two hills, and saw guys on one hill get hit." That hill was likely the location of 2nd Platoon. Three wounded that we know of were in the 2nd: James Neeley, lightly wounded, returned to the company the next day. Thomas Broome lost an eye. Chris Rush was seriously wounded. This was no "short round," the usual "friendly-fire" incident, in which "close support" becomes deadly. How could such a huge—and unusual—mistake occur? Kent writes that, "We later found out that the FAC had been given a dump grid for the CBU's, which he could not use in close support. He had misread his map by 2 KM and dumped on us without going down close enough to see what was there. He was also not monitoring guard frequency; because there were lots of calls warning him off before he told the jets to drop." Kent's summary is consistent with the entry made 90 minutes after the errant strike in the 1st Cavalry Division's Daily Staff Journal at its Camp Evans Tactical Operations Center:

FR: 1st Bde (Maj Olsen) A misplaced CBU strike landed in vic of D 1-12 loc at 392942. It was a diverted strike for dump at 385920. it was FAC controlled and FAC missed tgt by over 2000 meters. They [sic] were 5 serious WIA' and there are others wounded. Commo was solid between ALO [Air Force Liaison Officer?] and FAC. The FAC' call sign was Rash 32 and the fighter call sign was ELECT 03. Investigation being conducted at this time. Total casualties: 22 WIA (15 medevaced). (Symington).

Lieutenant Kirby postulates a different cause of this tragedy. He writes in his post-2007 note, that "I believe that the most probable truth is that, in reality, the FAC thought he had enemy in the open—a target of opportunity, as the saying goes—but it was us; and he very erroneously attacked us." Kirby goes on to make his case; like all else about the incident—except the wounded—it might be compelling, but it's not definitive. We'll not likely ever know any more than we do now, and of course, what happened in the attack is of great importance to Delta; its cause is not. - *TWK*-

(**Cavalry Raid** will be continued in the April issue of *Boot-to-Boot*.)

Notes

- 1- Contributions to "Cavalry Raid" from Richard Kent, George Davey, Ed Johnson, John Kirby, Tom Kjos, Ron Redalen, Ken Goff, Jamie Swidecki, James Neeley, and Gary Downs.
- 2- Daily Journals of the 1st Cavalry Division and 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry
- 3- Pearson, Willard, LTG, "War in the Northern Provinces 1966-1968," Department of the Army
- 4- Vietnam Center & Archive, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas

Boot to Boot

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January 8