

Eyewitness to the battle of FSB Pace....

By Marc Parsell

We heard the rumors about the horror of Fire Base Pace in Tay Ninh. I figured it out after I was on Pace for 3 weeks. The NVA mortar units were practicing their marksmanship as they passed the base on their way towards Saigon. But in the meanwhile...we dutifully queued up for the helicopters to take us there. Oh Shit. I'm sure it looked impressive, a fresh platoon escorted by two cobras, fully loaded with rockets and ammo following highway 22.

We dropped down to under 1000ft. near the base. That's when I saw this black blob come up and hit the cobra from behind in the area below the fuselage behind the rotor. Both the pilot and muni guy immediately looked at us. I'm sure they saw three of us grunts and the door gunner looking back at them with our mouths wide open in shock. In fact I personally said "Oh Shit" immediately. I watched the cobra roto down and crash near the FB. We landed outside the FB. The LT and radioman and medic went into Pace (The reporter Lied) The rest of us stayed outside the berm. Dropped our rucksacks out of the way of the other Hueys dropping the rest of the platoon. We stood there watching the cobra blowing up just inside the treeline 200yds from the base on the other side of a road that teed into Highway 22. It looked really hot.

It was about 8 minutes before LT came out and said we had to go secure the crash. No problem, we felt safer in the bush anyway. Besides, I was a replacement for when we invaded Cambodia and we spent 3 months picking up bodies. I did not expect to find any survivors. We moved out in two columns, two squads. When we got about 100 feet from the road LT got a call that said there were booby traps in the area. Once again, "Oh shit". We kept going towards the bush. Booby traps or not we felt very exposed in the kill zone around a FB.

LTs' column found the muni guy busted up pretty bad but alive! As my squad moved past the crash site we got word the pilot pulled his buddy out of the cobra then took off for help. He was 25ft inside the treeline. If he went in the right direction he would have hit the road and seen the firebase. He stumbled out of the jungle 4 days later. They both survived.

Day one on FB Pace was not near over. We set up perimeter around the cobra. We set up our M60 about 30 feet down a trail that curved in front of us and paralleled highway 22. We weren't there but 5 minutes before a large explosion went off from the wreckage. Since we were both looking down the trail we turned facing each other hearing the explosion and a piece of sheet metal flashed between us and stuck in a tree. The concussion blew out my right eardrum and my ear bled for 4 days. We both looked at the cobra then back at each other then at the tree with the sheet metal in it. Without saying a thing we picked up our M60 and ammo and moved 30 more feet down the trail.

The next three weeks were, to say the least, interesting. Near sundown NVA would pop 3-6 rounds at us. Then again around 1 am and again around 5am. Since I slept only 2-3 hours a

night I had a lot of times yelling "Incoming". I saw the flashes before I heard the thump of the tubes. At one time an officer was caught in the open in one attack. He ran past my position and dove under a tank. That would generally be safe but the round hit in front of the tank. The shrapnel hit the underside of the tank then went through his legs bounced off the ground and settled somewhere in his thighs. He survived but had to wait for sunrise to get to a hospital.

Fridays were really neat. We'd get really drunk and loaded and watch the light show. Fridays they opened up with the quad 50s. We had 4 one in each corner of the fire base. Man what a light show.

We went out for two patrols while on Pace. One we went out southeast through logging forests spotted with huge craters from B52 strikes. The water in the craters were greenish blue. Don't know why but we knew not to drink the water. The second we went to recover the crash site of a Huey the was hit in the same area as the Cobra. We crashed into the bush and used the trail that we knew paralleled the highway. When we reached the Huey Lt said it may be boobie trapped. I stomped over top of the wreckage and a piece of metal slipped on something squishy. It was barbecued toes sticking out of a boot. Somethings are seared into your memory. We only found 3 bodies.

My last memory of FSB Pace was more "Holy Shit" than "Oh Shit". We got word there was going to be a B52 strike. They told us it be about 1/2 mile from us. We saw the planes approaching. 3-B52s looked really small, maybe 12-15 thousand ft up.. I saw the first 500lb hit but immediately following it, it seamed the whole jungle raised up in explosion. Shrapnel, rocks, trees began flying towards us. I put my helmet on and got down low. Incredible, just incredible, truly a "Holy Shit" moment. When I left Pace I had 6 weeks before I got the hell out of Vietnam.