

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 2

APRIL 2021

Cavalry Raid: Operation Delaware, Part 3

A Terrible Trek, a Hot LZ, and (finally) some Firebase Duty

May 3rd, 1968 - The remainder of a day that had started so tragically courtesy of the United States Air Force only added to a wounded company's misery. It was a day aptly called (in a SP4 Jamie Swidecki letter to Captain Kent in 2003), a "Bad Day in A Shau." No sooner had Delta evacuated its wounded than Kent was ordered to move the company 5 kilometers east to a position near Route 548, not far from the pick-up zone (PZ) it had left that morning. Many remember that move as "lost in the jungle," but it was more "no easy way to get there," than "lost," the latter a rarity in Vietnam, with so many ways to locate a unit, from maps to aircraft to artillery spotter rounds.

Kent described the trek, "The area we had to traverse was laced through with meandering streams and extremely thick vegetation. By going in a straight line or compass azimuth, you would cross the same stream multiple times as it wound back and forth. None of this could be seen from the air because of the thick overhead vegetation. Each time, you had to hack through with machetes, climb down the stream

bank, cross by holding a rope and scramble up the far bank, which was steep, muddy, covered with roots and vines, and generally buggy and nasty. Then trudge through sharp-edged 12 ft high elephant grass for 100 meters until the next stream. I tried to move around the streams, but that proved impossible. (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

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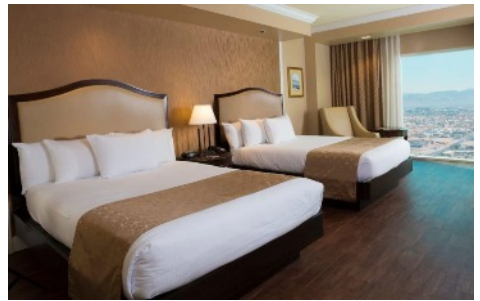


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at <https://tinyurl.com/Delta-Rooms> Group Code: **DCO0924 (DELTA REUNION)**

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 & INTRODUCTIONS - Johnny Gergulis (65-66) President, Veterans of Delta

KEYNOTE SPEAKER - Gary DeRigne (69)

BAGPIPES - Darrell Calvillo

FLAG DETAIL - Silverado High School Army JROTC

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

FIDDLER'S GREEN

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

JAMES BARNETT

ROGER CARPENTER

WILLIAM GORMAN

JOHN HAWKINS

CLAYTON SPIVEY

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



First Commander's Corner

We will all reach Fiddler's Green some day. We want to believe, "I'll be around for a while yet," but we will not have many more chances to share the memories of a half-century ago with the few men who truly understand. No veteran regrets time with his brothers at a Delta Reunion.

When we become aware of a Brother's passing, we send out a unique-to-Delta sympathy card. When we can, we add the thoughts of those of us who remember the soldier who has gone on to Fiddler's Green.

When we received this "thank you" (below) it broke our heart. Why? Because Lieutenant Hawkins was a "soldier to the end," and we have

to believe that he might have appreciated the Brotherhood of those with whom he served. But while he was known to some of us, because he was not "found," to Delta, the opportunities we provide for fellowship with those with whom he served were lost.

So, stay in touch! Call, drop a note, text, send a card, email a Brother. *And for God's sake, let Delta get in contact!* Please, don't assume what you can't know. As we were those years ago, we will be there for our Brothers, whatever the circumstances. We only want the chance!

Stay in touch with each other, Remember...we love you, Brother!

"OUR BROTHERS WILL BE FOREVER IN OUR MEMORIES"

Blessings & "But to But"

Johnny Sergulis

Thank you so much for sending the card and the remembrances + for recognizing him as a good man + a good soldier. I can tell you that he was a soldier to the end. I don't know how he did it, steel on the inside maybe and it was an honor to be there for him. We had a wonderful life. Your card means so very much.

During a time like this we realize how much our friends and relatives really mean to us... Your expression of sympathy will always be remembered

Lynn Hawkins

Website Update

The website continues to be popular, about 5000 visits per month. The vast majority are from the USA but there are some from all over the world.

New sets of photos have been posted on the Photo Index page from Ron Redalen (67/68), Ray Ferber (68/69), and Kirk Knight (65/66). Thanks Ron, Ray, and Kirk. There are updates to the Firefights page and numerous roster changes.

The Firefights pages still have gaps. Once again, I am asking you to help. Your stories are important and mean a lot to everyone. We need to get these stories recorded. Time seems to move past us faster and faster. Go to <http://www.cattrack6india.com/>, then click on FIREFIGHTS AND HISTORICAL EVENTS INDEX. Contact me if you have a story that can be added.

Take a look at the roster page that applies to your time in Vietnam. Many have changed phone numbers in the transition from land lines to cell phones. Are there are individuals listed whose status needs to be updated, including your own? Let me know. This is how your buddies get in touch with you.

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

(Cavalry Raid from Page 1) Some squads got separated from the main body, but almost miraculously, we all got to the objective without running into the enemy in our exhausted, demoralized and disorganized state.”

Lieutenant Davey had 1st Platoon on point for that trek across the valley. “It took most of the night to return across the valley,” Davey wrote recently. “It was very hot and absolutely no air much less breeze in the tall elephant grass and brush we were pushing through on a compass heading. I took a turn on point and it was exhausting. We crossed a narrow deep stream, and crossed it again. And then again.” So far, his recall matches that of Captain Kent, but as is almost always the case in the recall of events in Vietnam so many years past, it diverges. “A little time after that, Cpt. Kent called on the radio. He told me to take a 90 degree turn for 50 meters and then resume the original heading. I should have known enough to do it on my own—we were following a snake-like stream or sign-curve river. We didn’t see the water again after that move,” continued Davey. “At dusk we came to a tank park. It was complete with bunkers and places to service them like grease pits. The signs were recent that they were there.”

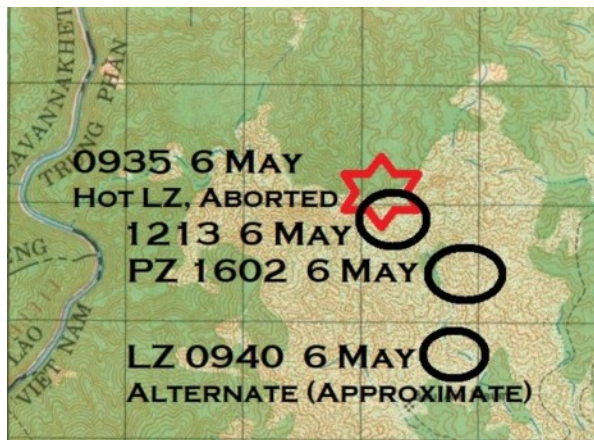
After that miserable trek from the site of the Air Force attack, the company established a defensive perimeter at 425960, within sight of LZ Lucy, occupied by the 3rd Infantry Regiment, (ARVN). May 4th and 5th were spent at that location. SP4 James Neeley, who was evacuated on the 3rd, said, “The next day I caught a helicopter out to D Company in the field. Luckily [*James was still hobbled by his wounds*] the company had stayed in the same location for about 3 nights. By the time we moved...I was able to walk well enough to keep up.” With the lightly wounded straggling into the company over the next two days, Delta had a kind of “in valley R&R,” with limited patrolling within sight of Lucy, not flying, not doing anything that would make the Division’s Daily Journal, and apparently not walking enough to leave Neeley behind.

After two days of this, the battalion was ready to get Delta back to work, telling the company on the 5th it would air assault the following morning to an area of reported enemy activity on the west side of the valley. Delta lifted off from near Ta Bat, which had become (and would continue to be) its “ome-away-from-home” in the valley shortly after 0900.

Continued on Page 5)

(Cavalry Raid continued from page 4) After two days of this, the battalion was ready to get Delta back to work, telling the company on the 5th it would air assault the following morning to an area of reported enemy activity on the west side of the valley. Delta lifted off from near Ta Bat, which had become (and would continue to be) its “ome-away-from-home” in the valley shortly after 0900. Third platoon was in the lead, followed by the company’ command group. Was the flight was large enough to get the entire company in the air? It seems so from what is remembered by Delta Troopers; the potential for contact on landing in A Shau was high, so not many air assaults were made that would require a “turnaround” to get more troops on the ground. We’d gotten some of our wounded back from having been a target for our own Air Force, but it’s unlikely our foxhole strength was greater than 90 officers and men. Given The PZ was in the open area north of Lucy, it was able to land multiple ships; so two flights of six birds, or three of four would lift the entire company. The flight then formed up and headed to west toward a one-ship LZ two kilometers from Laos.

The two or three “V’s” in which we were flying would now dissolve, a with the first Huey’s stacking up one above the other as they headed down into the LZ, the rest orbiting to join the stack in turn. If you’re in that stack, it’s a very uncomfortable time, akin to being in the car of a Ferris Wheel, as it comes over the top, stopping to let out riders below, then moving again. Waiting for someone to use you for target practice. Each bird would fly into this little patch of ground among the jungle’ trees, this hole in the canopy, off-load eight infantrymen, and pull up and out. Except we didn’t get that far. As the first Huey’s approached the LZ, hanging nearly



motionless, one above the other, they presented too good a target for an NVA gunner on a Heavy Machine Gun (12.5mm, 51 cal). He opened fire on the formation before the first of the lift had gotten into the LZ. That was a big mistake—two, in fact. First, good tactics were to let the first few birds get in and out, putting a platoon or so on the ground, then engage the later lifts, driving off reinforcements, and concentrating heavy fire on the small unit on the ground.

(Continued on page 6)

Secretary’s Report

Hi Guys. I hope by now you have received your COVID-19 shots and are doing well. This past year has been challenging, but compared to a year in Southeast Asia, not too bad.

I urge everyone who is considering attending our Reunion in Las Vegas in September to visit our website www.cattrack9india.com and review the Roster from your era to look for men with whom you served. Approximately 200 names have been accounted for since our last Reunion in Fort Benning. Give them a call and check on their well-being and if they are healthy enough, encourage them to attend. If you find a brother we don’t know about, or can correct contact information, Please let us know!

Boys, none of us got thru that war on our own. There is name—or two—on that Roster who got you thru it. It is time to thank them. PICK UP THE PHONE.

GOOD HEALTH

Fred Mac Lennan

(**Cavalry Raid** continued from page 5) By engaging the lift before any infantry hit the ground, the NVA lost their opportunity for what they would call a “big victory.” Second, the enemy gunner did not know that third platoon machine gunner Danny Thomas was aboard one of those Hueys. With the helicopters taking hits, Danny, sitting in an open doorway above the jungle, spotted the enemy gunner, brought his M60 up—and freehand—put suppressing fire on the enemy gun, allowing the flight of Hueys to pull up and out, ending the attack. For this, in an “impact award” ceremony, Danny was later pinned with the Air Medal with “V” Device for heroism in aerial flight. He never received the medal. Jamie Swidecki recalls there was a photo, now lost, of the award ceremony.

Three helicopters were hit by fire, a pilot was killed and another crew wounded. Ed Johnson, 3rd Platoon’s Platoon Sergeant was in the early part of that lift, and remembers, “I was on the helicopter that was hit and the copilot was killed by the 51 cal.”

(Continued on page 7)

BOOK REVIEW

RECKONING

Neal F. Thompson

Reckoning: Vietnam and America’s Cold War Experience, 1945-1991, is a compelling exercise in saying things that, in George Orwell’s words, it is “just not done to say.” Starting with the communist movement of the 1930s, and all that came with it, Neal F. Thompson, who flew Cobras in Vietnam and spent 16 years researching and writing this book, lays out facts that have been hiding in plain sight—elephants in the room.”

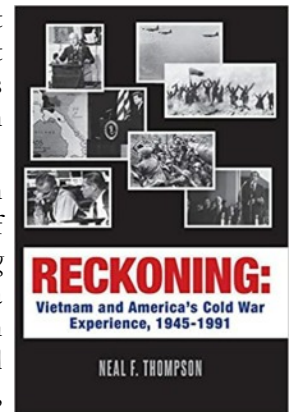
Thompson lays bare Harry Truman’s feckless response and relentless obstruction of Congressional investigation of the Soviet espionage network, and his purge of the federal civil service, thus poisoning political discourse for decades. *Reckoning* examines Truman’s senseless campaign in Korea in all its folly and brutality—a campaign that led the United States directly into the war in Southeast Asia—which would be fought ineffectively and lost by politicians like John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, whose every move was dictated by fear of, in Johnson’s words, “another Korea,” and which, though listed in America’s “win” column, had driven Truman from office. Finally, *Reckoning* examines the Vietnam War, including Laos and Cambodia in its proper Cold War context, focusing on history rather than ideology.

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If the Cold War, with the Truman Doctrine at its core, represents a just cause successfully concluded, then condemning the campaign in Southeast Asia makes little sense. You might be surprised by much of what you read here, but a paradigm shift in worldview awaits anyone willing to read *Reckoning* with an intellectually honest, open mind.

In the words of Hanoi’s most famous writer and female volunteer to fight “America imperialists,” Duong Thu Huong, “On April 30 1975, I sat on the sidewalk of a Saigon street, broke down and cried for my wasted youth and my generation because I realized that a barbaric regime had just won over a civilized one. How could that be?”

Neal Thompson provides thoughtful answers. His is one of the most insightful and well researched books ever written on Vietnam, and particularly, how we got there in the first place, and why decisions made as early as 1963 may have determined its outcome over a decade later. -TWK-



SEVEN REASONS TO REGISTER & BOOK DELTA'S REUNION NOW

- 1 It helps the Delta team plan and to make this reunion the best yet.
 - 2 Air fares have increased but are still cheap. That won't last long.
 - 3 Planning to travel with your motorhome? There are few options, and Delta has no "block."
 - 4 Our hotel room block is not unlimited.
 - 5 Listing you as "registered" encourages others to attend. (Be a leader.)
 - 6 Your hotel deposit is refundable*; most 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) The Division's Daily Journal recorded the incident:

0935 D 1-12, YC 331961 hot LZ, diverted to present LZ 1500M to south
At Hot LZ had 1 pilot KIA, 1 crew WIA, neg contact at present LZ

From that alternate LZ Delta worked its way back toward the north, and at 1425 reported it was following comms wire along a trail near the site of the morning's contact. We found nothing further. The company was extracted at 1602 hours from 338954, returning to 422961, north of LZ Lucy.

On 7 May, 1968, Delta assumed defense of Lucy from the 3rd ARVN Regiment. A battery of the 2nd Battalion, 19th Artillery (105mm) displaced from LZ Stallion to Lucy. On 11 May at 1351 hours one of Delta's platoons air assaulted to 457914, lifting back to Lucy later without incident.

The afternoon of 12 May Lieutenant Richard Parker's second platoon was lifted to 454916, south of Lucy, to assist B 1/9th Cavalry in recovering the crew of a Cobra gunship shot down while covering a 1/12th air assault recon. Artillery Forward Observer Lieutenant John Kirby went along, and recalls "We recovered one pilot; I helped carry him to the recovery helicopter. He was a young man, like so many of us; and was cold and lifeless. He was lying on the floor of the Huey as we lifted off and rode out of that area to begin his journey home." It was an emotional, tragic, moment.

D Company remained on "firebase defense duty," for the remainder of its time in the valley. Delta, along with the rest of 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry was lifted out of the A Shau to Camp Evans on 15 May 1968, reporting extraction complete at 1213 hours. By 1240, Delta was on its way up Highway 1 to LZ Sharon by truck, reversing the trip it had taken less than a month before. The 1st Cav Journal:

1/12 has assumed base defense responsibilities for LZ Sharon and LZ
Betty eff 1815H

In true raid tradition, the Cavalry had "ridden" deep into the enemy's rear, ripping up his roads, destroying his material, and generally raising all kinds of hell. The scorecard included 6 tracked vehicles, including a PT-76 tank, 67 wheeled vehicles, from jeep to duce-and-a-half, over 200,000 rounds of ammunition, from 7.62mm rifle to 122mm artillery, 72,000 pound of food, 2,600 individual and crew-served weapons, 90,000 pages of documents, and 31 flame throwers. -TWK-

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

Veterans of Delta Company
1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry (Vietnam)
9817 W Mockingbird Drive
Sun City, AZ 85373-2136

Delta Company Contacts and Addresses

<u>President</u> John Gergulis	(803) 727-2832	gergulis@yahoo.com	
<u>Vice President</u> Mike Van Kirk	(623) 937-0577	mijoy65@cox.net	<u>Mail for the Website</u> Bob March 1509 Sawdust Hill Road NE Poulsbo, WA 98370-9127
<u>Treasurer/ Newsletter Editor</u> Tom Kjos	(480) 352-2583	tomwkjos03@gmail.com	<u>Mail for Veterans of Delta</u> (Including Newsletter) Tom Kjos 9817 W Mockingbird Drive Sun City, AZ 85373-2136
<u>Secretary/Outreach</u> Fred Mac Lennan	(347) 853-1281	fredmacl66@outlook.com	
<u>Webmaster/Historian</u> Bob March	(360) 627-0918	delta@cattrack6india.com	
<u>65-66 Era Representative</u> Jerry Fell	(512) 923-4232	hometoo@sbcglobal.net	<u>Website Address</u>
<u>67-68 Era Representative</u> Doug Christ	(714) 865-3467	dfchrist3@gmail.com	http://www.cattrack6india.com/
<u>69-72 Era Representative</u> Paul Marling	(518) 789-4648	paulmarling@aol.com	