

What It's All About

by

Lonnie G. Schmidt
RFB Proverbs 21:31
October 12, 2019

"It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment"
(Hebrews 9:27)

1967, Republic of Viet Nam; the "conflict" (war). There are two seasons in Viet Nam, the dry season and the rainy season. It was the dry season.

As Flight Leader "Thunderbird One" of the 118th Assault Helicopter Company, I briefed my aircraft commanders (AC) on the mission. We would be dropping troops into a "hot" landing zone (LZ). Escorted by two gunteams (4 Charlie model Hueys) call sign "Bandits", full suppression was the order of the day for our 10 ship flight. Leading the flight over jungle terrain at 2,500' altitude, I had a clear view of the large cleared rice paddy LZ as we approached. Dotted with a few "hooches" (small stick huts with thatch roofs and open entries) it didn't look "hot" to me ... but orders are orders. I keyed my "mike" and called the flight to move from staggered into trail (single file) formation and began a rapid decent into the LZ; calling for suppressive fire after each ship cleared the jungle's edge. I checked wind direction and noted possible Viet Cong (VC) positions in the surrounding foliage. Selecting the center of the LZ to drop the troops, I un-holstered my Colt .45 auto, placed it on the console next to me and took the controls. The M-60 machine guns on each side of the aircraft started chattering. The Bandits started their strafing runs with quad-M-60s, rockets and two door gunners armed with M-60s.

We began taking return fire from the jungle area from the front and on two sides as we got low and slow. I brought the ship to a 3' hover and the troops began off-loading. There was a hooch about 30' at my 2 o'clock (nose of aircraft is 12 o'clock) with muzzle flashes of automatic fire coming at us from inside the dark interior through the door opening. I pressed the intercom trigger on the cyclic and told my door gunner to return fire. "My gun is jammed!" he said. I replied "You better get it going or I'm going to come back there and beat you over the head with it!!" With no defensive fire on my right, I radioed "Bandit, Thunderbird One taking fire from the hooch at my 2 o'clock!" "Roger, One" came Bandit's reply. "You have the aircraft" I told my co-pilot Lance Ward, turning the controls over to him. Picking up my .45 and pointing it out his window, I had a clear shot at the hooch. As I squeezed off the first two rounds about 6" in front of Lance's face, the spent brass ejected over my shoulder.

Instantly "I" was "standing" outside the aircraft about 80 yards to the left of the flight. I could see myself, my upper torso and helmeted head, inside the ship through the window of the cockpit's left door. I could see the entire flight of ten ships, the last few still approaching, troops jumping from the other ships, hugging the ground and engaging the VC. Mortar rounds began coming in and exploding. A view I could never have seen from inside the aircraft at the front of the flight.

My vision was spectacularly clear and colors so vibrant! Almost like normal vision is blurred by wax paper! I had no sensation of feeling the ground but did "feel" a soft breeze. I thought "This is really what it's all about. This is really what it's all about." Something caught my peripheral vision to my left ... a stream of machine gun bullets stitching its way toward me in the dry ground ... and I calmly watched as they "walked" right through me kicking up the dirt. Time seemed to stand still; no rush, no panic ... peace.

My physical eyes saw the last 1/4 and tail fin of a white 2.75 rocket as it flashed through the hooch's doorway, exploding and blasting it into splinters! I was back! The slide on my .45 was locked back. Nine rounds had been expended in the time I was "out". The ship was lifting off as I settled back into my seat. What had just happened? I thought. Apparently, death being imminent, my spirit didn't want to stick around ... exit stage left! What did I learn? That there is a definite separation of our spirit and body. All that makes up the real "me" went outside my physical body. I had vision, thought and feeling. Don't remember hearing anything ... possibly the .45 blasting away? As a Christian, I recalled Paul's words "to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8.) I am convinced that If I had died in that gunfight, "I" would have stepped into the presence of the Lord.

I didn't share this experience with anyone for a number of years, not wanting to be labeled a "Section 8" case (crazy). But did so eventually with my family. April 17, 2018, my best friend, partner, my only son, Daniel, unexpectedly collapsed "I can't breathe" his last words. His wife, our Becky, "watched his spirit leave through his eyes". I know Dan watched her and his sons Jacob and Nick do all they could to help him. And, looking heavenward said "This is really what it's all about" as he stepped into the presence of our Lord.

I wasn't there for him ... couldn't be there ... I am in prison. Can't be with my precious wife of 54 years, Dan's mother, to grieve. Three months later on Dan's 49th birthday, my 94 year old Dad joined Dan; and I wasn't there. Reader, don't let this happen to you. Life is too short and freedom too precious to spend it in prison. I close with two prayers for you: 1) make your peace with the God who loves and cherishes you by accepting the free gift of salvation He offers (John 3:16, Romans 10:9-13). So when you step into eternity, you can be with Him and those loved ones of yours who also know Him, forever. The alternative is a forever "hot" LZ!; and, 2) live your life in such a manner that if someone says something bad about you, no one else will believe them: a life above reproach.



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Born: Selma, California November 17, 1944 Born again: 1950
Father: Glenn E. Schmidt, US Army (WII prisoner of war 7 months, Germany) US Air Force. Grandfather: Jake J. Schmidt US Army (WWI).
Mother: Wanda L. Schmidt

Dad in service, we traveled a lot: I attended 17 grammar schools, 4 Junior High Schools
1 High School: Merced, California 1958 and graduated 1962. Went to France with family until January 1963.
College: American River Junior College: AA Degree in Business Administration/Real Estate.

Married: Connie J. Smith (Schmidt) October 1965.

Enlisted in U.S. Army December 27, 1965

Basic training: Ft. Polk, Louisiana

Warrant Officer Candidate School; and,

Basic Flight School: Ft. Wolters, Texas Helicopters (TH-55 Hughes Tool Company trainer).

Advanced Flight Training: Fort Rucker, Alabama (UH1 Iroquois; Bell Helicopter Company).

Graduated WOC/Flight School: Warrant Officer (WO1); Helicopter pilot, January 1967. My dad, an Air Force Major, swore me in as an Officer; Connie pinned Silver Wings on my chest. Four days later, our first child was born: Deborah, January 1967.

Left Travis Air Force Base first week of February, 1967 (it was cold) and landed in Republic of Viet Nam 20 hours later (it was hot) ... welcome to the war.

Reporting in to Long Binh reception center, I was assigned to the 1st Aviation Brigade, 118th Assault Helicopter Company (AHC) "Thunderbirds", Bien Hoa (approx 40 miles East of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City)). The 118th had 3 Platoons: Bandits (gunships), Choppers and Scorpions (troop transport (slicks)). I was assigned to the Scorpions. Usually flew in ten ship formation with four gunships escorting on "combat assaults". Single ship sorties were troop support (pigs & rice) missions. I initially flew in the right seat as a co-pilot ("peter pilot") learning to fly and fight "in country". After a couple months, assigned my own aircraft and became "Aircraft Commander" ("AC"). First call sign: "Thunderbird 13". My ship was "Redbird 7" (Scorpion colors were Red) and the ship was mine to fly. However, it was my crew-chief's ship to maintain (keep in flying condition) Ray Scholds was my crew-chief (the best!) never had to "red x" (ground the aircraft for maintenance problems) while flying with Ray. He also was door-gunner and a crack shot with an M-60 (saved our bacon more than once)! With his permission, I had "Connie" stenciled on my door, beneath the sliding window of the cockpit.

Ray sat behind me in the gunners seat on the left side of the aircraft. Door gunners (sitting on right side) rotated through the Company and were assigned randomly on daily basis. Minus R&R's (rest and relaxation) periods, I was in country 11 months and accumulated approximately 1400 flying hours.

Shortly after making AC I was assigned as our Company Instructor Pilot ("IP") responsible for keeping our pilots current with emergency procedures related to the UH-1. And at the same time, assigned as Flight Leader and a new call sign: "Thunderbird One". I survived as flight leader until rotating home.

During my "tour" of duty, I received a "battlefield" commission to 2nd Lieutenant, was awarded 30 Air Medals (1 Air Medal for each 25 hours of combat missions flown); and, the Silver Star for valor in combat. God brought me home in February 1968 ... and in one piece (no wounds no purple heart!). Thank You Lord!

Returning home, God blessed Connie and I with Daniel and Donna in 1969 and 1970 respectively. And they blessed us with Don, Becky and Eddie; and our family has grown with our 3Ds' blessing us with 7 grandchildren and 2 great-granddaughters! Thank You Lord!

I left active duty in January 1970 with permanent rank of Captain (now United States Army Reserve). Honorable discharge.

Immediately went into business for myself (with God as Senior partner) and have remained so until present. Connie and I just celebrated our 54th wedding anniversary October 2. Thank You Lord for my wonderful wife!

1990 first run in with federal government "law enforcement". Indicted for "Conspiracy to impair and impede the IRS". Trial in North Carolina ... convicted ...spent 37 months in federal prison until sentence vacated on appeal. Now its my turn to experience state government "law enforcement". Charged with primarily "filing false documents in a public office" in three Counties in California. Represented myself in all three cases (5 month trial in Sacramento: Case No. 13F07578, 2013) Santa Clara Case No. 1348325, 2016 and Solano County Case No. FCR817374, 2018. Sacramento case on Appeal Third District Court of Appeal; pending. Santa Clara appeal (affirmed) and now Habeas Corpus pending in Federal Court (Northern District of California (Case No. 19-cv-05447-WHO). And Solano County appeal pending. Issues raised in all three cases: fundamental jurisdictional and Constitutional error. See "Grounds for Relief" at www.withoutoneplea.com (click on "state"; all three cases are illegal prosecutions and must be reversed.) DejaVu ... I had found similar jurisdictional error in the federal arena almost 30 years ago! (click on "federal".) Stay tuned!

Yours in His service, Lonnie G. Schmidt

