

Remembering my men and friends of “Charlie” Company

By LT Tom Abraham

Platoon Leader, C/2/503



C/2/503 Platoon Leaders on or about January 1967. L-R: Lt. Welborn Callahan (KIA), 3d Platoon; Lt. Thomas Abraham, Weapons Platoon (81mm); Lt. Al Guyer (KIA), 2d Platoon; Lt. Phil Hayden, 1st Platoon.

My first assignment was the LT of the 3d Platoon. I arrived in August 1966. LT Guyer arrived soon after I did as did LT Hayden. LT Callahan arrived in January 1967. One of the first things I did was ask my men to write me a letter telling me about themselves so I could get to know them. I also told them about me.

I had an opportunity to take R&R to Hawaii at Christmas in 1966, and met my fiancé' there. We only had one major contact with the enemy up until that time. On my way out of the field to leave for Hawaii we drew .50cal fire and that was a rush but no casualties.

When LT Callahan arrived he took my platoon, 3d platoon, as I was senior and moved to the mortar platoon. In early February I was moved up to Battalion to lead the 4.2 mortar platoon -- just in time to plan for THE JUMP.

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The late LTC Bob Sigholtz (COL Ret), addresses his men of the 2/503 prior to combat jump in February 1967.

(Photo provided by Wayne Tuttle, C/2/503)

Sometime in January or February LT Hayden was hit very badly and was med-evac'd. Preparation for THE JUMP was limited to 4 or 5 officers, and I was included. The S-4, who always stayed in the base camp while I went to the field told me he would make the jump and I would stay behind. LTC Robert Sigholtz, our Bn CO, would have none of that. The starched fatigues S-4 would wear his starched clothes while Abraham went with the Battalion. I didn't know whether to be honored or scared.

They had planned a jump the previous year and found talk of it in the local bars; combat jump wings being sold, and an aerial recon discovered machine gun bunkers all around the drop zone. Security was tight this time and the jump occurred without a hitch. Our mission was S&D and try to find a POW camp.

The jump occurred on February 22, my fiancé's birthday. I told her to watch the news. We patrolled that area for a week with no sign of the enemy.

Then, on March 3, we got horrific news. Third platoon, my old platoon, was caught in an ambush. My heart raced while we waited for the news. LT Callahan, whose father was the Command Sergeant Major at Fort Benning, was KIA along with what seemed like half of the platoon.

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The platoon was crippled and needed a new platoon leader and new recruits. LT Guyer told me he thought the Colonel would pick him and he didn't feel good about it. He felt he was now senior and wanted to follow my path to battalion. He had that unmistakable look on his face. Some battle weary soldiers know what I mean. I went to the Colonel and offered to take over my old platoon, but LTC Sigholtz denied my request. He wanted me with the 4.2mm mortar platoon. He sent LT Guyer.

One month later, on April 8, 1967, 3d Platoon again got caught in an ambush. The KIA's were brought in and I loaded each on the helicopter, including LT Guyer and what seemed like the other half of the platoon. Hardened soldiers cried as they loaded LT Guyer on the helicopter. I would save my tears for much later. (Officers have to be strong in front of their men). It was hard.

KIA, THE MEN OF 3D PLATOON I KNEW

Lt. Albert M. Guyer was my hooch mate. We became very close. We both played college football, and Al was a small college All-American. He was in great shape and kept a set of tension springs in the hooch to keep his arms and chest strong. We both were engaged to beautiful women and we talked about them a lot. I had to help him write some of his letters, as he seemed to want the help. Al was from Kansas and his fiancé was living in Louisiana -- Missy Stewart. How can I remember that 55 years later and not even having it written down? I tried to find her when I went back and was stationed at Ft Polk, but no luck. Al was a great soldier and a great friend. 4/8/67.



Lt. Welborn A. Callahan was a great guy as well but I knew less about him other than what I mentioned above. He grew up mostly at Ft. Benning and was no stranger to the Army. It never leaves my mind that two of my replacements and most of my platoon were lost within two months of my moving on. 3/3/67.



PFC Steven Jack (John) Adams was a rifle Team Leader, was born in Stanton, Tennessee and was very proud to serve his country and planned to stay Airborne until his service time was up in 1968. He had planned to continue his education. 3/3/67.



PFC Charles Byron Alandt was a Grenadier from Detroit, Michigan, born on New Year's Eve, 1948. He told me he volunteered for Airborne and Vietnam, which he later thought was a big mistake but decided that while he was there he would do his "best because I feel it's my duty." He was looking forward to going home to live with his brother in California and to attend college. 3/3/67.



PFC Lionel S. Anthony was an AR man, which suited his muscular frame well. He was a happy young man and was proud to serve, and, like others, looking forward to getting home and getting on with his life. 3/4/67.

SSG Melvin Clyde Gaines, one of my best squad leaders. He was a good soldier and a good leader. He had time in country before my arrival and I learned from him. He took care of his men and I relied on him. 3/3/67.



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SGT Pedro "Doc" Garcia
was another one that I relied on heavily. He kept me straight and he was always a happy person with a good sense of humor. He was with me at HHC, 4.2mm mortars. Very good man. 3/25/67.



PFC James Arthur Skiles
was a machine gunner (AR) from New Jersey and had hoped to go back to college when his service to his country was up. His passion was singing in a group and hoped to pick that up again back home. 3/3/67.



SP4 Moses "Doc" Green was a medic in the 3d platoon. He was another great paratrooper. Kept me on my toes, refused to let me make a mistake, and I learned a lot from him. Everyone knew and loved him. 3/3/67.

SGT Douglas Eugene Moore, an outstanding squad leader who was a good leader to his men and a good teacher for his platoon leader. He had a good military mind and was war experienced in Vietnam. A new LT would be smart to listen rather than dictate, and I did. He was married and left an infant child. 3/25/67.



SGT John Raymond Stalter was a Pfc rifleman when I arrived. He was from Pico, CA and spent most of his time surfing. In school he played football and wrestled and placed in two AAU wrestling tournaments. He was looking forward to leaving RVN, but then who wasn't? He wanted to go to college. 3/3/67.



These recollections are from my memory and written notes from over 50 years ago. The men of C/2/503 were among the best. I volunteered for the 173d Airborne because I had heard what a good outfit it was. I wasn't disappointed one bit. The men who fell were all good, young men. They gave their lives to serve their country. It saddens all of us to reflect on their loss.

When I left Vietnam in August 1967, the Bn CO wanted me to stay to enhance my career. I would have commanded "Charlie" Company, my old company. I couldn't. I was getting married in a week. Less than 3 months later Charlie Company and the 2d Batt was surrounded at Dak To. I was lucky again. ###

THEY CALLED US “CHARGIN’ CHARLIES”



Charlie Company hooches along perimeter at Camp Zinn.
(Cropped from photo by Col. George Dexter, Bn CO, '64-'66)

