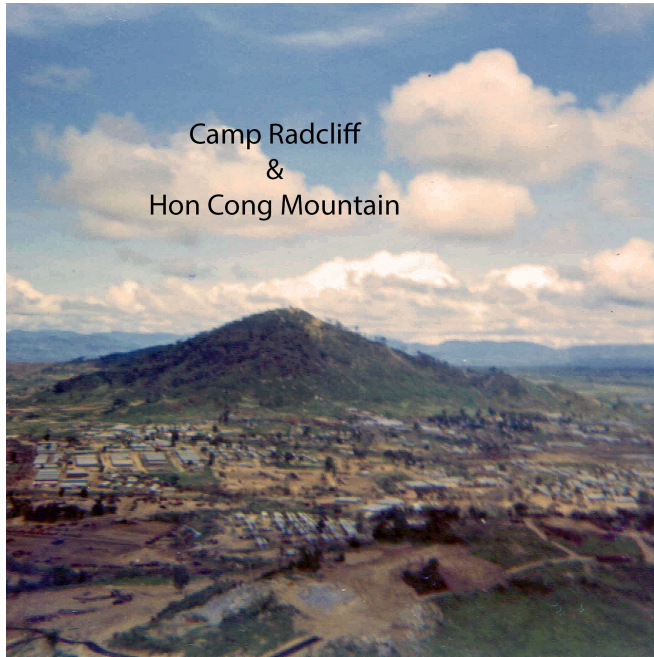


12 - MANG YANG PASS MISSION

Located North of Highway 19 and Halfway
between the South China Sea and Cambodia

May 21, 1970



We left from the same chopper pad that I had left on my first chopper trip to FSB Challenge only seven weeks ago. It seemed like an eternity since that time. Now I was an experienced grunt with a CIB (Combat Infantry Badge). I knew I wasn't the bravest of the brave, but I wasn't a coward. I wasn't as scared as some of the more experienced guys, but then again they were much shorter than I was, and I was still inexperienced. Time would tell if I would be the same.

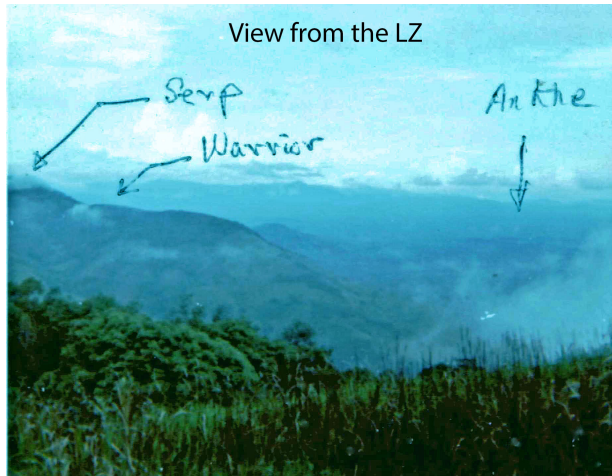
My main concern was my diarrhea, which started up with a vengeance when I started drinking ice-cold beer. It had not improved, and I was afraid of losing control without any underwear, or a change of clothes. Hopefully, it would fade

away with the lack of cold beverages.



Our flight of choppers lifted off from Camp Radcliff and headed west, passing by Tiger Mountain. From there we began crossing the An Khe Plain which resembled a flat prairie. There were bomb craters that dotted the landscape. Over the wet season they had filled with water forming little ponds. As we headed west the choppers continued to gain altitude. As we got higher the Choppers struggled to continue their climb. The sound of the chopper blades got deeper and the turbine strained to gulp the thin air and the temperature dropped to the

point of being uncomfortable. It almost seemed like we were heading back to Cambodia.

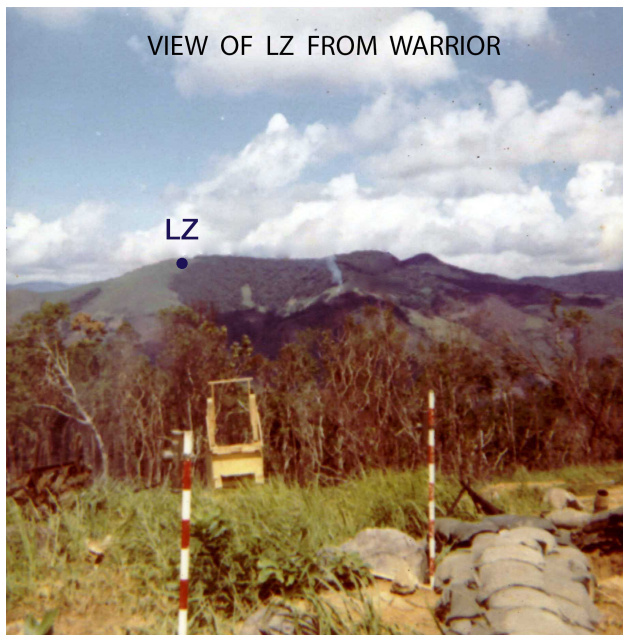


In the distance, we could see the mountain range separating the An Khe Plain from the higher Kontum Plain where Pleiku was located. We were just north of Highway 14 flying parallel to it.

As we approached the mountain range ahead, the choppers climbed with difficulty to gain altitude. Eventually, we landed on top of a grass-covered finger jutting out from a mountain just north of the Mang Yang Pass. We were actually above the clouds! As we landed on the LZ we could see the An Khe Plain and the city in the distance through

openings in the clouds below us. Over to the Northeast across a valley, we noticed that there was a firebase, called FSB Warrior. Luckily the LZ was cold, in more ways than one.

We secured the LZ and sent out a patrol to reconnoiter the area. There were no signs of the enemy according to the returning patrol. I didn't go on patrol and was able to linger on the grass finger and enjoy the view and take a picture of the scene. I was amazed at how cold it was up here. The elevation of the finger was 8,000 feet and we were heading for the summit of the mountain range.



A short time later we found a secure place for our night lager and set up for the night. Although it wasn't exactly hot weather it was dry and we were consuming large amounts of water. I suspect the week's indulgence in alcohol was taking its toll on us. It was a very cold, but uneventful night.

May 22, 1970

As dawn arrived, we set off to the top of the mountain ridge looking for water, as we progressed. Although we were getting critically short on water, my bowels failed to accept the shortage and kept very active. In the field we had to dig a hole to relieve ourselves and bury the excrement for hygienic reasons. In my case it took 2-3 holes to accomplish the feat. I was losing weight fast, from either digging the holes, or the act of relief, I didn't know which. Our Medic thought I was suffering from dysentery, and told me to keep drinking water.

Learning how to go to the bathroom in the jungle was quite an art and everybody had his own style. I wasn't very comfortable just squatting. Squatting required too much effort, and a good sense of balance. A loss of balance could mean disaster (falling in the hole) since we had no spare clothes. In my condition it took longer than a normal dump. To ease my plight I would dig a hole in front of a small tree with about an 1-1/2" in diameter trunk. This allowed me to hold on to the tree trunk comfortably with one hand, and it eliminated the balance variable.

During our excursion we sent out patrols looking for signs of the enemy with negative results. Due to the lack of water a blivet (a rubber bag holding about 50-60 gallons) of potable water was ordered from the base camp. It was due to arrive that afternoon. In the meantime we set up a small perimeter off a grassy meadow on the side of the mountain range for an LZ.

A short time later one of our patrols found a very small spring coming out of the side of a ledge. The water came out of the rock in a steady drip like a leaking faucet. It was collected in a small pool that held about a cup full of water. Nearby was an old hooch that had been used within the last few days.

One of the grunts was assigned to collect the water into a canteen. It took almost an hour to collect a canteen full (1 quart). Each canteen was shared among a squad. It wasn't much, but it did relieve the pain of thirst. We continued to collect water until late in the afternoon when the blivet arrived.

May 23, 1970

When we got up in the morning water was still short and one of the grunts went over to continue the collection process. When he got to the pool he found it contaminated with soap! Someone had beaten him to the pool, and had used it to shave in. The only person with a clean shave was a FNG officer. I thought someone was going to kill him. Although we wouldn't be around long enough to collect water, the thought of spoiling a scarce water supply was sacrilege.

After a series of sweeps were sent out around our night lager, the company headed out in an easterly direction. The 3rd Platoon and the CP (Command Post) traveled together, while the 1st and 2nd Platoon traveled independently from each other, and the CP group.

While the 1st Platoon had an uneventful day the rest of the company was busy:

Later that morning a dustoff was called for a man from the Recon Platoon, which was operating in an area code named "Rayon". He was suffering from a high fever due to an injured right leg. Maybe he cut himself and developed an infection? It was really easy to develop one in the jungle environment. Shortly after the dustoff, Recon discovered a N-S trail that had been used within the last two weeks.

Just before noon 3/D found a hooch last used about 5 months ago. Within the hour they found another hooch that was only about 2 weeks old, and was used within the last 2 days. Nearby was an E-W trail with tracks that indicated that a couple of individuals had passed by recently carrying heavy packs.

About the same time Recon came across a three-foot wide trail that ran from N-S. The trail had been last used about 2 weeks ago by an unknown number of people.

Just after noon 3rd Platoon, and CP, found a large old bunker complex with about 25 bunkers. The complex had been hit by an air strike. There were signs of new activity with a hootch under construction and animal pens nearby containing 10 pigs. Nearby was a N-S trail that had been used within the last three days by 3 individuals.

At 2 pm the 2nd Platoon took sniper fire and had their pointman shot in the chest. We heard that he was suffering from dysentery and stopped to relieve himself when an NVA shot him in the middle of his relief. The guy shot was the same man I had shared a bunker with on FSB Challenge. The entrance wound was a small hole, but the exit wound was large enough to put your fist into causing a sucking chest wound. To save him the medic had to wrap him in a poncho to seal his chest so that he could breath. It was a life threatening wound, but he recovered due to the quick evacuation and expert medical care.

[A typical firefight and dustoff](#)

During the 2nd Platoon action artillery was used, and the enemy returned fire. The 3rd Platoon arrived and moved to the SE in pursuit of the enemy. The enemy escaped suffering no visible casualties, or leaving behind any blood trails.

That night we camped out, along with the other units of our company, on the northern end of the ridge line we had been traveling. We were scheduled to be picked up the next morning and relocated to FSB Warrior.

Just before night I sighted a four-foot tree lizard in a tree just above our sleeping area. I made the error of taking a picture of the lizard without shutting off the camera flash. Because of the darkness the flash went off. I felt like an FNG, and other members of the company relayed the same feeling in a very vocal way. I really screwed up and knew it.

To this day, when I screw up, I think of that stupid lizard smiling down at me. Gotcha!

During the same day the other units in our battalion accomplished the following:

Around noon 3rd Platoon of C Company (operating in AO Linen) found 60 lb. of rice in a jug, along with two Japanese steel pots (The steel pots were vintage WWII helmets. A number of items from that war were still being found and used by the VC and NVA. They also found a couple of hand tools. The stuff had been around for two months.

Just after noon the 2nd Platoon found a large bunker (5x12x6') with a 7" overhead that was built about two weeks ago. It was last used about two days ago. There was an E-W footpath nearby that had been used lately by two individuals carrying heavy packs.

Just after noon, 3rd Platoon of A Company (operating in AO Silk) found, next to an E-W trail, another bunker complex. The complex was old and last used about 6 months ago. It was

composed of seven large hootches (10x20x8'), two bunkers (6x8x4') and six small animal pens (2x3').

Just before nightfall C Company called in a Dustoff for three grunts wounded by [punji sticks](#). The wounds varied from the lower to upper leg regions. The punji stick was a very effective booby trap that could even kill a soldier.

[On this day the five-day march against racism ends in Atlanta, Georgia.](#)

May 24, 1970

The morning was the beginning of a beautiful bright day. Perhaps we could enjoy a cold beer on the firebase? After a quick breakfast, a couple of patrols were sent out to scout the area for dinks. Other men were sent out to secure our Pick Up Zone (PZ).

The choppers arrived around 9 am to pick us up in a clearing on the west side of the wood line. This was near our night laager. Unfortunately, the PZ was on a side of a steep hill, and the helicopters could not land. Each chopper would hover on the side of the hill, low enough where on one side of the chopper the blades were just clearing the side of the hill. We had to attempt to load on the other side of the chopper where the skid was about six feet off the ground. Because of the danger from the blades, we had to load on the other side. This entailed taking off your rucksack, and hauling yourself onto the skid, and then into the chopper floor. The next man on the ground would hand up your ruck, as well as his ruck, and then he would climb aboard. This would repeat until the chopper was full (5-6 grunts). It was a difficult maneuver because every time someone jumped onto the skids to board the chopper, it would rock over and the pilot would have to compensate for the added load. It was a difficult, and dangerous way of loading, especially in full view of the enemy. The [Huey Pilots](#) did an excellent job. Big Balls. We loaded and departed without any hostile fire.