

9 - CONQUEST

Located in the northeast corner of Cambodia

The web pages on the Cambodian Mission are quite long. It is based on a 1-hour tape recording I made shortly after returning from the mission. I felt it was important to document it as accurately as possible. Anal? Maybe.

After writing the first draft, I received the mission logs for Cambodia and also the mission maps. That's how I can be so specific on the details. I also wrote descriptions on the back of the pictures my parents developed, so they could understand the photos.

May 7, 1970

In a short time we were crossing the Se San River which was the natural border between Vietnam and Cambodia. The view was spectacular and we all took pictures of this historic moment. Since I was the fifth man sitting in the middle of the chopper, I had to hand my camera to Sergeant Hubbard, who actually took the picture for me. As we passed into Cambodia, the landscape changed. There were islands of forest surrounded by dusty fields of sparsely planted potato plants. It was almost like a checkerboard, with the black representing the jungle and the red representing the fields. We then got our first surprise; an NVA soldier in full uniform, with a pith helmet and AK-47, was looking up at us as we flew over one of the fields. He did not even take a shot at us! The NVA sightings became more numerous as we made our way inland, and none fired at us. They seemed to be in a state of shock. Maybe they thought we were lost since Cambodia was off-limits to us. I hoped they wouldn't report us to the UN or the Geneva Convention for not playing fair. War is a crazy business, with the craziest at the top of the command chain.





It took us about fifteen minutes to arrive at the Cambodian LZ. Luckily the LZ wasn't hot. A hot LZ meant we were taking enemy fire as we landed. We were the second chopper to approach the LZ. As we landed, we noticed that among the plants were tree stumps left from crude field clearing operations. Today a common term for this type of operation is "cut and burn". This prevented us from landing. We had to throw our rucks out of the chopper and jump. Naturally, the chopper crews were not too anxious about getting close to the ground or hanging around too long.

Near some of the fields were crude one-room hooches made out of small branches, bamboo, and thatch-like roofs. A

number of them were located off the ground with stilts. I believe the stilts were meant to keep the food away from the vermin.

We regrouped into one of the forest islands next to the LZ and set up a defensive position. Within the forest, we found a hooch full of rice. There was a blue line below the field where we landed.

Once we got settled, the company, with our squad walking point, moved out in a northwest direction. We carefully moved about 500 meters into another forest island. The CO decided that we would set up our night lager here, and we began setting up a defensive perimeter. During this period we had to evacuate one man with heat prostration. Since leaving An Khe we had been in the sun and subject to 100-degree temperatures. Hydration was very important.

The last unit to leave Meredith was Company B, numbering 96 men. They left at 4:10 p.m. and finished their insertion at 5:32 p.m. Upon landing they headed in a northerly direction.

While we were digging in, the CO sent out a couple of sweeps to scout the immediate area for enemy signs. One of the sweeps reported a huge "trail" running in a North/South direction to the East of our position. On the trail, there were truck tracks and several footprints, all fresh. The trail was about as wide as a two-lane highway. We began calling the trail "the interstate". This trail turned out



to be one segment of the infamous "Ho Chi Minh Trail".

As soon as it got dark the commotion began. Throughout the night there were sounds of traffic and other noise that we could not decipher. Everybody was put on alert for an imminent attack, but none came. It was a sleepless, tense night. Visions of being overrun by swarms of NVA and tanks danced through our heads. What was all the noise?

Again, the plan for the mission was to have all units moving as company strength units. Any patrols were to be kept within close proximity of the main company so that they could be reinforced quickly. Large groups of NVA were suspected to be in the immediate vicinity. Our total battalion numbered 348 men.

May 8, 1970

As the night wore on, the noise slowly disappeared. Everybody wondered what the day was going to provide. We had been told that our part of Cambodia contained all kinds of re-supply depots, R&R centers, and troop re-supply encampments. It was speculated that there was all kind of anti-aircraft emplacements, artillery, and even Russian T-54 tanks. In the middle of this was the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail. As it turned out, the "interstate" we found was just one of much heading south, that comprised the "trail". We were beginning to feel awfully small and isolated. We prayed that we would get good air and artillery support. The army wouldn't send us into an impossible position, would they?

Our platoon was elected to walk point for the company, with the first squad leading. Usually, the order of march was the pointman (Messer), squad leader (Sgt. Hubbard), platoon leader

(Lt. Cassedy), radioman, and M-60 gunner (McGee). Due to the open terrain, the M-79 grenadier was moved up behind the radioman. I was the new M-79 grenadier in the squad and got a front-row seat to the action. I was still a cherry, meaning that I had never seen action yet! Was it an honor to my potential, or was the LT insane? Time would tell.



A single shot breach loading weapon that fired 40mm (1.57") Explosive Rounds or Buckshot rounds. The grenade round has a range of 400 meters (437 yards) while the buckshot was used at point blank range. The weapon weighed about 7lbs. loaded and was about 28 inches

long. The person firing the weapon had to press the butt of the stock tightly against the shoulder to prevent bruising since it had the kick of a 12 gauge shotgun.

We headed east and picked up the “interstate” heading north to Laos, which was about 20 miles away. I couldn’t get over the fresh signs on the trail, and the smell of charcoal, which was the scent of the NVA, since they cooked with wood and charcoal. I began mumbling the lines of Tennyson’s “Charge of the Light Brigade”. Possibly being in the middle of a poem took on a new meaning. My personal tension was through the roof.

Suddenly some hooches came into sight. The CO moved up squads from our flanks, and as our pointman approached the hooches, more appeared. There was a whole encampment consisting of dozens of large hooches. The LT had me drop in a round of “high explosives” (HE), also known as “ham and eggs”, into the middle of the encampment. The sound was loud and echoed back to us, but nothing human stirred. We heard pigs squealing and saw some chickens running about, but nothing else. There were no signs of bunkers, although we did find some empty spider holes around the “village” perimeter.



A “Spider Hole” was a shallow hole in the ground that could hold one man. It was covered by a bamboo and mat trap door that could be swung open for an ambush. The door was disguised to look like the surrounding ground.

The encampment looked as though it had been just abandoned. We counted over 500 beds set up in the barracks-type hooches. Other hooches contained administrative quarters and cooking huts. There were also outside training and/or entertainment centers. Surrounding the area were pens full of pigs and chickens. Some pen doors were left open and a number of animals were running loose. Huge rice storage sheds were empty. During our search, I found two machetes that were left behind and collected them as souvenirs. We also found a bicycle with a flat tire that was used to deliver supplies up and down the Ho Chi Ming Trail. There were baskets of rice (estimated to weigh 1500 pounds), corn, gourds, crossbows, AK-47 ammo, small ceramic bowls, and green and black clothing. In spite of all that we found, it was only the remnants of what was originally in the village. There was an E-W trail two feet wide nearby that was used 3-4 days ago and was visible from the air.

The official count was twenty-three 12x15 foot hooches, twenty 40x15 hooches, one temple, and twenty 3x4x6 foot bunkers with 2-foot overhangs. Later in the morning, eleven 6x3 foot hooches were also discovered. They were under construction and about 25% complete. Also found adjoining the area were three piggens which were 50% complete and four fireplaces. I was estimated that the area had been last fully inhabited about 3-4 days ago.

Nearby 3rd Platoon found a 5x6x12-foot hooch that was about one year old. The hooch contained about one ton of unpolished rice and two NVA entrenching tools.

Another sweep found twenty-two 10x25-foot hooches and one 10x35-foot hooch containing a half-ton of unpolished rice along with an NVA notebook and belt buckle. There were numerous pigs and chickens in the area. This sweep had to evacuate one man with a high fever.

One of the sweeps exploring the area surrounding the compound discovered a graveyard on the North side of the perimeter. Some of the graves had large mounds on with small hooches built on top. In the hooches were personal items, bottles, and bowls. It was thought that these were the graves of officers or other important dignitaries.



Under normal circumstances, the graves would be opened and checked for the bodies of American soldiers. Since this was Cambodia, there should not be any Americans in Cambodia. Were the NVA too moral to bring POWs across the border?

During the search, another squad found papers that revealed the encampment to be an R&R center for NVA troops in South Vietnam. The commotion we heard the night before was hundreds of battle-hardened troops evacuating this compound. The tracks indicated that they were heading north up the interstate to Laos. They probably had no idea that there were only 100 of us spoiling their vacation. I hoped they

wouldn't hold a grudge. I wondered if they had their version of Bob Hope to entertain the troops at this facility.

As it turned out, the NVA did have, in addition to Jane Fonda, traveling entertainment for their troops similar to the Bob Hope shows.

More sweeps were sent out to scout and secure the area. Orders from headquarters instructed us to kill the animals and burn the encampment. Luckily I did not have to participate with my

M-79, because it would be too dangerous. It took us about four hours to finish the destruction of the encampment.

Our scout, who was an ex-NVA soldier "Chu Hoi", had captured a small rooster. He tied a shoestring around one leg and tied it to his rucksack. The rooster rode on his shoulder as we marched, sort of like Long John Silver's parrot. He was quite a character.

Leaflets were dropped all over Vietnam urging the NVA to change sides or "Chu Hoi", in Vietnamese. The bearer of a leaflet could present it just like a Monopoly get-out-of-jail-free card to the nearest US or ARVN unit.

Once we regrouped, the company, with our squad in the lead, headed downhill in a northerly direction along the interstate. After only about 100 meters, we ran into a small stream with a bamboo pipe coming out of it. We stopped and filled our canteens and also had lunch. After



lunch, we headed east, although the trail headed northwest. We went an uneventful kilometer, sighting hooches in every field that we crossed, destroying as many as we could along the way. Again, the day was growing short, so we decided to make camp in a nearby wood line. Our squad went into the wood line to recon the area for signs of NVA. About 50 meters in we found some freshly dug spider holes and a 100-meter square campsite that was just abandoned. The area was set up as a night lager by the NVA and looked as though it would hold 50 to 60 soldiers. The tracks indicated that they had fled to the northeast. We heard bushes moving but didn't find anything. It could have been pigs roaming in the underbrush.

The NVA had left behind baskets of round-shaped watermelons. We tried eating them, but they turned out to be very sour. You had to add sugar to make them palatable. I was never crazy over watermelons and gave the other guys my share.

During the same day, the other units of the 2/35th were equally busy finding the following:

B Company found a 5x8x6 foot hooch located on stilts four feet above the ground containing a half-ton of rice, 50 lb. of rock salt, three Montagnard knives, and an AK-47 bayonet. The hooch was about six months old. Nearby there was an N-S trail about 1-1/2 feet wide. The trail was heavily used in the southerly direction and was not visible from the air.

Just after noon, and NW of the firebase, the company's OP (Observation Post) observed two NVA soldiers traveling to the south. They engaged the enemy with small arms fire and received 10-15 rounds of return fire from the enemy. The enemy fled to the south. PFC Matheis was wounded in the neck and died. [Click here](#) to see the Spot Report and Medical Evacuation Request.

Another more accurate version of the incident has [Richard Matheis](#) a victim of "friendly fire". Matheis had just celebrated his 20th birthday the day before.

C Company also NW of the firebase ran into one enemy first thing in the morning. The enemy was wearing green fatigues and was heading in a W-E direction. He was engaged with small arms and artillery and killed. It was discovered that he was unarmed.

A sweep by 3/C found two 12x15 hooches seven feet off the ground containing 900 lb. of rice, an NVA steel pot helmet, and Montagnard clothing. The area was used within the last three days.

Continuing on C Company found another fifteen hooches, five of which were 20x100 feet in size. Nearby were bunkers containing NVA web gear. An eighty-year-old lady was found in the area. She was sick and evacuated by helicopter for army medical attention.

Recon was heading in a southerly direction from the firebase when it ran into one enemy wearing a khaki uniform carrying a weapon and a basket also heading south. He was engaged with small arms fire and mortars but escaped.

Continuing on they found a 6x4x8-foot hooch four feet above the ground containing one ton of rice and 200 lb. of uncut rice. The hooch was about 4 months old and also contained some documents and a kerosene lantern.

Again, continuing on, a large complex was discovered. The complex contained four 25x10x15 foot hooches located 4 feet off the ground, sixteen 12x8x10 foot hooches also located 4 feet above the ground, fifteen utility type hooches that measured 4x4x3 feet, and five 20x20 foot animal pens containing 20 pigs and 20-30 chickens. Protecting the area were twenty 6x4x4 foot bunkers with 2-foot overhangs. Found in the area were 100 bundles of punji sticks, one ton of cut firewood, 50 lb. of salt, 4 blue sweatshirts, 5 NVA boonie hats, 10 sets of khaki uniforms, 5 pith helmets, 8 sets of NVA web gear, twelve AK-47 shell casings, one US machete, 5 crossbows, and miscellaneous water jugs, baskets and pottery.

In our night laager, people usually slept with a partner. Each grunt carried one poncho. By sleeping in pairs, one poncho would be used to lie on, while the other one could be used for shelter in the case of rain. The area of operation had to be pretty quiet for rain shelters to be used. Wet shiny shelters reflected light handily, and also acted like a drum amplifying sound. Both characteristics would help give away the defensive position.

My partner on this mission was our squad machine gunner, Dennis McGee. He would have the last shift right after mine, at the guard post that night.

A defensive position for a company-size group like ours formed a circle of M-60 machine guns. Our company had a total of eight guns (two per platoon x 4 platoons) spaced equally around the circle. Likewise, there were nine radios in the company. Every gun had a person assigned to for guard duty and every other gun had a radio assigned to it. The remaining radios stayed with each platoon leader. The ninth radio belonged to the company commander and stayed in the CP (Company Command Post).

Depending on the number of people in each platoon, each person would serve a 1-2 hour shift at a gun. That night I would have the shift from 4 to 5 am. It wasn't the best shift to have, since I would have to try to get back to sleep for only one hour.

At the end of my shift, as I awoke McGee for the last shift, I heard a rustling sound in the brush. I quickly went back to the gun, while McGee woke the Sarge. Unfortunately, the Sarge wasn't responding too quickly, but the noise kept getting louder and heading directly for me. I thought we were about to be overrun but held my fire so I wouldn't give our position away by the muzzle flash of the machine gun. My heart was in my throat, and I was sweating bullets. When do I fire? Was everybody going to be online in time to repulse the attack? Was I going to die? What was that smell? Did I just crap in my pants? And then a large dirty pig burst through the perimeter and ran by me. It took all my might from opening fire and turn the pig into pork chops. The joke was on me.

I had been in Vietnam for almost two months and had yet to fire a shot in combat. Where was the war? Here we were in Cambodia, with all signs pointing to a numerically superior NVA army surrounding us and all we encounter is Private Porky. This was getting to be too nerve-wracking. I felt like an old maid who couldn't give her virtue away.

In Chicago, a court frees the 7 Black Panthers who survived a shoot-out with Chicago police.

In New York, the Knicks beat the LA Lakers 113-99 to win their first NBA title joining the Jets and Mets as champions.

In NYC helmeted construction workers beat up anti-war protesters.

May 9, 1970

The next morning, our third day in Cambodia, using our night lager as a base, several sweeps were sent out to investigate the surrounding area. Our platoon was given the assignment to continue in a northeasterly direction toward Laos and the fleeing R&R troops. This was too thrilling.

As we descended the gentle slope on the north side of the night lager, we could see fields of potato plants bordered by low shrubs. Each field was approximately 20 acres with a hooch located in a corner of each field. It seemed that the fields went in every direction as far as you could see, broken only by the scattered forest islands. I wondered who farmed all this acreage.

Every time we approached a hooch that could be a potential ambush, I would fire a grenade into the area to try to expose the ambush. I didn't get a response, not even a stirring pig.

About 500 meters from the night laager we found a large hooch filled to the brim with rice. It looked like someone had poured it in from the roof. Surrounding the hooch was a substantial bunker complex. We reported our find to the company and waited for them to join us around 10 am so that they could destroy the rice. The official report estimated 2000 lb. of unpolished rice in the 6-month-old hooch that measured 12x6 feet and was located 4 feet off the ground. Also found in the hooch was an NVA pistol belt, 10 fish traps made from bamboo sticks, and miscellaneous baskets. Numerous chickens were near the hooch. The hooch had been used within the last week by an unknown number of individuals.

Our squad continued on the sweep and continued to find more rice hooches within two hundred meters of the first hooch. We reported the locations to the company so they could destroy these as well. One of the hooches contained another 2000 lb. of unpolished rice and was similar to the previous hooch containing rice.

While we continued our independent sweep the rest of the company found an old enemy night lager that was used within the last 24 hours and had sleeping accommodations for 100 individuals. In the night laager 100 rounds of AK-47 and 24 rounds of SKS ammunition were found. The ammunition was brand new. The company also observed enemy movement to the east, but no action was initiated. Another 10x6 foot hooch contained a US canteen cover, 10 lb. of rice wine, an empty NVA rucksack, pottery, 100 lb. of salt, a wine press, and NVA clothing. Later that day 3rd Platoon discovered 15 more hooches containing 2 AK-47 clips, one M-16 clip, a GI entrenching tool, 40 shirts and pants, 100 lb. of an unknown seed, 5 tons of rice, another 40 lb. of rice, 30 lb. of tobacco, assorted tools, and five NVA belt buckles.

Our platoon moved downhill for over an hour, crossed a small muddy blue line, and finally took a break near a small grove of trees. The sun was unbearably bright and the temperatures were near a hundred degrees. We were quickly running low on water again. I went searching for some shade behind a nearby tree before I sat down and saw something strange leaning against it. At first, it looked like an anti-tank mine and I called one of the sergeants over to inspect it since I didn't know what I was doing and didn't want to get blown up so early into my military career. Upon closer inspection, we found that it was a bamboo rucksack containing three brass gongs. One gong was about 18" in diameter, another was 12" and the smallest was about 8". Each was handmade by hammering a brass sheet over a wooden pattern. I kept the medium one and gave the larger one to Sergeant Brown, and the smaller one to Shevlin (Mouse), a rifleman from New York.



After a short rest, we continued on our march. The hill finally leveled off and led to a large stream with a hooch on the far side. On the other side of the stream was a forest that continued up the hill as far as we could see. I wondered how far away Laos was. We carefully approached the stream, hoping that we were not walking into a trap, since we were exposed in the open field, and help was a long march away. If there were any NVA troops in the wood line, we would be dead meat. Where was the dense jungle when you needed it?

After a very tense time, we determined that we were the only ones around. It looked as though the hooch was quickly abandoned just before we got there. We found all kinds of documents, sundry goods such as rice, pottery, farm implements, and a large crossbow. Some of the guys made souvenirs of these items. I kept a small bamboo knife with an ornately carved handle.

A short distance from the first hooch was three more, each filled with similar items. We discovered some documents that indicated that this was an NVA encampment. One of the items was a pith helmet worn by the NVA regulars. We concluded that the fields were probably worked by Cambodian civilians under the watchful eye of the NVA regulars located in these hooches. I wondered if this wasn't a form of slave labor.

Why weren't they counterattacking? They certainly had the numerical advantage. It felt as though we were living on borrowed time. I hoped I was wrong.

We filled our canteens and took bathes in the stream without bothering to take our clothes off. The day was hot and dry and our clothes would dry off within an hour.

Our squad made a quick sweep into the large wood line to the north but found nothing. On the way back we ran into a trail near the blue line that had fresh tracks on it. The tracks were less than two hours old and we proceeded to follow them. We eventually lost the tracks over some hard ground. We did find more fields and hooches along the way, but no further sign of the NVA. We returned to the blue line and the 2nd squad.

While we were there, we washed up quickly again in the stream and refilled our canteens. Mouse took the pith helmet and wore it as we departed at 4 pm to return to the company night lager. We had a long march back; all uphill, on a beautiful, but brutally hot day. Our plan was to destroy as many rice hooches as we could along the way back.

We took another break near the small grove of trees where I found the gongs earlier. Along the way, we considered inspecting more of the field hooches, but decided that they probably had nothing to add to our recon mission except more sweat. We continued up the hill without further side excursions.

About fifty meters up the hill I heard, what sounded like the snapping of whips, and noticed everybody diving for cover. We were under attack! The whips cracking were bullets passing around us. I got the message and hit the ground.

During basic training at Fort Campbell, in Kentucky, we were put in trenches, and rifles were fired over us. This was done so that we could recognize the distinctive cracking sound of bullets passing overhead. Only bullets fired in your direction would make this sound. If you didn't hear a bullet it meant that you were probably on your way home in a box.

Everything began moving in slow motion. The 2nd squad, at the tail end of the column, was still in the wood line, where the gongs were found, and had good cover. The guys behind me had found cover behind a large 3-foot diameter log to the east, while the first three guys at the point had found cover in a small row of potato plants going across the hill. The rest of us were caught in the open. One guy was behind the log and was screaming that he had dropped his rifle in the open. He would never live that down. While he was heading for cover, Mouse shed the pith helmet with gusto.

Everybody was trying to locate the source of the fire before returning fire. I thought the fire was coming from spider holes in the wood line, but the 2nd squad would have been on top of it. The 2nd Squad suddenly saw some dinks running into a distant wood line about 200 meters away to the NW. I didn't see anything. We opened fire into the distant wood line.

A major rule of engagement was not to open fire until the target is identified. Nobody wanted to get shot by their own guys. It takes a lot of discipline not to begin firing as a natural reflex to protect yourself.

I flipped up my long-range sights and set the range at 200 meters and fired off my first round in combat. The round landed right on target but exploded in the upper portion of the trees. I could not get over firing that first round. I could not come to grips that someone was trying to kill me

and that they had not even met me! To know me is to love me; assholes! I loaded another round for my new friends.

Before I could fire another round, the LT, from behind the shrubs, called for McGee our M-60 gunner to run up to his position. McGee was located about 10 feet behind me and had to run about 30 meters uphill past me to get to the LT. Everybody gave him covering fire when he got up to run. As he was running I saw little geysers of soil kick up around him, and he was running toward me! The geysers followed him all the way up the hill to the shrubs, without hitting him, or me. I felt totally naked in my position.

Next, the LT yelled for me to join them. I did not relish the thought of becoming the next geyser man, figuring that they might improve their marksmanship on me. With a great amount of trepidation, I got up to run. My feet were churning so fast that I fell flat on my face. I was up in an instant. My feet were slipping like spinning tires on snow, more action than speed. It felt like an eternity to reach the shrubs. The NVA were probably in stitches watching me run. That's probably why they couldn't hit me, or McGee's M-60 fire was effective in covering my mad dash. No Olympic aspirations for me.

Once I got behind the line of plants I attempted to return fire, but all I got was a hollow click. I discarded the round and tried again with the same results. Were these rounds duds? I looked at the primer cap on the round and saw a faint dot from the firing pin. I frantically tried another round with no result. In desperation, I rotated the same round so that the firing pin would hit another spot on the primer cap. This worked. To fire a round I had to pull the trigger unsuccessfully the first time, open the barrel, rotate the round, and successfully fire the round on the second try. I figured that the firing pin was probably worn out. Great timing! I wondered if the army had any preventive maintenance program. How old was this weapon?



While I was struggling with my weapon, the LT was calling in artillery. While the first two rounds came in on the enemy wood line, the rest of the platoon made its way up to our shrub line. During this time, I got a chance to shoot a picture of the two artillery rounds landing, which were white phosphorus. After the two rounds landed, the LT was notified that he had used up his allocation of artillery for the mission! There was a shortage of artillery rounds on the supporting firebase! Goodbye and good luck, out.

White phosphorus would burn through steel and flesh without stopping. It was nastier than plain explosives.

Shortly after the rounds landed the enemy fire ceased. Either artillery had scored a direct hit or they were retreating in anticipation of more artillery rounds.

The rear echelon jockeys, no shortage of them, ordered us to head to the wood line and engage the enemy. Does that mean that we get another allocation of two artillery rounds, you big spenders?

The 1st Squad headed back downhill to the gong wood line and turned left toward the enemy wood line. We got online and swept the area without finding a sign of the enemy. There were no tracks, blood trails, or spent ammo casings. We continued through the wood line to a field on the other side where there was a hooch filled with bananas and a crossbow. We continued west into a larger wood line that connected to the wood line we patrolled earlier in the day that had fresh signs of the enemy. We found nothing and returned to the hooch, ate some bananas, and destroyed the hooch

We returned to the ambush site, and 2nd squad, without further incident. We picked up our souvenirs and made our way back to the company night lager. Sergeant Hubbard checked out my weapon and agreed with me that the firing pin was worn out. Since we were scheduled to get a resupply in the morning, he called in for a replacement weapon. It was a quiet and uneventful night. I was extremely exhausted and slept well. I could have cared less about the imminent danger surrounding us.

During the same day, the other units of the 2/35th were equally busy finding the following:

A Company, 1st Platoon performing a sweep from the firebase found a 6x8-foot hooch four feet off the ground just 50 meters south of the firebase. The hooch was about 8 months old and contained 1000 lb. of unpolished rice. Another sweep found another hooch about the same size containing 200 lb. of rice. The hooch was about 4 months old.

B Company found a series of trails going in the N-S and E-W direction. The trails varied in width from 2-4 feet wide. Some could be observed from the air. All had signs of heavy use within the last 2-3 days.

Late in the morning, C Company found a 6x4-foot hooch that was about 6 months old and contained an AK-47. The hooch was used within the last two days. Just after noon, the unit spotted 6 to 8 individuals moving out of an abandoned complex. Mortar fire was employed with negative results. The complex contained one 10x20-foot hooch, that was about 4 months old, and contained 6 sleeping positions under the hooch. In and around the hooch, was found one flintlock rifle, 8 canteens, 7 US canteen cups, US clothing, three 51 caliber rounds, ten AK-47 rounds, a ball of string, two 2.75mm rockets, 600 to 700 lb. of rice, an old rucksack packed with

5000 punji sticks, sneakers, a satchel containing paper, an old military jacket, a US pistol belt, an M-60 bolt, an NVA gas mask, and 12 boonie hats. A fighting position was found at the entrance into a "punji pit training area". In that area were 800 punji sticks and 4 pith helmets. Later that night one man had to be evacuated with a high fever.

Recon had an uneventful day. They did not see any enemy or enemy signs.

In Washington a rally asks the US to pull out of Cambodia.

May 10, 1970

We got up around 6:30 am and had breakfast. Then the whole company retraced our platoon's trail from yesterday. As we passed the site of yesterday's firefight, I was amazed at the lack of any trace of that fight. Nobody would ever know that there ever was a battle here. What was the title of that poem describing such a scene? Ozymandias?

OZYMANDIAS

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them on the sand,
Half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamp'd on these lifeless things,
The hand that mock'd them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains: round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

- Percy Shelley -

We arrived at the large blue line, where we sent out more sweeps, formed a defensive perimeter, refilled out canteens, and bathed. Just before lunch, the resupply choppers arrived with food and ammo. We got a full supply of food, but not ammunition. It seems that ammo was in short supply. What a way to run an invasion? I was still fifteen rounds short of my full load of forty. Instead of getting a replacement weapon, I got a replacement firing pin, which I wasn't trained to change. Luckily, Sergeant Hubbard knew how to change it, even though we had no tools. We hoped that it would do the trick.

After lunch we headed in an easterly direction and found, you guessed it, more hooches filled with supplies. Boy did these dinks eat a lot, or if they didn't, there was a shit load of them. I suspected the latter. After destroying the hooches we moved on and set up a night lager in a nearby wood line. This was getting boring.

It dawned on me that we had seen everything being grown in the area, except rice. There were no signs of rice paddies anywhere. Was all this rice shipped in from the North to support the NVA in Vietnam? If so, all this activity was happening within sight of the Vietnam border. Was army intelligence this dumb? How could they allow this kind of activity to happen under their noses, while our troops were dying in Vietnam? Why couldn't we bomb this area? Didn't the presence of the NVA void the neutrality of this area? I thought it was criminal for our leadership, both political and military, to allow this to exist so blatantly.

One of the main contentions of the protests back home was the illegal bombing of Cambodia. I would later read about the massive extent of this bombing. The area of Cambodia showed no signs of B-52 craters or any other signs of aerial bombing. How could they miss this section of Vietnam? Maybe the number of bombings was an exaggeration, maybe they had the wrong country? The truth will never be known. I would later read an article by a B-52 pilot, that the Cambodian bombing was done blindly, in a haphazard fashion.

That night around 9 PM, I sighted some moving lights. The LT suspected they were NVA moving with flashlights, and pessimistically requested a fire mission from our artillery support. To our surprise, there were enough artillery rounds to fire on enemy flashlights. We fired some rounds and shortly the lights went out. I speculated the lifers in the rear were elated and assumed that we had made a direct hit. I don't know how many bodies they claimed. I doubted if it occurred to them that maybe someone just switched the lights off.

Later that night someone sighted more lights. These lights were in the same area, except bigger. They looked like campfires. The ghosts of the NVA we had killed earlier must have set them. Since they were so afraid of us, we let them be for the night.

During the same day, the other units of the 2/35th were busy finding the following:

A Company continued to secure the firebase and send out sweeps. The sweeps found three 4x6x4-foot hooches, again located four feet above the ground. The hooches were about 5 months old and contained 4000 lb. of rice. The hooches were used within the last week. Another sweep found three 8x6x5-foot hooches 5-1/2 feet off the ground and a 4x4x4 foot hooch 2 feet off the ground. They were about 6-7 months old and used within the last week. They contained 2000 lb. of polished rice and 4000 lb. of unpolished rice packaged in 250 lb. bags. Also in the hooches were filled water jugs and cooking utensils. Another sweep found another hooch measuring 8x10x7 feet containing 500-600 lb. of half polished and half unpolished rice, 50 lb. of corn. The hooch was about 6 months old and had been used within the last week by 2-3 individuals.

B Company found a new (1-1/2 feet wide) trail that was cut about two weeks ago. The trail headed in an N-S direction and was used for the last 4-5 days by approximately 20 individuals heading in a northerly direction. The trail was not visible from the air. There were about 50 punji sticks set up hastily along the side of the trail. Later in the afternoon, the unit discovered a large complex that contained 25 hooches measuring 8x10 feet and another four measuring 40x20 feet. The complex was surrounded by 10x4x4 foot fighting positions, each with a 3-4 foot overhang. Also surrounding the complex were about 1000 punji sticks placed in a random pattern. The sticks were installed within the last 4-5 days. The complex was about one year old and was last used 2-3 days ago by an unknown enemy force. The complex area measured 200x150 meters and was capable of holding 100 people. The only thing found in the hooches was one NVA pistol belt. The complex also contained 45 pigs and 100 chickens. Near the complex, was a series of trails running in all directions including a 15-foot bamboo bridge. The trails were about one year old but had been used within the last 2-3 days by an unknown number of individuals. The trails were visible from the air.

C Company got resupplied and had to evacuate one man with a high fever. No enemy contact was made during the day.

Recon also got resupplied. The day was uneventful for Recon.

During the day, some choppers took enemy fire near a blue line (531390). Gunships were brought in to attack the area. During the attack, secondary explosions were observed. A unit (?) was brought in to inspect the results of the attack. Four enemy KIA were found in the bunkers. The area contained 25 hooches and 20 bunkers. It was estimated that there were around 12 NVA in the complex during the attack.

In Boston, the Bruins beat the St. Louis Blues 4-3 in overtime to win their first Stanley Cup in nearly 30 years. Bobby Orr scored the winning goal as the Bruins swept the series in four games.

May 11, 1970

The next day dawned like all the previous ones, sunny and hot. It was amazing how much water we were devouring everyday. Our canteens were empty and I hoped that we would run into water soon.

Before starting out that morning each platoon was sent out in different directions on sweeps. Our platoon headed northwest and discovered two 6x10 foot hooches, 400 meters from the night lager. The hooches were about 50 meters from each other, and contained about 800 lb. of rice. Each hooch had a partition in the middle separating the polished and unpolished rice.

The 2nd Platoon was sent out in the direction of the lights that were sighted last night. They found no signs of the enemy. The 3rd Platoon also found nothing on their sweep.

The whole company headed due east and found more fields, but no more hooches We did run into an almost dried-up muddy stream. There was no way that we could drink, or fill our canteens from it. As we continued on we found a small muddy lagoon that had been dug out to provide a watering hole for livestock. In the watering hole, there was a group of pigs and chickens just having a good old time bathing, drinking, and using it as a latrine. Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink? We figured if we added some water purification tablets to the brown stew in the lagoon, we could drink it. The only problem was that nobody had any tablets!

We didn't have a choice; if we didn't drink we would begin to experience the effects of dehydration. The brown stew was thirst-quenching, gritty, but not too tasty. As we continued on another 1500 meters, we entered a wood line and found a path that had signs that it had been used recently. We decided to follow the trail. Not far down the trail, we ran into two stretcher-type devices with handles at each end. Instead of canvas in the middle, there was half of a hollowed-out log. They almost looked like water troughs for livestock. Whoever had dropped them had left the area quickly. We never did figure out what they were.

We found nothing else on the trail, but we did find a decent stream to refill our canteens. The company set up a defensive perimeter in the wood line just before dinner, while our squad went on a recon mission to the south. Heading uphill, we picked up a trail and followed it, suspecting that it might lead us to a bunker complex. There were more fields and wood lines bordering the trail. Every so often we would fire a grenade into a suspicious wood line to see if we could surprise some NVA. The new firing pin solved my weapon problem, but we got no response after the explosions. I was worried about my diminishing supply of grenades.

Late in the morning 2nd Platoon found five 10x8x6-foot hooches The area was a hospital complex that was about one year old and had been last used about 2-3 weeks ago. Four hooches contained four beds each, and the other hooch was a mess hall. The hooches contained various medical supplies including gauze, two German first aid kits, scissors, a diary, miscellaneous documents, a monsoon sweater, and 110 new AK-47 rounds.

After finding nothing on our sweep, we returned to the company night lager. Upon arriving, we found out that our mission had been modified. After noon, choppers would pick us up and place us in front of the fleeing NVA. It was thought that the NVA was trying to find sanctuary in Laos, which was off-limits to us. We can't break the rules now, can we?

Although I thought we were heading north at the time, based on the mission logs I later acquired, we were actually heading west to try to stop the NVA from heading into the interior of Cambodia.

I didn't quite understand how a handful of GIs was going to stop an NVA force that could number thousands. They couldn't support us with enough ammo, or artillery support, yet they were willing to put us into an impossible position. Wasn't the 100th anniversary of Custer's Last Stand approaching soon?

The choppers did not arrive until about 2:30 pm, in the heat of the afternoon. Either they were trying to build the suspense or wanted us to wilt in the heat to give the NVA a fighting chance. Typical army mentality, hurry up and wait. Between the anxiety and lack of water, we were really getting mentally and physically depleted. It was about time for another adrenaline shot.

I was supposed to go with the second chopper, but when it landed it couldn't take off with a full load of five guys, so Sergeant Hubbard, still linked by our shovel, and myself had to get off. Evidently, the chopper was due for an overhaul, and the turbine couldn't develop enough power to do the job. This was a common occurrence on missions. This wasn't too bad at the beginning of a mission, but could be disastrous during an extraction. Sorry, you'll have to wait for the next chopper.

A popular story going around was about an extraction that happened to a platoon in the 4th Division. The last chopper in to pick up the remaining five grunts was a dog and only could take off with three guys. Two guys stayed behind waiting for another chopper. Since it had been a relatively quiet mission, the area was thought to be enemy free, and no problems were anticipated leaving the two guys behind.

When a chopper returned they found both guys dead, with their heads placed on stakes. Shortly after discovering this grisly scene, the chopper was attacked and barely made it out of the LZ. The remains of the troopers were never recovered. I have never been able to verify the story, or others similar to it.

In any event, I got on the third bird, which could take a full load. The bird I was on, made a big sweeping turn that took us over the Se San River, Vietnam, and then back into Cambodia heading in a Northeasterly direction. At least the ride was refreshing in the heat.