

### **The Move from LZ PUNCHBOWL to LZ EMERY**

Bravo Battery 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 42d Field Artillery was located at LZ PUNCHBOWL () in January 1969. While there CPT Emory Hill the battery commander became very ill. He had a high fever and they thought it might be malaria. As a result, he was medically evacuated to the hospital at Camp Enari. I (CPT Frank Moen) was assigned to replace him as the commander and arrived shortly after CPT Hill's departure. LTC Perlow the Battalion Commander and I flew from battalion headquarters at LZ Marylou to LZ Punch Bowl and the colonel introduced me to the officers and NCOs. The officers and men of the battery were noticeably concerned about CPT Hill's welfare, and I believe that many wanted 1Lt Robustelli, the battery XO, to assume command.



LZ PUNCHBOWL was not a complete bowl-shaped position as the name



implied, but rather it had higher terrain around it on several areas. Not a great position for a firing battery. When the battery was given orders the next day to move to a new location called LZ EMERY there was a sense of relief. How were we to know that it was about to get worse. This new LZ was established by dropping a BLU-82 "daisy-cutter" bomb on the hilltop to clear it for occupation. A BLU-82 'Daisy Cutter' detonates after being dropped from the rear ramp of a USAF MC-130E Combat Talon to create helicopter landing zones in dense jungles during the Vietnam conflict. The "daisy cutter" weighs in at 15,000 pounds and is advertised to destroy anything in a 600-yard radius. However, not everything works as advertised.

Because of the short notice and lack of helicopter support, we were not able to conduct a normal recon the position. Rather, we had to make an advance party insertion to receive the battery that followed soon after arrival. When I arrived with a small advance party, we observed a position that was a total mess and unsuitable for a firing battery position. There were several large trees and branches scattered on the hilltop. Some were smoldering and there were some small fires burning. Almost all of the trees that were blown down were burning or smoldering. Nonetheless, we had to occupy the position though it was



unsuitable. Some of the trees that were blown down that remained in the location were too large to be moved. The battery was without engineer equipment or explosives that were necessary to clear the area and time did not allow for any a delay to get it. There was also a lack of water or any additional firefighting gear other than the normal allocation of fire extinguisher. To make matters worse, the 1-12th Infantry was being inserted into hostile areas not too far away from the LZ and the battery was needed to rapidly occupy to provide direct fire support. Basically, nothing was going as one would normally want and having a new commander under these circumstances did not help. Lack of familiarity with the personnel, their capabilities, just too many unknowns.

So as ordered, we moved the battery into the position and labored to find enough suitable positions for the guns. It was a real lousy irregular setup -- nothing was as one would want it to be. The entire command labored to quickly occupy and prepare for fire. The officers and men were magnificent in their efforts. Not only were they working under terrible and potentially dangerous circumstances they were operating on little to no sleep. Loads of ammunition were brought into areas that still had smoldering trees with the possibility that an increased winds could start them burning again was a real possibility -- it was an unpleasant situation at best. We knew that fires would start up again from the downward propwash from the helicopters as they brought in the howitzers and supplies. 1SG Marconi anticipating this had men ready to extinguish any new fires.



Another major problem was caused by the blast that cleared the area was insufficient causing us to occupy a firebase that was not large enough and we had gun position that were too close to large trees along the perimeter. As you can see in the photo at Figure X and, there was smoldering debris on several of the hillsides that burned throughout the night and next day. .

The men of the B battery rapidly occupied the position as soon as the CH47 sorties dropped us in to the LZ and all attempted to establish proper firing positions, but that did not occur as desired. Before we were even remotely setup and ready for normal operations, elements of the 1/12th Infantry encountered the enemy upon their insertion. Thus the gun sections were firing a "contact" fire mission from unprepared positions and the FDC was operating in a status more like a "hip shoot" than normal. Because of the close proximity of the infantry in contact and the trees on the perimeter, we were forced to fire high angle. The gun crews rapidly dug into the extremely hard fire baked soil to create the necessary high angle pits. Due to their tenacity, we were able to provide the timely response to the fire mission requests and achieved fire superiority for the infantry.

It was obvious that my men found themselves very vulnerable on this firebase. We were operating from un-bunkered positions and had ammunition exposed. Because all personnel were busy with the fire mission and position setup our perimeter security was almost non-existent. Again, Bravo was fortunate that the enemy was not able to take advantage of being the battery being placed in another lousy firebase location.

As the day went on fatigue began to show on the men. They suffered from lack of sleep due to preparation for the move and the labor of moving a firing battery—an operation that is very tiring when all goes as planned. They had to tear down the bunkers to get the timbers and perforated steel platform (PSP) sections from the old position bunkers that were necessary for building bunkers in the next position. Then they had to load all the gear and the howitzers with harnesses for air movement. All the ammunition had to be loaded into A-22 bags and more. It was necessary to police the area to ensure we did not leave wire, ammunition, or anything else that might be useful to "Charlie." And when they finally loaded up on the helicopters for a brief rest, they knew that upon landing the real work would begin. There is the unloading, putting the howitzers into position, sorting equipment, and preparing to build bunkered parapets, bunkering in the FDC, ammunition and supplies. And for this move, nothing came close to the normal. As mentioned earlier, upon arrival the normal activities were exacerbated by the smoldering debris fires in the trees and the need for almost immediate fires in response to requests from the supported infantry. In the evening, we were still filling sandbags and improving our positions. Exhaustion was showing on us all and water was at a premium. We had use much of the water in the "water buffalo" --the name we used to referred to the water trailer.

Our concerns about the possibility of facing serious fire was founded as a fire on the southern hillside started from either the wind or from our unwanted neighbors. Regardless of how it started, it did silhouette our position and that was cause for additional concern. The fire did have one useful effect in that it provided light for exhausted men to continue their work among the debris reducing the possibility of having some very tired young men stumbling around among the trees and stumps. Fortunately, other than the concern about the fire on the hillside, and a few fire missions, the evening was uneventful, and they were able to get a few hours rest.

At daylight, we continued to improve the position, but most all would agree that LZ EMERY would never be a good position until all the trees and stumps were removed. We worked on improving the position and got it looking a little better. Then, we learned that prayers for CPT Hill health and welfare were answered ,

he was recovering quickly, and he did not have malaria. So after a few more days, he returned a few days later and once again to Bravo and became the battery commander. CPT Moen returned to battalion headquarters and again assumed the duties as battalion Fire Direction Officer. In May, CPT Moen replaced CPT Bob Maynard as the Alpha Battery commander at LZ JOYCE.

Author's Note: Although I served as the commander of the men of Bravo Battery for only a short period, I also spent a week with them when I filled in as Liaison Officer (LNO) for 1st Battalion 12th Infantry when CPT Truesdell (SP ?) went on R&R . As a result of these two short periods I gained respect for all the officers and men as they stood tall and performed their mission better than most under very adverse conditions. I will always have fond memories of my time in Bravo Battery.

Author: Frank Moen, LTC US Army (Ret)