

# 2/32 RESCUE MISSION

By BILL VAN ECK

Jan. 13, 1966

TRUNG LAP, South Vietnam -- It was after lunch. My daily routine was to pick up the section's mail in our C Battery's Command Post or CP. I usually ended up talking to C-Battery's clerk Spec.4 Stemper, a Pennsylvania native.

A few seconds after my arrival, SSG. J.D. Gosnell came in looking for 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. James H Chapman. Chapman was our Battery Commander, who with most of the Battery's officers, including First Sgt. Guildernick, were at the next camp site over in a battalion staff meeting.

SSG. Gosnell started to leave when a 1<sup>st</sup> Engineer, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, C Company XO named 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Fowler C. Humphrey came running in and almost ran Sgt. Gosnell over. Humphrey immediately began pleading for help. "HELP ME! HELP ME! My Company Commander along with 5 other Engineers have been wounded in an ambush down by the main road to TRUNG LAP."

What I didn't know about SSG. Gosnell, until speaking with him 3 years ago was that he had served with the Mike Company 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Combat Team, 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Division, in Korea. He is a survivor of Hill 633. Out of his 50 caliber machine gun squad only 3 out of 12 men survived. Mike Company went from 142 men to only 41. One hundred and one men were either killed or wounded

The cry for help from 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Fowler C. Humphrey was all the Korean War Veteran had to hear. For a moment SSG Gosnell could recall the ghosts of his men in Korea calling to him for help, before they were killed. I'll never forget the wild stare in Gosnell's eyes. He then looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Quacks, get some men!" I remember running out of the tent yelling to anyone that would listen that the engineers had been ambushed and were in need of our help.

There was no difficulty finding volunteers. C Battery's men were tired of being attacked almost daily by snipers, land mines and especially mortars. We had been fighting a ghost and it was time for us to stand up.

The first man to heed my call was PFC James E Davies Jr., a Colorado native, came with his 3<sup>rd</sup> gun sections APC. Together, PFC Davis, Engineer Lt. Humphrey, SSG. Gosnell, 2<sup>nd</sup> gun section, Gunner Sgt. Burlip T. Cooper, a native from Texas, 2<sup>nd</sup> sections Pfc. Guadalupe "LUPU" Perez, a native of California, and myself, Spec.4 William Van Eck, gun driver, native of New Jersey, went to rescue the ambushed men.

We were Lt. Chapman's Reaction Forces volunteers, we were trained to fight as a team in the states and had no problem doing the same on foreign land.

The rest of the men boarded the other 2 APCs. Approximately 15-20 men went to rescue the ambushed soldiers. We were ALL VOLUNTEERS. Men with last names like McCaffery, McGuire, Lynch WIA 1/14/66, Abruzese Killed August 24, 1966, Cpl. Williamson, Thomas, and Spec.4 Bogan and a few names that I can't remember, but all of us were PROUD AMERICANS.

As we passed the ARVN Ranger Camp, we noticed a ARVN Ranger armed with a carbine and shooting in our direction. To this day, SSG. Gosnell and I still cannot understand why. Our rescue convoy proceeded past the ARVN Ranger Compound, through the little village of TRUNG LAP and into a swampy area. We proceeded over a newly constructed concrete pipe bridge. At the edge of the swampy stream, the other APCs took up position at the edge of the stream. One was located on each side of the road at the bridge. Our APC continued down the road after crossing the bridge. (I talked to Cpl. Williamson at our reunion in May 2001, our backup men had a field day with lots of targets.)

We could see the convoy straight ahead along with the Company Commander's jeep in a booby trap hole. The other 5-ton trucks were all in a column and the Engineers could not disband the convoy due to the swampy conditions on both sides of the road. Although these conditions made our situation more difficult, they proved to be a perfect place for the enemy to plan an ambush.

SSG. JD Gosnell opened up with his 50 cal. machine gun and the rest of us fired our M-14's. Together, we began firing into the tall elephant grass on the other side of the stream. At this point we could see a few men laying in the road and one man on his back with a medic trying to help him. PFC Davies spun the APC around and dropped the rear door. Perez and I exited the vehicle. I reached the Commander first and observed that he was out cold.

PFC Perez and I took up our position a few feet away from the wounded Engineer and tried to shield the rescue operation. The firing was extremely heavy on both sides of the stream. I kept looking behind to see how the rescue was going. Apparently, SGT. Cooper and LT. Humphrey could not just drag the Commander into the APC. due to the type of injuries the Commander had sustained. Both men quickly ran back to the APC and started to tear out the seats for a lifter.

By this time, Perez and I noticed a group of Engineers about 10 feet to our front, strung out down along the edge of the stream. We decided to join the Engineers rather than remain shooting over their bodies. As we continued to fire, I was able to keep one eye on the rescue and the other on the Viet Cong to our front.

At this time, the wounded C- Company Commander Captain was carried into the APC. Perez and I continued to shoot, waiting for a signal. We watched six to eight men, some who were wounded and others who were helping the wounded, load into the APC. I called to Perez. "Let's go!"

We were just in time to see the APC moving forward and the door going up. Everything at this point got confusing due to all of the other GI's dressed in fatigue shirts. Davies, the driver of the APC, could not see the faces of the men who got into the APC, he could only count the shirts. With SSG. Gosnell manning a 50 Cal whose only protection was a few sand bags with no steel armor plating and SGT. Cooper trying to help the wounded Commander, Perez and I got left behind.

Time passed and the shooting began to slow down, 20-30 minutes passed. In the distance you could hear a helicopter, which turned out to be a HUEY gun ship from the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. The HUEY came in tree-top level and made one pass, shooting up the enemy position. By this time, the Viet Cong had gone into hiding. The one thing that remains in my mind is a misguided round from the HUEY that left an Engineer, no more than 15 ft from me, dead. The sight of the dead GI being carried off the field of battle still haunts me. Perez and I will take this memory to our graves.

I remember immediately yelling over to the Engineer's Sergeant, who was positioned by the first 5-ton truck, "Lets get out of here!" The Sergeant gave the command and everyone made a break for the trucks. PFC Perez and I headed for the Commander's lead jeep and pushed it out of a booby trap hole. Perez quickly jumped in the front driver's seat and I jumped in behind, to provide fire protection against the Viet Cong. By this time we were joined by two other Engineers. One sat next to Perez, the other next to me. Perez got the jeep started and within a few minutes we were safe behind friendly lines.

1<sup>st</sup> Engineer 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division C-Company's Daily Journal, DA 1594 reads, ( 13 January 1966 Info frm G-3, C-Co fire fight ended 1915 hrs, MP's reinf C Co.- Casualties, one KIA, 7 Wia all from C Co. Enemy est: company strength, Flare ship and chopper fire teams were involved.) Nothing is mentioned about the C-2/32 **PROUD AMERICANS**. The men mentioned in this story are my witnesses

Our Reaction Forces Volunteers did a magnificent job. Two Bronze Stars w/V for Valor were awarded. One went to SSG. Gosnell and the other to Spec.4 Bogan for his work with his M-79. Perez and I were just glad to be alive. This was the first rescue mission of its kind during U.S. participation in the war.

**PROUD AMERICAN**; Spec 4, William Van Eck – nickname (Quacks)C-  
Battery 2/32, 2<sup>nd</sup> section gun driver of M-110 8in “CANNONADE” the first 8in to fire  
West of Saigon, January 8.1966. “OPERATION CRIMP”

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