

Vietnam

3rd Security Police Squadron
Biên Hòa

Pathfinders 173rd Jungle Warfare School

by [Dave Ware](#),
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173rd Jungle Warfare School

I was one of the volunteers for "Eagle Flight" or "Eagle Platoon." Can't remember exactly what our official title was, although I have heard that Col Miller did not necessarily have the blessing of 7th Air Force for his excursion into the domain of the US Army. I suspect the Colonel was not unlike myself in a belief that it is easier to get forgiveness than it is to get permission. Especially if you feel it is something that must be done.

I do remember school and the instructors and some of the Sky Soldiers who were newly arrived in country. We all went through the same training and we were all basically there to learn and not get ourselves killed.

We were skilled in the art of proper patrol techniques and how to use good cover and concealment. We had weapons training including the weapons of the NVA including grenades, rifles and machine-guns and the crew-serviced weapons we might encounter including the RPGs. There was a tunnel complex which we all crawled through and we were taught the perils of each and what to look for or expect if we encountered such tunnels. We learned how to deploy claymores and set up daisy chains and how to set up weapons positions and points of fire positions and defensive perimeters. We reviewed the fine art of digging a fighting hole (foxhole) which was always inspiring, especially in the hardpacked, root encrusted clay soil. : >) We learned how to set up boobytraps and recognize booby traps. We threw grenades and learned how to breach an ambush and set up ambushes of our own. When attacked, react violently was the motto. We also learned how to disengage and use the cover and fire method. Much of what we were taught had been taught at AZR and Camp Bullis, but not near enough. If it did not fly, then the Air Force tended to give it only cursory attention. *I understand that things are now much more geared towards Advanced Infantry Training when it comes to Security Forces.*

There was one incident that caused us all to catch our breaths. The instructors were going over the nomenclature of the Claymore mine as we sat in the hot sun shortly after noon and watched the instructor on the podium. Instructors always have a podium, even in Vietnam. Well one of the paratroopers was allowing his head to nod and the instructor saw him and tore into him and called him all kinds of endearing names for sleeping during an important class that could very well mean the difference between life and death. You actually felt sorry for the poor kid, but was glad it was not you. During all the commotion the instructors got distracted and picked up a live Claymore versus the original marked "Dummy" Claymore He began to once again show us how the detonator was screwed in and how all you had to do was squeeze.... He stopped in mid sentence and another instructor quickly removed the detonator. We all got a 15 minute smoke break while the instructors regrouped. Had he squeezed, they would have had to count the boots and divide by two. And I was sitting in the front row. Thank God he caught his mistake. We later blew up a bunch of claymores and threw grenades and made a lot of noise and dust.

The school had a fuselage of a battle damaged UH1-B Huey that we trained getting in and out of on an air combat assault. I remember thinking how vulnerable you would be sitting there in an open cabin going into a hot LZ. If I could not fly the thing, I would just as soon be on the ground. I would later pilot airplanes and helicopters for thousands of hours and still don't like riding in the back.

We were trained on the proper way to carry our gear and how to lighten our load and make ourselves not rattle or jingle when we humped. All the little details were keys to survival and I and my fellow SP's absorbed all the info we could. As a matter of fact the instructors had nothing but praise for the personnel of the 3rd SPS. I remember crawling through the tunnel and having to maneuver across a pit that was difficult to traverse in the narrow and darkened tunnel. I made it across without falling or slipping in the darkness, but some of the troopers were having trouble and one of our guys, a big tall fellow with *Drew Carey* type glasses spread himself the length of the pit and braced himself with his legs and arms and allowed the others to crawl across his back. The instructors loved that he was innovative and willing to subject himself to the burden.

I recall walking point and brushing up on the use of hand signals to deploy or alert my squad and observing a cameraman filming. We learned how to walk "slack" and "trail" and how to move on a line or a diamond and set and execute an "L" shaped ambush. The cameraman followed us through much of the training, but I am not sure if he went on the air assault. I do not know if it was Air Force or Army, but it would be nice to get a copy of the film. Somewhere it is in an archive and I am guessing that it was an Air Force cameraman,

as to the uniqueness of the operation and training.

The SPs and the Paratroopers and other assorted grunts waited in the hot sun for the arriving chariots that would take us to our LZ. As is usual with the military, everything was behind schedule and we roasted in the sun and nearly drank all our water. Fortunately our superiors had enough foresight to allow us to replenish before we hit the bush. It must have been a 100 degrees on the PSP tarmac as we watched the horizon. Finally they came like a flock of Canadian Geese and blasted us with talcum dry dust that stuck to our sweaty fatigues. I had been fortunate to have flown the area before by both airplane and helicopter, so I recognized the AO in which we would be operating. We were not far from a Leper colony and several villages dispersed with jungle, shrub and rice paddies. Typical of most of the terrain in the Iron Triangle.

We boarded in a surprisingly orderly manner and we lifted off. We were riding in H model Hueys and I ended up in the hell hole, which is a great place to view the countryside, but leaves you exposed to ground fire. The ride was not that long and I felt the collective go down and we made a descent into the LZ which was a grassy meadow surrounded by small shrub trees which was surrounded by larger trees. Sitting in the hell hole I was free to deploy at anytime and as the chopper made contact I jumped and deployed to the left flank and moved out as the chopper became airborne. I mustered up with my squad and we moved out on a line and eventually formed into a long trail formation as we wound our way through the forest and abeam the rice fields. It was not much unlike the bayous of Louisiana. Certainly the bugs and mosquitoes were about the same.

We eventually stood-to and dug in and set up our firing positions. I got my butt chewed up by the 'dau' ants. They are sneaky little critters that hang on the bottom of leaves and wait for some dumb moron with a machete (me) who decides to cut down the shrub to make a better field of fire. They lit me up and I was not a happy camper. The instructor suggested I learn to look under the leaves before I started swinging the machete. They stung like southern fire ants and did nothing for my attitude. We finally got ourselves dug in and a decent defensive perimeter with our claymores strategically deployed along with our trip flares. Things went pretty well and we could have made a good accounting for ourselves if Mr. Charles felt like taking us on.

I do remember one incident that struck me as humorous, but necessary. We had several Officers (newbies) from different units who were going through the same training. One particular Officer from the 1st Inf was obviously disorientated and had us lost as we made our way through the jungle. Which was understandable, but he would not admit he was lost. One of the instructors by the name of Arceaneaux, a Louisiana Cajun, no less, came ripping past me in the vines and brush and swinging his M16 like a toothpick and cussing up a storm. I was within hearing distance and I could hear him reading this Captain the riot act. The jest of the conversation was that if you did not know where the hell you were at, then get some one to help you and do not be bullheaded. The instructor was quick to point out that we were on a training mission, but that the VC were watching us and if they saw an opportunity they would light us up with mortars or an ambush if we wandered around like a one-eyed goat. The instructor got us on the right azimuth and pointed toward Long Bien.

I remember one paratrooper who was pulling slack behind me that was having a hard time with the heat. He was a light skinned freckled guy and the heat was jumping all over him as he had just rotated from the states, probably the Midwest. He kept falling back and I had to help him and encourage him to keep his 10 meter interval and not get straggle. The instructor told me in no uncertain words that this man was my responsibility and I was to keep him "tight." He was really hurting and the last thousand meters or so I dragged him and cajoled him along. I was hurting bad myself and I was told that we humped about 14 miles as the Crow flies, so God only knows how many miles we covered. We flew out and walked back. We were all sucking canal water.

The "Doughnut Dollies" were awaiting our arrival. Their intentions were good, but no one was interested in drinking orange koolaid from some "waif" with a Snoopy T-shirt on. I am sure she had a home, but she just seemed out of place. We had visions of cold beer and a place to rest our weary bodies.

The whole experience was gratifying and opened our eyes to the lives of the "11Bravo Infantryman." We were all volunteers and many of us secretly wanted to exact some payback and this was a possible chance. The 'probably' smart ones didn't volunteer. The training would serve us well in the months to come and we made quite a few sweeps and patrols around the area and set up some ambush sites and generally did our best to make a show of force.

Thanks to Colonel Miller for having the foresight and fortitude to take that extra step. Believe me, we all appreciated it. It was an honor to have served under him and the other fine Officers and NCO's of the 3rd SPS. We were second to none. Colonel Miller and the 3rd SPs were the Pathfinders and at the forefront of future Security Forces in the USAF. Vietnam was a wakeup call and we are all stronger as a result of it.

Waredog

I currently live near Atlanta and fly EMS Medevac helicopters.

LTC Miller confirmed everything David spoke of above. He doesn't remember David but attributes that to old age. LTC Miller will be completing a photo journal by the end of the month and wants us to have a copy. He did mention that he would see me at the Reunion in October. I'll send a copy of his letter to you in case you want to use parts of it on the web site.

Don Graham, VSPA Historian

The "Battle for Saigon" book refers to the 3rd SPS attending the 173rd Jungle School and making a combat patrol as the final exam.
Steve Ray

We Take Care of Our Own

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