

Capt. Ernie “Outlaw” Carrier – Getting to 3/21



Grew up across the levy of Red River in Bossier City, La. so poor my mother made my shirts out of feed sacks. Big deal on Saturday was to go to feed store to see if we could match last week's sack color so I would have a new one. Older and larger I got, more sacks that were needed. Father was born 1901 and raised on hog farm in Kansas. His parents decided by the third grade that he could read and write, so pulled him out of school. Only trade he ever learned was butchering animals and though an alcoholic worked every day. Guarantee he didn't know playtime, he'd never had

any so I shouldn't either. Discipline

was strict and corporal till was about 18 and one day just told him that whippings were over and from now on we talk.

Going to college and playing too much since didn't get to when was younger and laid out spring and summer to work and make money to get back in school. 1965. Came home from work one day and my mother handed me my draft notice. Friends and neighbors had selected me for the armed forces. Knew where my neighbors were and took my aggression out on them first. Time was through with them no one would on up to being my friend. First time scheduled for induction was in jail, fighting, and didn't make it. Got me later though.

You're in the army now. Thought about enlisting in the Navy but decided to see where army took me. All of the tests given when you first enter is for them to know where you're best suited for them. Went through basic @ Ft.

Polk and AIT @ Ft. Ord. Where an officer came to me one day and said you're qualified for O.C.S. @ Ft. Benning do you want to give it a try?

Poor boy from the sticks with chance to be an officer? Hell yeah!

172 of us started my class and only 72 of them were commissioned. I made damn sure was one of them. Now here I am an officer and a gentleman 2d Lt. What do I do now? Tried to stay in schools as much as possible, safer than Nam. My first Captain told me something that stuck with me all of my career. "You are young shavetail 2 Lt. been in the Army only short time. Now" walking to the window of his office, "see that Field First E-7 standing out there? Go out to him and tell him you're a dumbass 2 Lt. and would he mind teaching you about the Army." Did as I was told.

SFC Willey E. Clark had one eye that was off kilter from knife fight he'd been, got through Ranger school but couldn't get into jump school because of his sight and he was mad about that. First thing I learned was that I might command things of NCO'S but they ran the Army. Of all the First Sgts. I had I always told them, "I command it but you run it." My times were sure easier when I did that. There were times when I insured that they knew what I meant but only for a short period. Remember this was poor boy who was now an officer in the army and proud of what I'd accomplished but I learned was going to mature and cut my leadership skills where everyone had guns and handgrenades. Learned that the greatest need of human beings is the need to be appreciated. A pat on the back, extra dollar in the paycheck, just so they know you appreciate what they do.

Down in Panama with 8th SF group when orders for my senior trip come in. Next year's across the pond for me and I'm going to a leg unit, all of those jumps and not going to draw pay for it. Damn! Assigned to Task Force Oregon when Americal formed. They needed 2Lts. Some more cannon fodder I was guessing. Assigned to Charlie, 1/6 198th out of ChuLai and for a time Baldy. My education was about to go into high gear and I set goals.

Wanted to take all of my platoon home was number one. Not very realistic but worth trying. We were fairly well in the thick of it for my 8 months as platoon leader but in that time I was the only one of my men who was even wounded. Hit a hospital complex and was trying to coax a dink out from a rock outcropping in the side of a steep hill. He had to scoot on his back from his position, the hill was hell of a slope and all I remember seeing was

the pin from an m-26 grenade flying into the air. To this day I don't remember lighting him up, but my mag was empty when it was over. He'd rolled on top of the grenade when it went off, saving my life but covering me from the top of my head to toes in blood and body parts. Like been soaked with waterhose. Caught some shrapnel in my hands but looked like I was dead. My medic thought I was severely wounded, asked me where I hurt and held out my pinky finger that hurt like hell from a piece of shrapnel. Thought he was going to beat me to death for that.

8 mos. of sleeping in a hole every night. Was in bush 106 days when we were selected as I Corps platoon of the month and got a week in Da Nang at III Marine Corps Hq. for reward. Marines were in charge of I Corps. Stood at the flush toilet at the Stone Elephant Officers club for an hour just marveling at a flush toilet.

Was really proud of myself with what had accomplished with my unit and knew tactics, how to fight Charlie and how to lead men. We lose our Captain to CONUS and get new West Pointer who's so full of himself, rank and all, been pushing pencils somewhere and had no command time or combat experience. Prior three nights I'd been pulling ambushes with my platoons' maneuver element. In other words, if you're going outside laager and belong to me, I'm going with you. Three nights with no sleep, hump all day, think I was tired?

New CO now and he wants to feed the troops hot meal in field to show what a good guy he is. Tell him, suggest, he land the chow bird on two adjacent hill tops and not at our location in triple canopy. Doing so will only provide Charlie with an aiming stake on our pos. Send squad to hump food and two for security and he won't know we're here. I'm just 2Lt. from O.C.S. what do I know. Idea nixed. Always trained my rto's what I knew. How to talk to helicopters, artillery, fac's, etc. so in case anything happened to me, they could carry on. Since I had to land the bird took my rto for lesson. Landing Huey in triple canopy is difficult enough and he'd never done that. Turning him on a specific azimuth to get in the only clearing we had. Straight down and up is the only way in and out. Got bird landed and safely out chow off and everyone fed, food canisters reloaded and aiming stake lifted out.

By now am dead on my feet and have found some three foot high rows of something planted, blew up my airmat and crashed. Mortar round will have

to land on top of me if I'm going to catch one and went to sleep. About 1:30 am or so can hear the thump,thump,thump of the incoming rounds. Got sprayed with dirt and rocks, cleaned my airmat and self off after making sure everyone of my platoon is safe, went back to sleep. Suddenly my rto's at my feet saying we've got a wounded. My question to him was,"What idiot was running around in a mortar attack?" The new CO called and wanted me to land the medevac, so, asked if he thought he could do it and excitedly he said yes. Told him to go ahead and try it but if you have any problems come get me.

Bird came and left without incident, back to deep sleep. RTO's back waking me up saying the new CO's mad at me since he gave a direct order for me to do the landing and since he came down with the wounded man knew I wasn't there. RTO explained to him how was in training to do this very thing and had been given opportunity to try one. Didn't matter, wanted me to report to him at 0530. I did and started getting butt chewing for really nothing. Finally got my say and told him the only reason we had a wounded was because some idiot exposed himself and you landed an aiming stake right on our pos. Now, after 8 months, platoon of the month in I corps, never lost one of my men, I'm insubordinate. He calls into bn,wants me relieved.

Later everyone leaves their rucks and me with two squads to guard them while this newbie takes the rest to look for the tubes. Hell,tubes had been gone 10 seconds after they fired. Told one of the guys he took from me to get on freq 7500 and keep me up to date on what this omnipotent feller's doing . Suddenly the radio is buzzing with"you won't believe what he's done now". He has found piece of commo wire buried in the face of a rice paddy berm and is pulling it out of the ground and walking towards one end of it. "has he cut the wire?" no sir! "get away from him before he kills someone. don't let him notice you doing it." About that time we heard aloud explosion off in the companys' direction. They found the soles of his boots was all and five others perished with him. Course if I'd have been there the wire would have been cut the second we found it.

Too late, one daY and my career is on the rocks. I am relieved and shipped off to a MAT team. The dead end for officers and NCOS that have bad mark against them. Did learn Vietnamese culture and some of th language. Got posted down in IV Corps out of Bac Lieu province, capital, Soc Trang.

On a compound of Nhungs, Cambodian mercenaries eating paddy rats, waiting on the tide so we could move, when a large manilla envelope arrives for me from Americal HQ. I open it up and out flops a citation and a Silver Star that had been awarded to me while platoon leader. The S.O.B'S had the nerve to mail it to me. Steam was coming out my ears by now. Knew had to get back to Chu Lai without these fools knowing why. Because they would have wanted to have a ceremony for the Vietnamese with my award.

Finally got a three day incountry leave and caught a flight to Americal. Division HQ building is big, imposing, white elephant in the middle of a bare area that looks like a parade ground. Still got all of my warshit with, no rank, no insignia, m-26 grenades, magazine vest holding 36 loaded, when stepped through that white door and stared at two spec 6s'. never seen one before and stared for a minute. They were asking if they could when noticed a sign on a door jamb to my right. Sec'y General Staff, Maj. somebody. Did right face and walked into this office with the spec.6s' screaming I couldn't go in there.

Snapped to attention in front of the Majors' desk, saluted, said Lt. Carrier reporting. Then threw that manilla envelope on his desk and said in a stern voice; "The motherfucker that signed that can pin it on me." Slowly the Maj., without saying a word, opened my envelope and read the citation. When finished he told me "I'll see that the motherfucker that signed it gets your message. Would you mind having a seat out front while I do so?" I had earned this one and no one was going to denigrate it like they had and got away with it. So far.

Left me sitting on that bench for 45 minutes. The thoughts that go through your mind while sitting there are scary. Bravado starts wearing thin and you know that any minute armed MPs' are coming to shoot you. When this spit shined Captain comes from the back and says the General will see you now. Would you mind leaving all of your war gear with the clerks? They'll take good care of it. Down the hall we go to the Captains' desk. He shakes my hand like I'm being executed, tells me he's the General's Aide, just walk up to those two large doors in front of you and knock wait till told to enter. Sounded like a foghorn telling me to enter and suddenly, there he is Maj. General Charles M. Gettys. When I reported he told me to stand at ease

and how he hated to do all this paperwork that was flying from one box, his signature, in the next box.

When he started to get up and round the desk, was reminded of a battleship leaving harbor at Pearl one time. Huge, 6'6", about 260. One of George Patton's tank commanders in WWII. Stuck his hand out, said "I'm the motherfucker that signed it and I'm the motherfucker that's going to pin it on you! I've got a briefing in about 5 minutes and I'd be honored to have you as my guest. My aide will give you his seat and if you'll wait outside with him I'll be with you in a little while." My nerves had started settling down by now. My knees were like jelly for a little while.

At the briefing I was definitely count. When over the General stood, had me stand and told everyone he would be holding an awards ceremony in his office for this brave man and all that could attend he would appreciate it. Near tears when the citation was read and medal was pinned on. First time I'd ever heard of the 3/21 and never forgot it.

Went to the Generals' mess for supper and was asked where was I now and why. Time I had finished running it by Getty and his staff, he told his G-1 that he wanted me on his staff, find a position and get me transferred back. Next morning was in Colonel's office seeing what was going on and was told "We just got rid of you." Told him if he had problem getting me back there and on staff I'd just go tell Getty that he had a problem. Things got to rolling then.

Went back to outpost and got my belongings, had a ceremony for the Vietnamese and flew back to America. Was assigned job of Asst Psychological Operations Officer G-5. Meant that I was now one of the briefers everyday and the last in the rotation. Sat through G-3s briefing everyday and paid attention to 3/21, their KIA count and the number of weapons captured. These gentlemen were not shooting farmers, 3/21 was fighting Mr. Charles and I was hooked.

Ended the briefing one night and Getty stood and told the assembly that the ones going with him already knew but the rest did not. He was getting his third star and becoming what amounted to the entire Army's personnel chief J-1 at the Pentagon, that if anybody wanted to change jobs to let him know while he was still in charge and the new commander might leave them there when he arrived but they needed to decide now while he could make it happen. Turned then, looked me in the eye and said Carrier you're

the lowest ranking one here where do you want to go. Without skipping a beat told him wanted to be a company commander in the 3/21. He then began to question my sanity because 3/21 was in so much. Told him was tired of starched fatigues, three hots a day, officers club, nurses, donut dollies, etc. and really belonged in the field where I was happy and most fulfilled. Told me I'd always been a little crazy but that he understood and would see I got my wish.

Wasn't long and I was on my way to Baldy and 196 hq. Stayed there about three days and saw some real remf sights. Finally caught a command and control bird coming to Center. I'd extended my tour by now for six months but when Brandenburg sent me to B co and Ballinger told me he was going to make me his xo blew my top again. Got on the scrambler and told Brandenburg that there was a two star general in Chu Lai that said I could have a company in this battalion but that if he didn't have one let me go somewhere that needs me. He sent his c&c bird out early next morning, flew me back into Center and told me he did not appreciate the way I had talked to him. Told him again about Getty's promise and that I would go back and tell him you have no company available.

That's when he told me about Charlie and bucky beaver leaving, but that he'd been saving it for his E co. commander that had been wounded. No problem. I'll go back and tell Gettys that you didn't have one for me. Think he saw the light about that time and reluctantly gave me to you guys. Took me sometime but got there. Hope you all had a pleasure serving with me I certainly did with you.