

Reflections of My Tour of Duty With C 3/21



After 40 years, it is still difficult to assess all of the feelings that are related to the events experienced by C 3/21 196th LIB during our tour of duty. There are a few recurrent thoughts that I would like to capture.

As is true of many of the major battles that we encountered. The human statistics of the Battles of Tien Phuoc, Tam Ky, LZ East, Hill 102 as well as many other incidents are terrible but they do not convey the feelings and emotions wrapped up in the numbers. These are not just statistics these were the people that we ate with, slept with, talked with and spent 24 hours a day with. We shared our food, our hopes, our dreams and our lives with these guys. These were our friends and our constant companions that we trusted and depended upon.

The other thought is, "Why am I alive?" Why was I spared when so many others were not? Many times we were placed in the same situation as those that we lost. So why did we survive? Was it just luck? Was it the hand of God?

One of the most troubling circumstances of the situation we were in was the fact that we never grieved for the ones we lost. We did not have time. We felt very bad about the fact that one of our friends lost their life or limb but we had to move on and prepare for the next battle. We had to protect ourselves, and those we depended upon and in turn, depended upon us, as best we could from a similar fate even though that was not entirely possible. There is also the possibility that it was just a personal defense mechanism that caused us not to dwell on the casualties.

There is one last point that is difficult to put into words. There are two questions. Why did it take me 40 years to reach out to any of those that I served with? Why was I closer to those that I knew earlier in my tour than those that joined our company later?

I have finally concluded that the answers lie in the fact that a human being is programmed to avoid pain. Losing a friend was very painful, so one of the ways that I avoided this pain was to remain aloof and not form hard friendships for fear of losing them. I don't think I am unique in this regard. I remember the "aloofness" that I sensed in the more seasoned troops when I joined the Company. It has taken me a long time to begin to understand it.

I really do regret my aloofness and now I am trying to put together some of the friendships that should have stayed cemented some 40+ years ago.

Ron Kociba
08/18/2009