

FRIENDLY FIRE INCIDENT
TUY HOA V.N.
MARCH 26, 1966

Preface: My name is George R. Bassett (E-4), Fire Team Leader & Point Man-2nd Squad, 1st Platoon, Co B, 2/502 Abn. Inf., 101st Airborne Division. I will relate my participation in an event that took Place at Tuy Hoa, Viet Nam on March 26, 1966.

We were operating as a company sized unit high in the mountains of Tuy Hoa, Phu Yen Province, in search of the 95th NVA Regiment with orders to engage and destroy them. On March 24, one of the men in my fire team, PFC James Campbell, slipped and sustained injuries to his back and claimed that he could not walk. He was unable to urinate, and the medic suspected a ruptured bladder. Due to the terrain and the proximity to the enemy there was no way to get a helicopter in to extract him. We were instructed to construct a litter and carry him, which we did. Our goal was to gain the rice paddies that were 5000-6000 meters away, where our company would be extracted by helicopter. We were traveling in a company sized unit, with a recon squad on point, followed by 2nd platoon, then us, 1st platoon, with 3rd platoon bringing up the rear. Campbell was a member of our squad and it became our responsibility to carry him. We were short of men, having lost several not long before, including our Sqd Leader, Estevan "Chico" Alvarado, who had been shot 4 times on 6 Feb. and evacuated to the U.S. We had 4 men on the litter, myself and Pfc James Hudspeth on the front with Pfc Ben Chavez and another trooper on the other end. We were high in the mountains and descending down a saddle, following a small game trail with a steep rocky mountain face to our immediate left. We had been carrying Campbell for 1 1/2 days at that point and could see our goal, the paddies, from our high vantage point about a mile to our front. Gunfire to our front suddenly erupted to be shortly followed by more gunfire from about 100 meters above us from the side of a rock-strewn mountain to our left. We all went to the ground in place and returned fire despite not knowing from exactly where we were being shot at from among the rocks. We had an artillery Forward Observer traveling with us (I shall not name him) and he immediately called for the artillery to fire a white phosphorus air burst to adjust their fire from. After the air burst, he made his calculations and told them to fire for effect. The artillery battery, consisting of 5-- 105-millimeter artillery pieces then fired for effect. The FO shouted, "shot out" and we all hugged the ground as closely as we could. Very shortly thereafter, I heard an indescribably sound that I had never heard before or since in my life. The closest way that I can describe it would be like laying between a set of railroad tracks and have a high-speed locomotive pass over you. Suddenly there was a tremendous explosion, branches, debris, dust, smoke and shrapnel were flying among us and newly wounded men were screaming. My ears were ringing, and I sat up immediately and the first thing that I noted was that one of the nearby troopers was examining his rifle as it had a piece of smoking shrapnel the size of the palm of your hand wedged in the flash suppressor. Troopers were hollering but I couldn't hear them clearly. Lt. Cousins RTO was on the radio trying to get the CP to tell the FO to "Check fire". He could not transmit as the speaker cord has been severed by the shrapnel. The RTO had been wounded and gave up trying to use the radio. I saw Pvt Campbell get up off the stretcher and run like hell??? My hearing started to improve, and Lt Cousins ran by me and told me to "Help that Man". I looked for Hudspeth that had been lying next to me and couldn't find him. I heard a voice screaming from a nearby ravine "Get it off me, get it off me" I descended into the ravine and could hear where the screaming was coming from but could not see the person as the ravine where the screaming was coming from was filled with purple smoke. PFC Wayne Linville accompanied me into the ravine despite having a shrapnel wound to the leg. I went into the smoke and saw a trooper, PFC Hudspeth, and grabbed him by his LBE and pulled him from the smoke and noted that his face and head were severely burned. Most of the damage coming from a purple smoke grenade that he wore on his LBE right suspender. The smoke grenade had burned the side of his face to the bone. The device was still burning when I ripped it off. It was with great difficulty that I dragged him up onto the trail, Linville was not able to assist due to his wounds. After gaining the trail with Hudspeth, I noted that his leg had been cutoff between the ankle and the knee but was not bleeding, just a white bone stub sticking out of

the amputated limb. I rolled him over to check for other wounds and found that one of his buttocks had been blown off. Linville made a spontaneous cry of surprise that Hudspeth's leg had been cut off and it was at this point that Hudspeth knew that he was in bad shape. I stayed with him while a medic worked over him, but I believe that he knew that he was dying, and he asked me to make sure that his mother got his camera. (not long before, he had received a letter from his wife letting him know that she had filed for divorce and it really galled us to know that she would be getting his military insurance) A1E Sky raiders showed up on the scene and silenced any further fire from the mountain side with napalm. I believe that 11 men were wounded, and several killed as a result of one arty round hitting a tree directly above us. It took several hours to patch up the wounded, make stretchers and collect all the gear. The decent was now even slower than it had been before, and it took quite a while to reach the paddies. I was amazed to see one of the seriously wounded NCOs (Archuletta) helping to carry one of the stretchers. He had a severe gunshot wound to the jaw and his head had been wrapped with so many bandages that the only visible part of his face that you could see was his eyes. I can't remember what became of Campbell after he bolted off the stretcher and ran. Medivac choppers were circling the paddies below waiting for our arrival. Due to the number of casualties and the seriousness of their wounds they had several surgeons on board. Hudspeth died from loss of blood on the chopper en route to the medical facility. From that day on whenever an artillery fire mission was called in and word was shouted "Shot out" I trembled as did others that were that day. From this time forward, I recall very little. My tour was up in early June 1966, and I returned to Ft. Campbell and shortly after my arrival, I was assigned as an enlisted orderly to Maj General Ben Sternberg, Commanding General, 101st Airborne Division. The duty was "plush" with many perks that came with the assignment. Within two months I became bored and applied to return to Viet Nam as a door gunner on a huey chopper. The paperwork took months and by the time it was approved, I had only two months remaining on my enlistment in the army. I extended my enlistments for another 10 months in order to be able to complete a full year tour as a door gunner. Upon arriving in Viet Nam for my second tour, I was assigned to the 170th Assault helicopter Co. in Pleiku, 26 miles from the Cambodian. Part of our duties was to clandestinely insert and extract SOG recon teams into and out of Cambodia. When I was discharged, I returned to Maine and worked for the U.S. Border Patrol for the next 16 years.

George R. Bassett