**Blackhorse Hoofbeats**

***Echoes from the Regiment’s Service in Vietnam 1966 – 1972***

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**Doc**

**20 May 1967**. Operating with the 2nd(Republic of Korea) Marine Brigade in May, Echo Troop ran into a well-entrenched enemy in a hamlet north of Chu Lai.  The 2nd Squadron annual historical summary for 1967 tells that story.  “About midday on 20 May, E Troop was approaching a small village when it began receiving heavy automatic weapons fire and rifle grenades.  It was during this action that Private First Class Joseph P. Tamboia first experienced the taste of combat.  Private First Class Tamboia was a medic assigned to E Troop when the initial burst of enemy fire wounded several men in his platoon.  With complete disregard for his own safety Private Tamboia left the safety of his armored vehicle and ran to the aid of his stricken comrades.  He repeatedly exposed himself to intense enemy fire as he moved to treat the wounded.  As the enemy fire increased in volume, Private Tamboia noticed that the machine gunner, who had been providing suppressive fire for the friendly forces, was wounded.  Without hesitation, Private First Class Tamboia grabbed the machine gun and fired at the insurgent position from which the accurate enemy fire came until it was silenced.  Troop E, crushing the enemy resistance, continued on its mission and later in the day it again received heavy fire from another enemy emplacement.  Another cavalryman was wounded and Private First Class Tamboia again moved unfalteringly through the hail of bullets to render aid.  Private First Class Tamboia was awarded the Silver Star for his gallant actions.”

**28 June 1968**. Awards for bravery were presented to a large number of Blackhorse medics between September 1966 and April 1971, but relatively few were awarded to squadron and regimental surgeons.  It wasn’t for a lack of bravery, but a lack of opportunity that led to this situation.  For the most part, these cavalry doctors were located in relatively secure base camps and fire support bases, where their surgical skills were needed the most.  But 1st Squadron’s Captain (Dr.) Paul Gold was an exception.  He joined the Blackhorse just one year out of medical school in September 1967.  By mid-1968, he was nearing the end of his tour and was beginning to think about going into family practice back in Michigan.  On 28 June 1968, 1st Squadron was under the operational control of the 3rd Brigade, 1st (US) Infantry Division.  Alpha Troop was conducting reconnaissance-in-force operations between Phu Loi and Lai Khe.  This was relatively open territory, known to be frequented by the 88th and 101st (NVA) Regiments.  Without warning, two of the sweeping ACAVs detonated anti-tank mines.  Almost immediately, a firestorm of rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and automatic weapons fire broke out, coincidentally wounding every medic in the troop.  The call went out to the 1/11 command post for a medevac, as well as additional medics.  CPT Gold heard the call and boarded the first helicopter.  Briefed on the situation while en route, the squadron surgeon knew that Alpha Troop was in the middle of a mine field, fighting for its life.  Knowing that other mines might be in the area, but realizing that Troopers’ lives depended on him, he didn’t hesitate.  When the Huey landed, he leapt to the ground, charged across the minefield, and began to treat the most seriously wounded.  As his Silver Star citation reads: “Completely ignoring shouted warnings concerning the presence of mines, he administered first aid to the wounded crewmen and then fearlessly went from one injured soldier to the next, rendering emergency medical treatment.”

**31 July 1968**. Arthur Dowding was awarded a Bronze Star for valor for his action on 31 July 1968.  On that day, the 2nd Platoon of Golf Troop – to which “Doc” Dowding was attached – was working with the tanks of Hotel Company south of Phuoc Vinh in the area called the Catcher’s Mitt.  This was an area known to be home of the Dong Nai Regiment, as well as a number of very active local Viet Cong cells.  Many of the villages were known to be pro-VC, so it was not very surprising that when the tanks and ACAVs went to recover an Armored Vehicle Launched Bridge (AVLB), the dismounted Golf Troop scouts found the ground at the temporary bridge site to be strewn with anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, as well as booby traps.  Arthur Dowding’s Bronze Star citation tells the rest of the story: “Extreme caution was being exercised by the recovery team as the entire area around the bridge was heavily mined.  Suddenly one of the flank security men [SP4 Charles Hamner] detonated an antitank mine which blew him 25 to 30 feet from the point of contact.  Specialist Dowding, hearing the explosion, reacted instantly and with a total disregard for his personal safety, dashed through the heavily-mined area to administer first aid to and prepare the seriously wounded soldier for evacuation.”

**1969**. In December 1969, the 37th Medical Company made the move with the rest of the Regiment, consolidating its operations from Blackhorse Base Camp to Quan Loi.  Moving into its new facilities – a dispensary, two permanent hospital wards, x-ray and laboratory facilities, and a dental van – the company’s 125 assigned personnel could look back at three years and three months of providing medical support to the Regiment.  Working with the 7th Surgical Hospital until its deactivation in June 1969, the 37th Med cared for casualties brought in by dust off from the Regiment, from the 1st Cav Division’s 3rd Brigade, the 199th Light Infantry Brigade, the 18th ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] Division, the 1st Australian Task Force, and various infantry, armor, and artillery units under the Regiment’s operational control.  The daily routine of sick call, mess hall sanitation inspections, rabies control, personal hygiene instruction, training new medics, and medical resupply was routinely supplemented by MEDCAPs (Medical Civic Action Program) and DENTCAPs to Xuan Loc, Bien Hoa, Gia Ray, Ong Que, and Lai Khe.  By the time it moved to Quan Loi, the 37th Med was the largest separately operating medical company in Vietnam – providing division-level medical support to the Blackhorse family.

**26 December 1969**. In a letter to his parents on 26 December 1969, Mike ‘Doc’ Rafferty summed up what it was like to be a Blackhorse medic in combat.  He had come under enemy fire for the first time earlier that day while working with Golf Troop.  One Trooper was wounded, so Doc had the opportunity to employ all of the skills he had learned at Ft. Sam Houston during Advanced Individual Training.  He treated the wound, he reassured the man he would be alright, he looked for signs of shock, he filled in the medical casualty tag, he stayed with the wounded warrior until the medevac arrived.  He even helped him to the helicopter.  Later, after he had a chance to take stock of what had happened, he wrote: “Over here, I have the terrible responsibility of human life on my hands.  It will take all of the love, understanding, and courage I possess to meet that responsibility successfully.  Today, I had more responsibility for two hours then I ever had in my life.”

**21 January 1970**. Blackhorse medics were a breed apart from their counterparts in infantry units.  The 7.62mm slug from an AK47 rifle caused some pretty horrific wounds – but nothing compared to the wounds made by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG).  Bravo Troop’s Kip Hammond recalls treating his first casualty in country.  “A tank commander had been hit in the head and half of his head was gone, but he was still alive, and he was conscious.  He asked me for a cigarette, and the whole time I was working on him, he was talking to me, and I just didn't understand how somebody with this bad of an injury could be doing this.  I mean, I could actually see his brain …” (The wounded Trooper survived.  He and Kip met at the 2013 reunion in Indianapolis.)  Less than two months later, Kip was himself wounded (his first of three) in the chest and leg by shrapnel from an RPG; despite his wounds, he continued to care for his fellow Troopers, earning him a Silver Star.  He believes that as a 20-year old, he and his fellow medics experienced things that “a lot of doctors in the Chicago emergency room will never see in a lifetime … The destruction to the human body is unbelievable.”

**1970**. In mid-1970, Sergeant First Class (SFC) Bill Rehm was the 1st Squadron medical platoon sergeant.  A number of fire support bases (FSBs) were being attacked in War Zone C at the time, and he thought about how he could best prepare his medics for the inevitable attack on the command post itself.  When the squadron occupied FSB Kramer on 12 April, he designated four collection points for the wounded – one next to the Howitzer Battery tent, one each on the north and south sides of the perimeter, near the AVLB, and the final one on the west side.  He briefed the leadership on where the collection points were located, then walked his medics and the cooks (who served as litter bearers during a fight) through the procedures to be followed once the wounded arrived.  SFC Rehm remembers: “‘This was the first time we put it into effect… because other fire support bases were getting hit.’”  Three days after occupying Kramer, the 95C (NVA) Regiment attacked.  The new procedure worked just as planned.  The wounded were brought to one of the collection points, where a medic provided immediate first aid.  From there, the wounded Troopers walked or were carried by the cooks on a litter to the squadron aid station located near the center of the fire base.  Each collection point had a portable radio, and the medics periodically reported their status to SFC Rehm.  This procedure soon became the standard operating procedure at every new FSB.