

Excerpt from my Vietnam memoir "REMF: Life Inside The Wire" (Amazon Kindle)

On May 1, 1970, I was stationed in Cu Chi, Vietnam, right beside the Cambodian border. Below is a general description of how the events of May 4 at Kent State University played out for me:

Prior to Long Thành North, the only previous time I had to don battle dress ...no war paint required ... was on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1970. Even though it will require another digression away from the 39<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion Supply Room, to the recent past, I want to squeeze in this somewhat relative experience here!

I was still in CủChi and the Cambodian invasion had jumped off into the Parrot's Beak on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1970. Known variously as the "Cambodian Invasion" or "Cambodian Incursion", the U.S. military liked to refer to their part of it as "Operation Rock Crusher".

Whatever, about three o'clock in the morning my III Corp CủChi world resembled something akin to D-Day at Normandy. On some unheard signal, thousands of troops from the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and First Air Cavalry went airborne, west across the Cambodian border. The chopper assault filled the horizon, from north to south, east to west, and coordinated with B52 "Arc Light" carpet bombing just across the border. The locus of the immediate action was about twelve or thirteen kilometers, eight miles or so away, on the far west side of the Boiloi Woods, adjacent to the CủChi perimeter.

This commotion in the middle of the night roused us all from our sleep, whereupon we ran outside without the slightest inkling of what was going on. Upon looking up at the sky, what to our wondering eyes did appear was not Santa Claus and his eight reindeer, but the largest airborne operation one could imagine. And there was more clatter than a whole herd of running, flying reindeer and all the drunken department store Santas combined.

Actually, I found it most impressive and amazing that message discipline within the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had been so airtight that an operation of this scale could jump off without the slightest of hints from anywhere before it started. And I was continuously surrounded by grunts from that outfit. Someone feel free to correct me, but I believe it was the largest such operation of its kind during the Vietnam War.

Concurrently, all the "incoming" sirens suddenly began to wail, and Top, along with the other bosses, were running all over the place yelling. All of us not immediately involved with the airborne assault were ordered to the perimeter to defend against any possibly ensuing counterattack. They ordered us to get armed and into full battle dress ...the point of my diversion to this story. It was the first time I had to wear my Rambo getup for real.

The unit armorers were practically throwing weapons and ammo at us as we ran by the small arms hootch. Of course, we weren't carrying field rucksacks, a few were missing their blouses, but for the most part we still looked rather soldier-like in our helmets, flak jackets, ammo slings, and grenades. As always, I had my M7 bayonet hanging from my belt at my right hip, and now an M16 rifle slung across my back. Sorta reminded me of my internal sensation when first looking at "real" soldiers on the tarmac when we landed at Tân Sơn Nhứt back in February.

It was during this event where on that perimeter I witnessed, relatively close up for the first time, what was known as "Arc Light" bombing. Even though we were about seven or eight miles away, believe you me that's about as close as you ever want to be when B52 bombers regurgitate their multiple sticks of five hundred pound bombs from an altitude of around thirty thousand feet.

I don't know how many bombers were in that sortie. Flown in support of the troops even then assaulting into Cambodia, it made the ground shake until your knees felt wobbly even at that distance. You could actually feel and see the distortion of the atmosphere on the early morning horizon. The effect was eerie, somewhat similar to the Northern Lights but to the west ...and without the colors. You could immediately understand why they called these bombings "Arc Lights".

I suggested to a nearby grunt that it was impossible to see how anyone in the vicinity of that strike could survive. "Oh" he drawled, "a few of them survive ...you can find dinks bouncing around off the trees for days after one of those". We stayed on the perimeter until shortly after daylight and were then

replaced by the regular contingent of day guards. There were still a few grunts around who weren't in Cambodia but not many.

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Twenty-four American servicemen lost their lives in the Vietnam War on May 4, 1970, a day back home in the World which erupted in so much protest against what I was looking at right before my eyes. And, perhaps most poignantly, at Kent State University from which I had recently graduated.

It was that night in the service canteen where I had a near run-in with a grunt, a 5<sup>th</sup> Mech "Bobcat" from the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. I believe I referenced this incident earlier when describing a flame-out by some filthy FNG, stinking, "Ted Nugent" wanna-bee who inhaled a fifth of vodka and flipped out. He was dragged away by the MPs.

A short time later, that same evening, some other guy who I didn't know from Adam, was drinking at a table with three other guys ... 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from right next door to us in the CủChi Base Camp. Without warning he got up and in tears demanded to know why I didn't get killed in Cambodia. Through his stupor, he directed his question straight at me.

"My M60 gunner was killed and what gives you the right to be alive?" he drunkenly demanded to know. He wasn't really aggressive, but he was drunk out of his gourd. Outside of the obvious pain this individual was suffering, the experience left me trying to answer his question for the rest of my life too. "Why had I not died in Cambodia?" Such a haunting, existential mantra never really goes away ...never. I couldn't help but think again about that G&R warehouse.

A week or so later I received a letter from my Mother detailing the events of May 4<sup>th</sup> that had transpired at my alma mater, Kent State University, the riots and deaths that were inspired by the invasion. [i][ii] William Schraeder, Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller and Sandra Lee Scheuer were the four students who were killed during the Kent State protests on May 4, 1970.

How utterly ironic that less than one year after my graduation from Kent State University, here I was, standing guard on the Cambodian border in fear of a counterattack, while students from my alma mater ... "my generous mother" ...were rioting and even dying because I had the temerity to be there. And perhaps even more biting, I was there most strenuously against my will.

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[i] AV\KentStateReport1.mp3 (May not be available on Kindle)



KentStateReport1.mp3

[ii] AV\KentStateReport2.mp3 (May not be available on Kindle)



KentStateReport2.mp3