

Armed Taxi

by John McCluskey

We were covering a combined 199th Light Infantry Brigade / ARVN operation in the Duc Hua area not far from Saigon. We had a standard, 2-ship, light fire team of C-Model Huey gunships. My bird was armed with a 40mm grenade launcher mounted in the nose, 18 2.75" FFA rockets, and two door gunners with M-60s. My wingman had the same rocket and door gunner configuration and 4, pylon mounted M-60s. This was in 1967 before the introduction of 7.62 mm miniguns.

Nothing happened until the grunts reached a small stream they had to cross. It wasn't very wide, 4-5 meters, but it was chest high for the US US troopers and probably over the heads of the ARVN.

The lead elements started across the stream and the VC opened up from a tree line parallel to the stream. We did what we were supposed to do and suppressed the fire with several runs along the axis of the tree line but as soon as we broke to return to the target, the fire continued. We made two or three runs and I noted that only about five of the troopers had made it across the stream and they looked to be exhausted. This was clearly not going to work. We would be out of ammo before two squads were across and they had already taken a casualty.

Time for a field expedient: the armed taxi.

I directed my wingman to keep up the cover and I dropped down to the near-side of the stream bank. I off-loaded my door gunners, picked up a load of grunts and hovered across the stream. As I popped up, I lobbed 40mm into the tree line before dropping the troopers on the far side, then hovered *backwards* across the stream, keeping the 40mm chunking away while we were exposed, then repeated the process. Without a single radio command, my wingman saw what I was doing and timed his runs to cover us when my 40mm wasn't firing.

We got the entire unit - a reinforced company I believe - across in about 15 minutes (and 100 rounds of 40mm).

My resourceful door gunners had organized the loads so as soon as I touched down, they had another stick ready to go. I don't think another round came in from the tree line during the whole shuttle. We then loaded up the WIA, handed the target off to our replacement team and headed back to the pig-pen (our gun platoon was called the Razorbacks and our revetment area at Tan Son Nhut was the Pig Pen).

I'm not sure what happened after we left. Our replacement team finished the mission and didn't know either but every grunt we loaded on the helicopter shuttle was grinning ear-to-ear and gave us numerous thumbs-up.

It was cool to see everyone immediately assume the roles necessary to get the mission done without any planning or briefing. Just a nod, a point and a few words was enough.

It wasn't always that easy.