

A Good Day  
by then Captain William P. Dillon  
The 4<sup>th</sup> ID D troop 1/10 Cav

Inwardly groaning as I listened to the Squadron Commander (LTC Ashworth) tell me how to deploy the infantry platoon (Blues) of a Divisional Cav Squadron Air Cav Troop, I feigned interest. As the Aero Weapons Platoon Leader (equipped with Cobra gunships), I had the additional duty this day as the Air Mission Commander (AMC) for the troop.

By way of background, the time frame is during the Cambodian incursion, and I am being briefed at the squadron headquarters base camp. The NVA have been conducting road ambushes in the vicinity of Dead Man's Curve on Route 19 between Pleiku and Cambodia. LTC. Ashworth told me to insert the Blues about a mile down a blue line (stream) that runs perpendicular into Route 19 and parallels a hill to the west.

LTC Ashworth excitedly continues, "In the event of an ambush, insert the Blues and have them sweep north toward the road. The Air Cav's scouts will conduct visual recon from the ambush site south down the blue line catching the NVA ambush party between them and the Blues."

Sure enough the squadron commander calls later in the morning while the troop was conducting a visual reconnaissance mission and tells me an ambush has occurred in the vicinity of Dead Man's Curve. So, as planned, I insert the Blues down the blue line noticing several vehicles stopped and smoking at the ambush site on Route 19.

We felt our Air Cav Blues platoon was the best in the division, all having been handpicked after 6 months in country. The platoon was usually worked as two squads, one led by the platoon leader and one lead by the platoon Sgt. SFC VanHorn. In addition, we always had an alerting dog and handler from the division canine unit and two Kit Carson scouts (former NVA). Each squad was equipped with its own M-60 machine gun. We even had a draftee 11 Bravo, who I believed was a professional football player with the Detroit Lions. He carried one of the M-60 machine guns and some of the ammo wrapped around his body. He was that big.

After approximately 30 minutes, the Blues contacted the NVA withdrawing south from the ambush site at the road. This turned the NVA back up the blue line toward the ambush site. The Blues killed several NVA at this point.

Then I received a radio call from a surprising source, the squadron sniper who was on the hilltop east and adjacent to the blue line. He told me he dropped 3 NVA troops trying to escape around the front of the hill between the road and part of a ground Cav troop that had moved into a blocking position on the North side of the road at the ambush site.

Suddenly there was an explosion and cloud of debris around one of the LOACH Scouts doing a VR to the east of the blue line over tall elephant grass. Thinking a Scout was

blown away by an RPG, we grimaced as the dust cleared and the Scout, still hovering in the general area of the explosion, relayed they had shot at several low crawling NVA and must have set off a secondary explosion striking an NVA's RPG rounds in his rucksack.

By this time the Blues had pushed the NVA up to the vicinity of the ambush site and the sniper, the Armored Cav ground troop, and the LOACH Scouts had cut off most of the NVA escape exits. We had killed about 6 more NVA by this time.

(Writing this I noticed the need to list body count, remembering that was the one item higher HQs used to measure our success or failure in a firefight.)

As the battle progressed, looking out of my LOACH (as the AMC, a LOACH was more convenient to use), I spotted SFC Van Horn, with no helmet on, moving about and positioning his squad. I yelled at his RTO to get his 6S## helmet on! Later a call came for a medivac and one of the scout LOACHs volunteered, swooped down and picked up one of the Blues hit in his foot. As ammo and water were needed, we resupplied them by the LOACHs.

The Blues used a fire and maneuver method of advancing on the NVA, behind machine gun fires catching most of the NVA in spider holes. They must have previously dug these for their ambush fighting positions.

By this time squadron and division became very interested in our firefight, so the stack of helicopters over our firefight began to grow. Several times the squadron commander called and told me division wanted prisoners to interrogate.

In turn, I called down to the Blues platoon leader and platoon sgt. and asked if they had any prisoners yet. Later recounted to me was a tale of Sgt. VanHorn grabbing a Kit Carson Scout by his legs and dangling him upside down from the top of a cave entrance being used by several NVA.

Apparently tired of my calls and the timidness of the Kit Carson scout (who was too far away from the cave entrance to be heard by the NVA), Van Horn resorted to grabbing the Kit Carson scout.

We never did get an NVA to surrender.

Later the Squadron Commander called and told me he wanted to land while the fight was still in progress. I told his pilot to switch off the colonel's UHF receiver and threatened the pilot's safety if he landed the colonel. Calmly, I called the colonel back on FM and told him not to land now as the ground situation was still hot and we would have to pull Blues away from the firefight to secure the LZ for his Loch. The colonel relented for a while.

Eventually the Blues platoon leader called saying the firefight was over and more than 20 NVA had been killed. Then the squadron commander in his Loch and division G2 types

landed in their Huey as the Blues gathered up all the weapons and rucks of the NVA and brought the NVA gear to the LZ.

After a hard day's fighting, the Blues were ready to return to base camp and I called in the Slicks to extract them. Then I heard a major from G2 whining to the Squadron Commander that several NVA holsters were turned in without accompanying pistols which he thought could provide additional intelligence information. The major believed these pistols should be secured from our Blues immediately. I looked at the squadron commander and just smiled, as both of us knew this REMF just wanted souvenirs and the pistols would not be returned to the Blues who captured them. As I said in the beginning, it was a good day in Viet Nam.

I am sorry I left out my fellow pilots' names. I just don't remember who was there. Maybe Captain Glen Dalton as scout leader, Captain Bill Miller as gun lead or Captain Allen as slick lead. And worst of all, I can't remember the infantry platoon leader's name. I put him and SFC Van Horn in for Silver Stars and the Lt. got his. Van Horn on his fourth tour, did not, instead he got another BS. Oh well !