

Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP)

(pronounced “lurp”)

By [Charlie Ostick](#)

In 1967, the 4th Infantry Division was assigned the mission of a large holding action on the entire western flank of the US Army’s II Corps in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam. This was a very important mission for the 4th Infantry Division. Part of that mission was deep reconnaissance to find the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). The LRRP’s were a critical part of this mission by finding and tracking the NVA.

How was this done? Well, part of it was done by intelligence from the Air Force with aerial photos. Also, we knew where the Ho Chi Mien Trail was. The Ho Chi Mien Trail was the route that the North Vietnamese used to bring supplies and equipment through Cambodia and Laos down into Vietnam. The problem with the Ho Chi Mien Trail was that we weren’t allowed to go into Cambodia and Laos thereby giving us a real problem. So we wanted to verify and monitor where supplies, equipment and men were coming into South Vietnam.

We also used a “people sniffer” mission. I’ll explain this in some detail. Because the “people sniffers” were new to Vietnam, the 4th Infantry Division was one of the first units to ever try it out. Basically, we took a Huey, a UH-1D in this case, and put an air scoop underneath. In the back in the cargo hold, the Division and Corps chemical people would then put a chemical analysis machine that took the air samples that were coming in through the air scoop and would do an analysis on them. We were mainly looking for ammonia although smoke and a few other elements were also included. As we flew along, when we would decide that you had seen the right chemical mix indicating human activity, we would mark the map and then note that there were suspected enemy. Now the problem was how did we know whether the readings were elephants, a large band of monkeys, a small village, or actually NVA. Part of the reason you would know it wasn’t elephants, it was deep in the high jungle on the ridgeline. Elephants didn’t go there, the terrain was too difficult. Also, Montagnard villages could be seen and they had a distinctive look about them (long pole houses, grass roofs, etc.). Generally monkeys don’t congregate in that large a group, so you could, based on the terrain analysis and where you were finding these sniffer readings, assume that there were some NVA in the area, particularly if they shot at you. That was a clear indicator of NVA as we flew over and the monitor in the back pegged out and everybody in the back said, “enemy, enemy” and you would mark your map and then you would hear a couple of rounds coming up at you and you would see some tracers; that was a clear indication that we had just found the NVA in the Central Highlands.

How did we figure out where to land these LRRP’s when we took them out? Well, there were a couple of easy ways that we would insert. We used bomb craters in the area. A 500 or 1,000 pound bomb made a reasonable LZ. Another way we could put them in is we could rappel them out of the helicopter on long ropes. The danger with rappelling is if you didn’t have an LZ and you couldn’t see the ground, you didn’t know how high the trees were and if the trees were higher than the ropes were long, that was really unhealthy. We tried to avoid rappelling into the deep jungle. Another way to find a LZ was to go out low level, fly along in the proposed area and just chris-cross while everybody was looking out the doors and the windows of the chopper. All of a sudden somebody saw what looks like a landing site and if it was within the area that the LRRP’s needed to be you would fly back over and give it a try. The best way to find LZ’s were recent and accurate aerial photos, ~ the missions were flown by the US Air Force and they would do it from high level with

their really super cameras and then you could pick an LZ based on the photos and your map reconnaissance.

This next part is a real story about a mission of insertion, re-supply and extraction of a LRRP...

The mission began at O dark thirty which is thirty minutes before sun up. In this case it was 0530 hrs. with our take off from Camp Enari. We were going to where the LRRP headquarters were which was out by Plei Djereng (on the map below within the red circle).

When we loaded our troops and tried to get out of Plei Djereng. I couldn't hover the Huey very well. We were too far up in the mountains and we had quite a load on, seven LRRP's, our crew chief, and door gunner in the back. I was hoping that this LZ (landing zone) would be quite a way out so we could burn-off some fuel. It turns out that it was quite close so we were going to have troubles landing. We had selected a bomb crater in a valley between two significant ridgelines near the Cambodian border (see photo after the map). In fact, we were so near the border that there's a probability that we were going to fly into Cambodia no matter what we did. The bomb crater LZ was right on the border. How would I know that? In that particular region of the country, the border was defined by a significant river (Hodrai River below) and when you were on the west side of that river you knew that you were in Cambodia and that you weren't supposed to be there.





The LRRP insertion...

Ivy 33 was the call sign of the LRRP and the helicopter call sign was Black Jack 241. On this mission, we had a C&C (Command and Control) overhead at about 2-3000 feet with the call sign of Black Jack 6.

Blackjack 241 was flying low level. By low level, I mean between the trees, if we could get that far down, certainly between the hilltops and under the clouds.

Black Jack 241 was flying along when all of a sudden the C&C ship said “Black Jack 241 this is Black Jack 6, one minute out, over”. “Black Jack 241, roger, out”. “Black Jack 241 this is Black Jack 6, 30 seconds out, over”. “241, roger, over”. “241, 10 seconds to the LZ”. “241, do you have the LZ in sight”? “Black Jack 6, 241, negative”. “241, flare – flare now”. “Black Jack 6, I don’t have the LZ in sight, oh, there it is, I can see the LZ now. I’m going in”. “Black Jack 6, 241, there’s no room in this LZ. I’m going around”. I pulled pitch as we descended toward the treetops and I nosed the Huey over and we dropped down into the valley. We screamed down to pick up airspeed and we got back around and Black Jack 6 gave me directions for another try. This time we came in from a different direction into the same bomb crater and it appeared like there was going to be room, so “Black Jack 241 this is Black Jack 6, 10 seconds out from the LZ, flare now” and I started flaring and I saw the LZ, it was really tight, and as I got into the LZ I hollered back to the crew chief, “Clear my tail rotor.” They both stuck their heads out, the crew chief and the door gunner and they were telling me that my tail rotor is clear and I kept them on the job when, all of a sudden, whap-whap, whap, whap-whap, whap, whap, whap (at about 500 beats per minute). I heard this and I know already what it was. It was the main rotors striking some trees and as long as they are small trees I can live with it. I saw them right out in front of the Huey anyhow and they were small. So I continued the mission. We were trying to hover. Remember we were going to have trouble

hovering because of the load and all of this time we were whapping the trees. I started to pull power and was trying to hover and the noise of the main rotor warning (siren or horn) was picking up. As soon as you got out of the green range, there is a loud horn or siren that started banging in your ears. I urged the team to jump out at about 4 ft. in the air and thank goodness they did. The LRRP people were out and as they jumped one at a time out each door – guess what? – I was able to recover my rpm, the warning light went off, and the power came back. I was now able to pull power and come straight up. The crew chief and the door gunner were hollering a little left, a little right as we came straight up. After clearing the trees, I did a right pedal turn. The rpm in a Huey comes back when you do a right pedal turn. When I got it straight up above the trees, I literally dumped the nose and we were screeching down the valley. The Huey was responding nicely and we were nose over and tail high and heading out. I was able to get back to the PZ (pick up zone) in good shape.

LRRP Re-supply

Now we're going to talk about re-supplying the LRRP's because they are often out there for extended periods trying to get intelligence, calling air strikes or adjusting artillery barrages. In this particular case, Ivy 33 was out there for about a week and he needed C-rations, water, ammunition and batteries for his radios. We had all of that in our Huey (quite a bit of it) so, once again, we were not able to hover in the PZ at Plei Djereng. So I had to do a running take off but this time I knew that the LRRP's were far enough away that maybe we would be able to hover when we got near them. There was no LZ available for this supply mission.

The mission starts with Black Jack 241 calling Ivy 33 and saying, "Ivy 33, this is Black Jack 241, we are in your area. Do you hear or see us? Over." "Black Jack 241, this is Ivy 33. Roger that. I hear you but I can't see up through the canopy. Proceed on your present heading and talk to me later. Over." "Ivy 33, this is 241. Roger. Out." So I continued on the mission and I flew by what I thought was Ivy 33's position on the map. So I called him again. "Ivy 33, this is Black Jack 241. Do you hear or see me? Over." "Black Jack 241, Ivy 33, you just flew over my position about 200 meters north. Over." "This is 241, I'm coming back around." I circled down the valley and back up toward the ridgeline where Ivy 33 was and I tried to get right over him. I did get right over him so "Ivy 33, this is Black Jack 241, am I near you? Over." "This Ivy 33, you're right over me but you can't dump them – I'm right under you. Over." I went around again and I came back around for another try. This time I got about 50 meters to the right of where I was before – actually that's only a couple of trees over and I tried to hover and I couldn't. "Ivy 33, Black Jack 241, is this okay." He said, "Dump the load." So we dumped the load and as we were dumping the load, my rpm came back again and I was so happy that we were able to get the valuables down to the LRRP's. As we were leaving, I hear this, "Black Jack 241, Ivy 33. Great job, just what we needed. Thanks. Out." End of mission.

LRRP Extraction

Getting a LRRP out was just as interesting as putting one in. If it was a cold pick up zone, that was an okay mission. If the LRRP's were totally out of contact and they'd gotten a nice clear area for you to pick them up, that was just a wonderful day. It didn't often happen like that. Often the pick up zone was hot or became hot at any moment. So here was how an extraction of a LRRP would go in the central highlands and it happened to me many times just this way. The LRRP's would be in the woods and they would have a cleared area for us to go pick them up in. The LRRP's were really quite good about knowing how big a Huey was and how to get it in and out. They would either pick a large bomb crater or a sand bank or a graveled area on a creek or a river or the very top of a ridgeline so that you could get in and get them.

The mission would be conducted like this. The LRRP's were in the woods and they would fire on their way towards the chopper and they would usually stop firing just as the chopper came on final. When the LRRP's stopped firing they would run toward the chopper and leap into the cargo deck. When the last one was in they would holler to us or give the crew chief a signal or they would radio me or however they would get me the word and then I would tell the door gunners to open up and start firing. They would fire into the tree lines or any suspected areas as I would pull power and get out of there.

So let's go out on a typical extraction mission – remember that I was Black Jack 241 and the LRRP's were Ivy 33. “Ivy 33, this is Black Jack 241. Over” “This is Ivy 33, I hear you. Turn to your west, I'm about 500 meters away. Over.” “This is Black Jack 241. Wilco, starting my approach now.” “This is IVY 33. We're getting a fire from the ridgeline off to the west. Over.” “Roger. I see some tracer now coming down.” “This is Ivy 33 you're on short final now.” “This is 241. Roger.” Then, when I saw the PZ, I started to flair and we started to go in. Just as we rolled in on the final I saw some tracers coming out from the right side on a ridgeline looking over the PZ. All of the LRRP's were running toward the chopper firing into the tree line and throwing hand grenades. They wanted to get out of there that's for sure. So as soon as I thought all of them were in, I asked the crew chief and he hit one of the LRRP's on the head and he got a thumb up. They all agreed that they were in and I told my crew chief to start firing into the tree lines. Just as I started to pull power to get out of there, “tick-tick, tick-tick.” When you hear bullets hitting a Huey it sounds just like you're hitting metal with a tack hammer. I pulled power even more because it is really exciting when you're taking hits. Just as I cleared the tree line with full power I saw some more tracers. I directed the crew chief on the right side to fire into the ridgeline and I nosed the chopper over. We were getting out of there! We gained airspeed really fast. I was so glad to get away from the NVA on the ridgeline that was firing down on us. We were flying down the valley getting out of there with a really high airspeed. I was able to do a cyclic climb, that's pulling back on the cyclic from 110 knots to about 60 knots. You just swoop up in the air like an eagle. We got up about 3000 feet really fast. At 3000 feet we were out of small arms range so we could cruise on home. By the way, at 3000 feet the air was about 20 ° cooler than it was down at the PZ and it is so refreshing. We dropped them off in Plei Djereng and when we got back to Camp Enari the crew chief found four bullet holes in the Huey, one on each side of the tail boom and one bullet hole in the main rotor blades. We survived the day and got our LRRP out in good shape. End of mission.