

## CHAPTER ONE

George Bowers; his scout dog Wolf, Clinton Epps; his scout dog Lobo; Gary Detrick; his scout dog Princess, and I Rusty Allen had just finished leading a company of the 101st Airborne Division to a ridge in the Ashau valley where the, Army in all it's wisdom, decided to build a new base camp. It was our job to lead the company to this destination, where the US Air Force had graciously dropped ten one thousand pound bombs to clear the triple canopy jungle the bombing mission had been a success. The ridge all along the top had been blown away. And down in the valley on the eastern slope, the jungle was still there, just as if it had been planned that way.

As the element moved in along the ridge it began to set up security around the cleared area. The CO(Commanding Officer) had decided to set up his CP (Command Post) as near the center of the perimeter as possible. The dog handlers and I elected to set our position up inside the perimeter near one of the bomb crater left a thousand pound bomb that you could set a small house in and

some old NVA(North Vietnamese Army) bunkers. We were about thirty meters up the mangled slope from the CP.

It was hot like only Vietnam could be with the temperature soaring over one hundred degrees and the humidity a sweltering one hundred percent. My clothes were wet from seven day old sweat and sticking to my skin. I was dirty and smelled like a gook whore on pay day.

Since we had finished our mission we were due to return to LZ Sally, our rear area and base of operation. This was a normal procedure for dog teams, because the dogs had to be rested and checked for diseases and health problems before their next mission.

"Stay here." I ordered the dog handlers. "I'll go down to the CP and see if I can get us out of this fucking shit hole." I slowly stumbled through and over the rubble and debris left by the bombs. As I approached the CP I could hear the CO bark orders to the RTO (Radio Telephone operator). "You get back on the horn (GI slang for radio) and you tell those fucking REMF's (Rear Echelon Mother Fuckers) I want my supplies ASAP (As Soon As Possible).

"Sir." I said interrupting his conversation with the RTO." Do you think it might be possible to get the dog teams and me on



the next available chopper?" I hated to add another burden on the CO when I could see he was having problems just getting his men re-supplied, but I also knew I had to get these dog teams in as soon as I could because they had been in the field for the maximum time that was usually allowed for the dogs.

"If I can get a chopper out here for re-supply they should have room for you guys." Oh and tell your people thanks they did a good job." He calmly said. "Yes sir, thank you, and I'll get them ready." I respectfully replied. The CO was rather a young man to be a Captain, he was of medium height with dark hair. I couldn't help but notice that he was an Airborne Ranger which is the elite of the infantry. Rangers were usually very forceful as he was, they were also known to be a bit gung-ho. His faced reeked of stress from trying to command his company and please his superiors at the same time.

Just as I had stumbled back to the dog handlers and their faithful tail wagging canine friends with the good news. They were pretty sure things were going well, because they could see the broad grin across my face that was impossible for me to hide. They were thinking of the hot chow and a shower, and even their dogs seemed to know we were going in.

All of a sudden small arms fire opened up with a sharp stabbing sound to my ears. It was M16 and AK47 (Russian made

assault rifle, standard issue to the NVA). I instinctively dove to the ground yelling "incoming". The handlers were already dropping to the ground making loud thuds and grunts as they hit the ground. Just as quick as it the firing stopped and then came the eerie, almost deafening quiet of the jungle.

"What was that all about." asked Bowers who had dove into an old NVA latrine that had been dug near the old bunkers. "I don't know but you smell like shit." Replied Epps, laughing and holding his nose with two fingers.

Detrick seemed a little startled, seeing this was his first time to come under fire, and wasn't saying anything, and was staring in astonishment that Bowers would jump into a shit hole.

"I May smell like shit but at least I'm still alive!" Bowers laughingly yelled back. "At the time I really didn't give a damn where I was as long as I was safe."

"What was that all about?" Asked Detrick.

"Probably somebody just checking their M16." Peps replied.

"I don't think so." I said.

"What do you mean Sarge?" Bowers asked.

"Well I heard some AK fire in all of that shit." I said.

"How can you tell it all sounded the same to me?" Detrick asked.

"When you are on the receiving end of an AK enough you will learn that it makes a double cracking sound unlike the popping sound of the M16, or the earth shaking heart thumping sound of the M60 machine gun." I explained.

Bowers a light complected southern fellow from Alabama, with that strong southern drawl, and that comical attitude that you would expect from a good old country boy. Had been in Vietnam for a couple of months. As a matter of fact he and Epps came to the 47th Scout Dog platoon about the same time. Epps was a black fellow from Louisiana, and he too was one of the good old country boys as was I being from South East Texas about fifty miles from Houston.

Detrick on the other hand was kind of short and had blond hair and was from Hawaii, More like the quiet surfer type. Although quiet he was a very likable person and from just the short time with the 47th seemed to develop friends easily. This is his very first mission, and that is why a short timer (soon to go home) like me is roaming around in the jungles of the Ashau valley. It is my job to teach Detrick the ropes and make sure he and the dog are compatible in the field.

"You guys stay here I'm going down to the CP and see if I can find out what the fuck is going on. And keep your fucking head down!" I ordered. I grabbed my M16 from next to my gear and



stumbled back Down toward the CP when out of the corner of my eye I noticed a medic scrambling, as well as he could through the rubble, down toward the lower perimeter I immediately turned and started in his direction. As I was coming nearer to the medic I could see a wounded grunt (slang for infantryman) lying on the ground in a pool of his own blood. As the medic frantically tried to stop the bleeding. The grunt excitedly said. " I killed at least one gook and wounded a couple more, but the rest ran into the wood line. "You gotta watch Doc, you gotta watch before they come back!"

I butted in and said. "I'll check it out Doc you just take care of the guy."

"Just set up security for us help is on the way." The medic said.

I had decided that it may be a good idea to look around for a wounded gook. I was easing my way through the rubble and debris and was directing my attention on the wood line which was about 25 meters away. As I easily lowered my foot I felt something that didn't feel right, I quickly glanced to the ground and jumped back with a start, for there was a dead gook lying right under my foot, I had stepped right on his chest. In a fraction of a second I realized he was dead. He was hit almost right between the eyes and the tumbling effect of the 5.56mm M16 round had caused his head to explode like a water melon, there was blood and brains

all over the ground. It even made my stomach a funny feeling and I as a combat veteran of ten months.

I immediately took a quick look around to make sure there were no surprises like maybe a booby trap then started easing my way closer to the wood line. I took a about four or five steps then I noticed something in the brush that looked odd as I slowly moved closer I felt my stomach twist as I could see that it was a gook. I carefully moved closer and was relieved to see his AK47 lying a few feet from his hands, I could also see that his hands were empty. Then I noticed the three patches of blood on his fatigues. I was pretty sure he was dead, however I was very cautious as I approached him and kicked him to make sure he was dead. I then crouched down and began to search the area, again I was startled for just a few feet away I could see another gook that looked like he was dead I eased up and kicked him, he to was dead. I felt a strong feeling of relief, then I realized there might be more alive, but I was getting dangerously close to that dark mysterious jungle. I was startled from a voice from behind. "Wait up." the voice yelled. I turned to see three grunts approaching me from up the slope. I felt a strong sense of confidence seeing help was near. "Hey look out for those three dead gooks, one is over there," I pointed to the first one, "the other two are over there," I pointed to them.

"Well take over here." one of the grunts said.

"Thanks for the help." Another said.

"No sweat." I replied, and started back up the slope toward the wounded grunt.

As I approached the location of the grunt I could see that the Platoon leader had reached him.

"He got at least one sir and maybe wounded a couple more." The Lieutenant said to the CO over the radio.

"He killed three that I saw." I interrupted as I walked up to the Lieutenant.

"Stand by." The Lieutenant said into the radio.

"Are you sure he got three?" Asked the lieutenant.

"Yes sir I saw them myself they are right down there." I said as I pointed toward the spot where I had seen the dead gooks.

"Thanks Sarge." The Lieutenant said.

"You bet." I replied.

"ALPHA six, ALPHA six (The CO's radio call sign), this is Alpha one-six over" (the first platoon leader's call sign). The Lieutenant said into the radio hand set.

"This is Alpha six over." The CO squawked back over the radio.



"This is Alpha, one-six the dog handler sergeant said that he saw three dead November Victor Alpha (Phonetic alphabet for NVA) near the wood line, and my WIA (WOUNDED IN ACTION) said that he saw several more run back into the wood line over." The Lieutenant said to the CO.

"This is Alpha ,six give me an estimate on the number of November Victor Alpha that retreated into the wood line over." The CO ordered back over the radio.

"How many NVA do you think there was." The Lieutenant asked the wounded grunt.

"I think maybe eight or nine." The grunt replied as his face grimaced in pain.

"Alpha six, this is Alpha one-six over" The Lieutenant said.

"This is Alpha six over." replied the CO over the radio.

"This is Alpha one-six, we estimate at least re-enforced squad ran back into the wood line over." The Lieutenant said to the CO.

"This is Alpha six take two squads from your platoon and see if you can locate the November Victor Alpha over." The CO ordered.

" Roger out." the Lieutenant answered.

The Lieutenant signaled to his two squad leaders to bring up their squads. As the Lieutenant was giving the squad leaders the

orders you could see the downhearted look on the grunts faces, for they new that going after the NVA in their own back yard was very dangerous. In the Ashau valley the NVA were at home and would fight to the death to keep it under their control, but that's why were here to take it away.

After a short briefing the grunts prepared to enter the jungle of death.

"Good luck men," The Lieutenant said.

"Yes sir." Replied one of the squad leaders.

I watched as the grunts slowly moved into the dark mysterious jungle. When the last one was out of sight I started making my way back up the steep slope toward the CP and the dog handlers I had left behind.

About half way up the air exploded with small arms fire of all types. I dove to the ground. I couldn't help but wonder what those poor grunts ran into. Against my better judgment I let my curiosity get the best of my common sense, I knew I should turn around and head back up the slope. But I made my way back down to the platoon leader just to see what was going on.

"Alpha one seven (first platoon first squad leader) this is alpha one six over." The Lieutenant said.

I could see that he was really worried about his men by the serious and a bit frightened look on his face.



"This is alpha one seven over." The voice from the radio replied.

"This is alpha one six what the hell is going on down there over?" The Lieutenant asked.

"This is alpha one seven we are drawing heavy fire from about half way up this mountain directly opposite your position over." The patrol leader replied.

"This is alpha one six what is your situation over?" The Lieutenant asked.

"This is alpha one seven looks like we are penned down by what appears to be a re-enforced platoon of NVA, and we are taking casualties we have at least one KIA (killed in action) and two WIA, we need help bad over." The patrol leader said in a very shaky and excited voice.

"This is alpha one six roger stand by over." The Lieutenant replied.

"Alpha six this is alpha one six over." The Lieutenant said.

"Alpha one six this is alpha six I have been monitoring your transmissions and I have alpha two six on his way with re-enforcement's, and I have a medic on the way over." The CO replied.

"This is alpha a one six roger out."

"Alpha one seven this is alpha one six over. Did you copy over?" The Lieutenant said.

"Alpha one six this is alpha one seven I copied but we need help ASAP over!" The patrol leader replied.

"Hang in there one seven we are on our way." Out. the Lieutenant said encouragingly.

Things aren't looking good right now but I figured that a platoon from this company was as good as any NVA company. So I couldn't understand why these guys were pinned down by just a re-enforced platoon.

Meanwhile the second platoon was in the process of a flanking maneuver when all of a sudden to the left of the pinned down platoon small arms fire opened up with as much fury as the first platoon.

"What the fuck, over?" I said.

Then the radio blasted out. "Alpha six this is alpha two six over." The second platoon leader screamed excitedly.

"This is alpha six over. What the hell is going on down there?" The CO asked.

"This is alpha two six we have casualties at least one KIA and three WIA. Request additional support over!" Alpha two six replied.



"This is alpha six, roger understand your situation, have mike victor (Medi-vac helicopter) on the way, Foxtrot Oscar (Artillery Forward Observer) has red leg on the way with one zero five mike mike's (one hundred five milli meter howitzer cannon) standby for marking round, over." The CO answered.

"This two six roger standing by. Do you have an echo tango alpha (estimated time of arrival) on the mike victor, over?" Two six asked.

"This is six standby. Two six we have one round marking out over." The CO replied.

Several seconds went by with the radio quiet then.

"This is two six marking round on target fire for effect, over" The RTO for two six replied.

"This is six stand by, round out, round out, round out, round out. Mike victor echo tango alpha is one five mikes, over." The CO said as we could hear the artillery rounds coming over our heads. The swishing sounded like the rounds were going to fall on us, but a few seconds later we could hear them exploding with a deafening blast.

I was sitting with alpha one six just up the slope from all the shit. It was an awesome sight and sound as all the small arms fire was filling the air with fourth of July fire cracker sounds times ten and the artillery sounded like loud claps of thunder.

The whole area was beginning to fill up with smoke and dust, and the air reeked of gunpowder. I sometimes see the flashes from the 105mm rounds and tracers coming from the woods. If it were under different circumstances it would be an awesome sight to see.

I glanced back up the slope to see if I could see the other handlers even though I knew I couldn't see them from where I was. I couldn't help but wonder what they were thinking about all this shit, none of them had ever seen a show like this before. But things were getting more and more serious as the time passed.

"Two six this is six, over." The CO called out over the radio.

"This is two six, over." Came the reply.

"This is six give me a sit rep(situation report), over." The CO ordered.

"This is two six situation worsening cannot remove WIA and KIA to safe location for extraction, under heavy fire we are pinned down, over." Two six replied.

"This is six stand by two six we are trying to out maneuver the November Victor Alpha, over." The CO replied.

"This is two six, roger over." Two six answered.

"Three six this is six, over." The CO called over the radio

"This is three six, over," The third platoon leader replied.



"This is six over move your platoon around to the south flank of one six over and try to flank those bastards I estimate a dug in re-enforced company of November Victor Alpha , over."

"This is three six, roger over. Three six replied.

It was easy to tell that one six was wishing he was with his men because they were unable to pull back and had wounded and dead with them. If there had been any place to pace I'm sure he would be pacing, but all ears were glued to the radio waiting to here of some relief from somewhere. The sound was deafening. The jungle would explode with noise then get as quiet as a mouse, then someone would move or just start shooting then the noise would explode again. The artillery was still coming in and now we were getting air support from the Cobra Gun ships with their ARA (aerial rocket artillery). The sights and sounds were becoming unbearable yet awesome. I was very impressed with the way that all these units came together. All this had just started just a few minutes ago but seemed like it had been going all day.

All of a sudden and down to the south of us the jungle exploded with new small arms fire. We immediately knew that the third platoon was under heavy fire now with all this fire it was just one long loud roar.

"Six this is three six we have just come under heavy fire and are pinned down and we have undetermined casualties and need more support, over.

"This is six roger we now have air strikes on the way so tell your troops to keep their heads down. One six, two six do you copy, over." The CO said.

" This is three six roger, over" Three six replied.

" This is one six I copy, over." The Lieutenant replied.

" This is two six I copy, over." Two six replied.

All of a sudden everything got real quiet the artillery stopped, the gunshots pulled away. Everyone was looking up. Then all of a sudden from out of nowhere an F4 Phantom appeared streaked down over the jungle then took off like a streak of lightening a second later the jungle exploded with all the sounds of hell waking up as the two hundred fifty pound bombs exploded. Just as I was about regain my composure another Phantom zipped from the sky and unloaded two more bombs with a terrific blast.

"This is six I need sit rep from all units, over." The CO ordered.

Just as the CO finished his transmission over the radio the jungle erupted from all sides within small arms fire again.

"Six this two six negative results at this position, over." Came the reply from two six.



"Six this is one seven, negative results at this position, still drawing heavy fire and have more casualties, over." One seven replied.

"Six this is three six negative results here it seems as if the incoming fire has intensified, over." Three six replied.

" This is six stand by." The CO replied.

After hearing one seven's report I decided, against my better judgment, to go down into the jungle and see if I could help those guys. So I slowly started to move in the edge of the jungle and was about fifteen feet inside the wood line I must have come into some gooks line of fire because the trees around me seemed to be erupting in boils as bark came flying into my face, and the rocky ground seemed to jump up into my face as the AK rounds came zipping through the air like mini jets breaking the sound barrier as they passed by my head. I dove to the ground saying out loud, "I'm to short for this shit, I'm too short for this shit." All of a sudden I had noticed that I was trying to hide behind a small sapling and was sticking out on both sides I could have shit, but I just found something bigger to hide behind. Funny thing is I always hated the army's entrenching tool(folding shovel) but I sure could use one now. I did find out that if you needed to bad enough you could dig a ditch with a plastic C-Ration spoon.

By this time I had decided that this was not the place for me and began trying to crawl out of this gook's line of fire. Just as I thought I was going to make it I heard a call for help. I turned to check it out.

"Help me get this guy up so he can get a bird out of this shit." The grunt medic ordered.

When I looked the medic was crawling pulling a wounded grunt with him. I couldn't refuse that's why I came down to see if I could help.

I crawled toward them as bullets riddled the trees and ground with more fierceness than before but as long as we stayed low we were OK. The wounded grunt was covered with blood and when I looked at his face I could not believe that he was still alive, he had been hit with an AK round right in the right forehead and the round traveled through his eye socket and all that appeared to be left was a bloody flap that was his eye lid, then there was this black streak down past his nose and exited out his left cheek and where there once was teeth and a face was a big gaping hole with bloody flesh and teeth fragments, it looked real bad.

The grunt was unconscious so it was very difficult to drag him up the slope. We pulled and tugged inch by inch with agonizing difficulty. Finally we reached an area out of the line of fire, and other grunts who had moved down to the position of

one six to start receiving wounded, came down and took the wounded grunt from us.

"Sarge will you come back and help me we have a bunch more (wounded) to get out almost all of us are wounded?" The medic yelled because the noise was so loud I could barley hear him.

" Lets go." I answered.

We started crawling back down into the jungle. We had gone just a little ways when we came upon another WIA. He was attempting to crawl out himself but wasn't making much head way.  
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"Take it easy we'll get you out of here!" The medic yelled out over the noise.

I positioned myself on one side and the medic on the other and started dragging the grunt out. His face grimaced with each inch he was being pulled.

The air strikes and artillery was getting closer and closer by now we were receiving debris from the two hundred fifty pound bombs. There was bits of burning gook flesh and body parts falling around us from time to time.

The medic and I had made it back down into the jungle and came upon another WIA. He was covered with blood, and was very pale looking.



"We got to get him out of quick before he dies!" The medic excitedly yelled out.

"Lets go!" I yelled back

As we pulled him up the slope slowly I began to feel dizzy.

"Hold up a minute." I yelled out weakly to the medic.

He looked at me in that professional medical look that doctors use just before they are about to tell you the bad news.

"We got to get this guy up the hill then you need to go on back up to the CP. You are about to become a heat causality, and we don't need any more causalities." The medic yelled out to me.

"All I need is a rest." I replied.

The medic reached out over the WIA and touched my forehead and face and said. "You are about to go down with heat exhaustion. You've done enough, I don't want to be pulling you out of this mess. Just go back up there with the other dog handlers."

"Lets get this guy out of here and then I'll go.

We painstakingly pulled and tugged until we had reached the safe zone where all those bullets that had to whom it may concern written on them could not reach us.

I just hadn't noticed just how hot I really was until I stopped for a minute to rest.

"Thanks for the help Sarge." The medic said as he and another grunt eased back into the jungle.

I really needed a rest before I started up that long rough trip back up the slope.