

# McNeely/Giles: Operations Harvest Moon & Hastings, 1965-66

Where it all began at Camp San Mateo, Camp Pendleton, California . Giles reported to Pendleton in January 1965 and was assigned a platoon in Echo company that began extensive “lock on” training and prepared to fight in any type of terrain and combat conditions. McNeely had already spent a brief advisory tour in 1964 with Major Alfred E. Gray, later to become a future Commandant, and was training with Golf company.



Figure 1: Camp San Mateo, CA

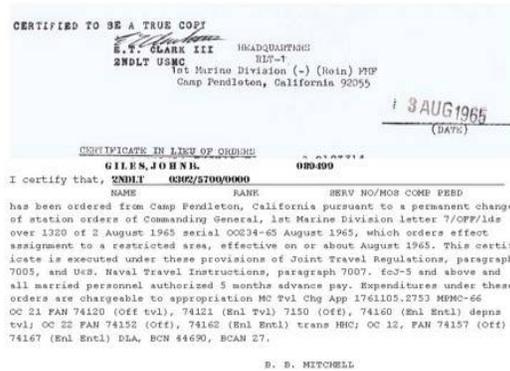


Figure 2: Orders to Vietnam

On 6 August we received word to mount out and embark aboard ships. We did not know where we were going. We were among the first 100,000 troops to deploy to Vietnam. For approximately 18 days aboard ship, we pulled into the Philippines to conduct conditioning hikes, jungle warfare to acclimate to the tropical environment.

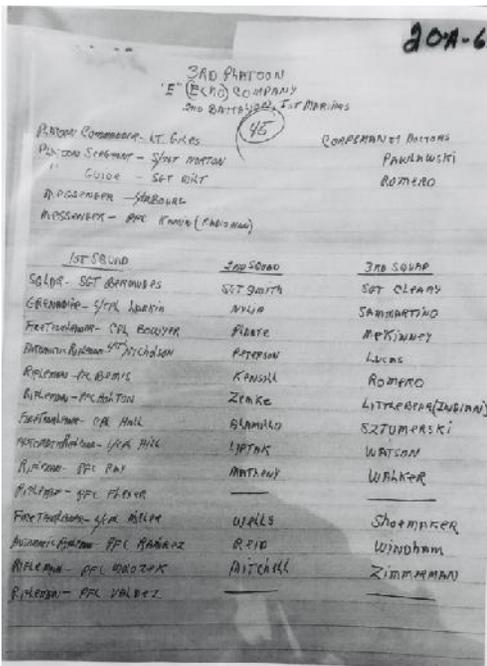


Figure 3: Echo Platoon

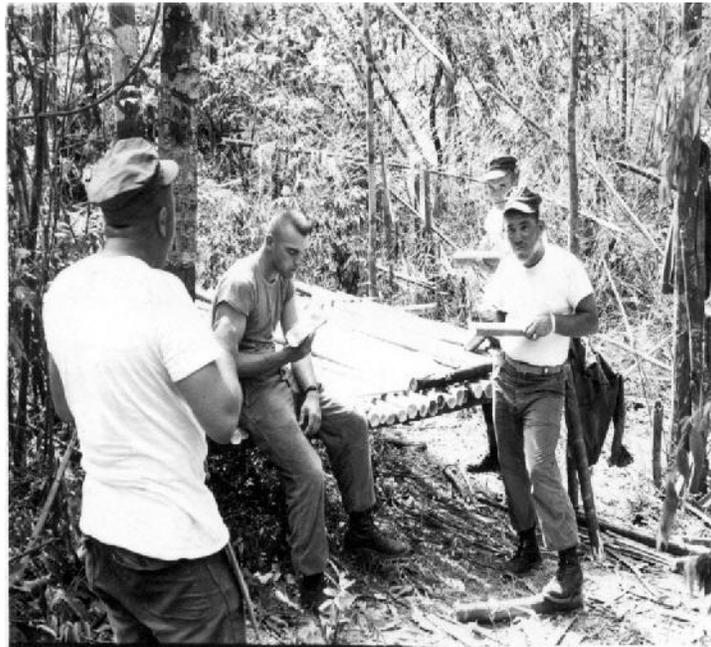


Figure 4: Philippines

We were writing the SOP for amphibious operations in Vietnam. After six weeks of training, we embarked aboard ships to become a Special Landing Force (SLF).

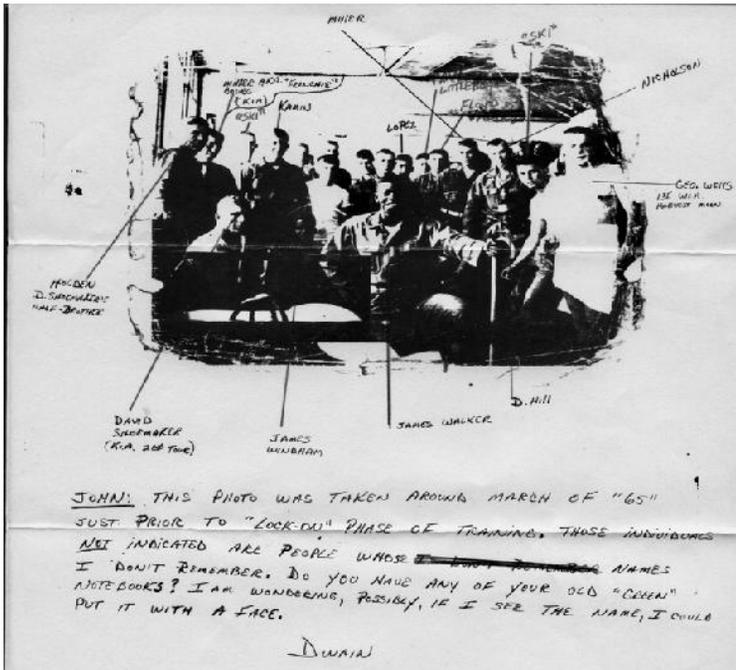


Figure 5: Barracks Mount Out

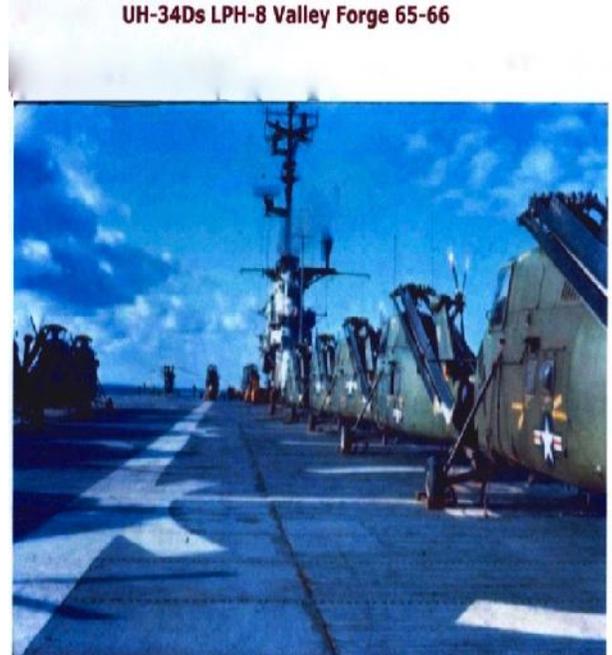


Figure 6: USS Valley Forge

After a week in the Philippines, we received word to embark aboard ships and become a Special Landing Force (SLF), see Appendix A. We embarked on three ships, an LPH USS Valley Forge, APA USS Talledega, and LSD USS Monticello. We entered the South China Sea and as a Special Landing Force from the first part of September to the first part of December 1965. We were the first battalion landing team to make raids along the coast of Vietnam averaging about two days per month, called "Dagger Thrusts". Our landing in the Que Son Valley kicked off Operation Harvest Moon on 6 December 1965.



Figure 7: Dagger Thrust Operations

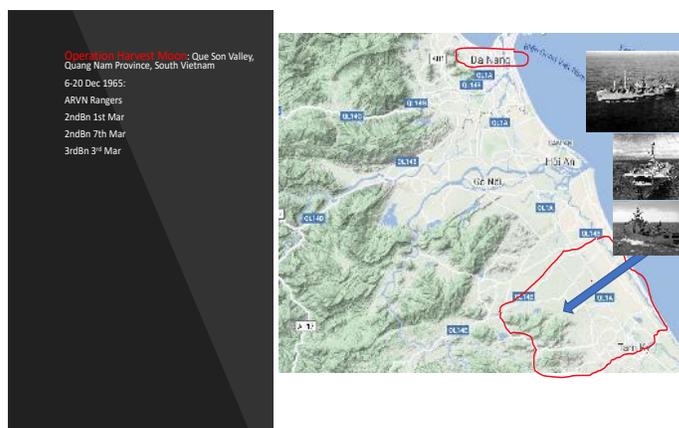


Figure 8: Operation Harvest Moon

Harvest Moon ended on 20 December 1965 with the following friendly and enemy casualties as follows:

**d. Friendly Losses:** KIA - 44, WIA - 265\*, DOW - 6, MIA - 1, NBD - 1.  
\* As of 23 December 112 WIA had been returned to duty.

**e. Enemy Losses.**

	<u>CONFIRMED</u>	<u>POSSIBLE</u>
(1) KIA:		
Ground Forces:	314	327
Marine Air:	69	284
SAC:	24	UNK
(2) WIA: estimated 100		
(3) VCC: 33 (including 4 PAVN)		
(4) VCS: 231		
(5) Ralliers: 3 (including 2 PAVN)		

Figure 9: Harvest Moon After Action

Following Harvest Moon, our battalion off loaded from the SLF at Hue-Phu Bai Airfield and resumed pacification and security duties in the Hue City area until late May when we received briefings on a large upcoming operation named Hastings. This mission involved opening up Route 9 to the Laotian border and attacking large NVA main units south of the DMZ. Below is the Hastings TAOR.

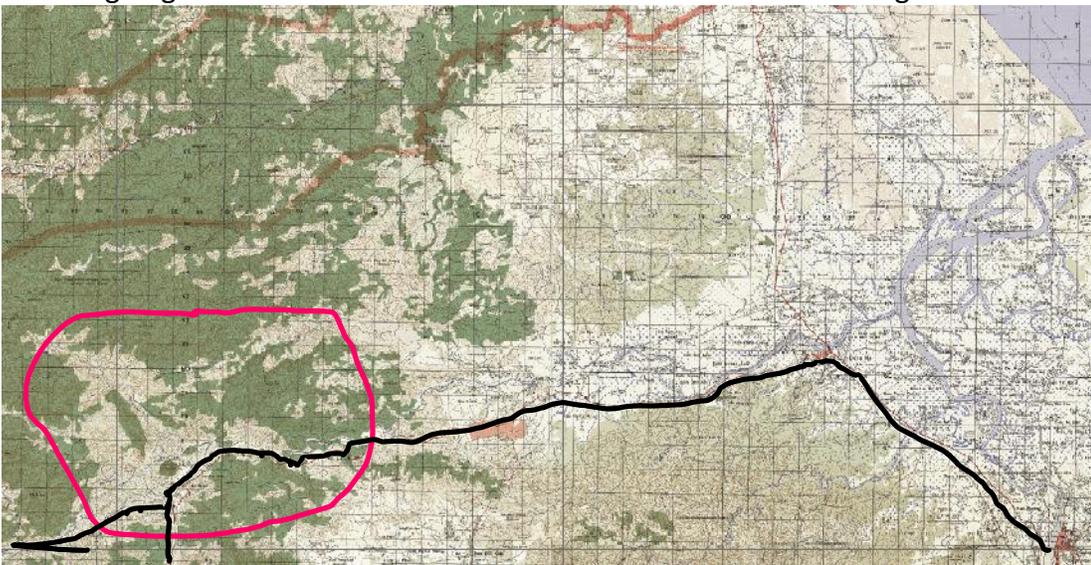


Figure 10: Hastings TAOR.

The attack plan followed as depicted on the next page with an SLF in support. Initial contact was light. A side story. My Hotel company was in reserve during the initial attack and my Forward Observer was new to

Vietnam and insisted he go with the attack wave. I told him to get permission from the Colonel. He was granted permission and his helicopter was one of the few that were shot down with all lost. His Dad was a Marine and insisted I meet with his family after my tour and explain what happened, which I did.

**7. UNIT COMMANDERS:**

H&S Company	1 - 9 July	Capt A.J. SIBLEY USMC
	10 - 31 July	1stLt R.P. FLINNER USMCR
Company "E"	1 - 29 July	Capt R.A. LARSEN USMC
	30 - 31 July	1stLt G.P. LEVENDIS USMC
Company "F"	1 - 23 July	Capt J.R. STENCE USMC
	23 - 31 July	1stLt D.W. PICKERSGILL USMC
Company "G"	1 - 17 July	Capt R.E. LAVAN, JR USMC
	18 - 31 July	1stLt C.C. KRULAK USMC
Company "H"	1 - 31 July	1stLt J.R. GILES USMCR

**UNCLASSIFIED**



Figure 11: Hastings company leadership.

Figure 22: Downed Helicopter

For the next 10 days or so, contact was light with enemy forces, Units recovered tons of equipment and supplies that had been abandoned by the NVA during our attack. We discovered underground hospitals, caches of weapons and dead NVA left behind. The operation was going too smoothly, and we knew it would be a matter of time before the NVA would make their move. They were watching and waiting for the right moment. Our sister battalion from the 4th Marines were already pushing south from the DMZ to squeeze the NVA into our positions.

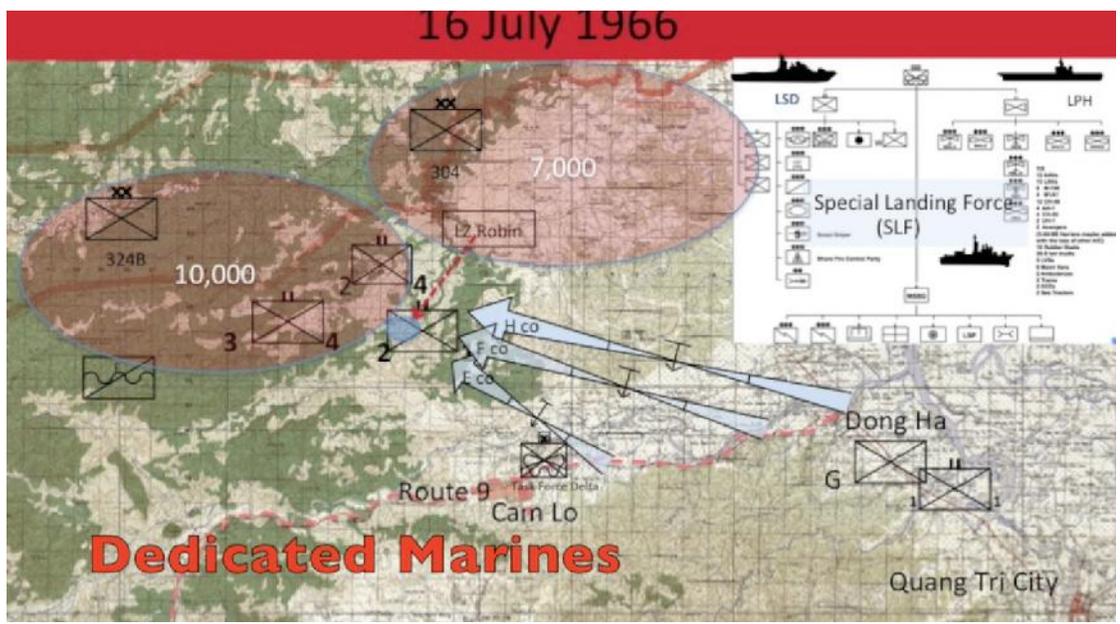


Figure 13: Battalion Attack Plan.

The press described the operation on the following page and the deployment of company TAORs.

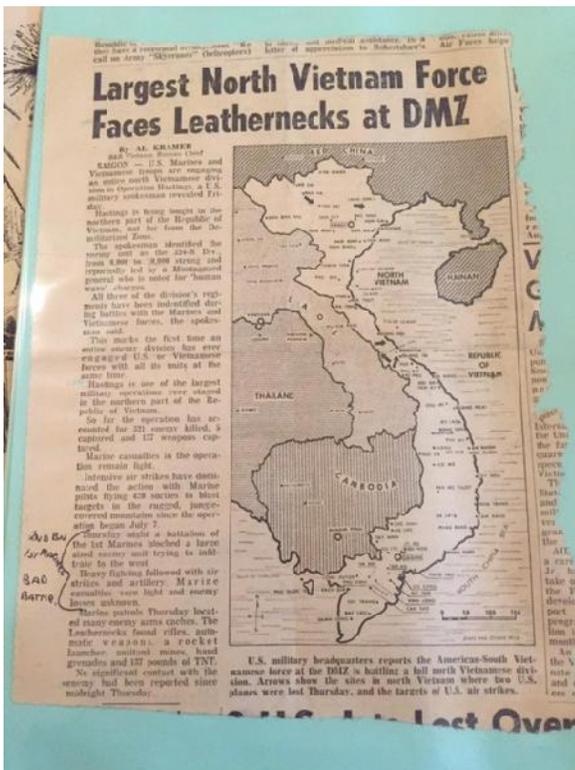


Figure 14: The Military Times



Figure 15: Company TAORs

In the late afternoon on 20 July, our battalion commander, LtCol Spalding, landed by helicopter and told me to move the company north to a small round top near the DMZ (see map) before dark and leave behind guides for Foxtrot company who would be moving at dark on foot through triple canopy and link up with my company in a blocking position. I said, "Sir this is pretty risky this time of day to move through triple canopy." He said, "We have to get that blocking position in place ASAP." "Aye, aye sir," and we moved out in a hurry. Thank God we had a few days to do our scouting and recon of this area and we had the company in blocking position and set up our defenses with ambush and early warning detection sites around our perimeter before dark.

On the other hand, Foxtrot company wasn't so lucky. On 20 July, while the NVA tried to overrun our Hotel company, we dispersed their attack with mortar and artillery barrages. The NVA broke off their attack on Hotel and attempted to bypass our blocking position and the NVA co-mingled with Foxtrot at the trail at the bottom of our hilltop. Needless to say, a firefight broke out that lasted nearly all night. Mike was wounded and two Marines were KIA. Mike's story is at Appendix B. Read Mike's medevac company message at Appendix C.



Figure 16: Foxtrot Ambush Site

Below is a listing of Operation Hastings After Action Report.

DECLASSIFIED				DECLASSIFIED			
<u>AIRCRAFT LOSSES</u>				<u>OPERATION HASTINGS/LAM SON 289</u>			
				<u>DATES</u>			
8 Jul	CH-46	COMBAT		7 JULY - 15 JULY	RECON PHASE		
14 Jul	CH-46	COMBAT		15 JULY - 3 AUG	EXPANDED PHASE		
	CH-46	COMBAT		<u>FORCES INVOLVED</u>			
15 Jul	F-4B	COMBAT		<u>USMC</u>		<u>ARVN</u>	
	CH-46	OPERATIONAL		TF DELTA	ABN TF	1ST DIV RECON	
20 Jul	UH-34	OPERATIONAL		4TH MARINES	2 ABN BN	1/1	
2 Jul	UH-34	OPERATIONAL		2/1 3/5*	6 ABN BN	2/1	
				2/4 1/3	8 ABN BN		
				3/4 2/9			
				1/1 3/12			
				1ST MAR CMD GRP AT DONG HA			
				*AFTER COMPLETION DECK HOUSE II			
				<u>NVA FORCES</u>			
TOTAL	4 CH-46	COMBAT		324B DIV			
	1 CH-46	OPERATIONAL		812 REGT			
	2 UH-34	OPERATIONAL		803 REGT			
	7 HELOS			90 REGT			
				<u>RESULTS</u>			
	1 F-4B	COMBAT		<u>USMC</u>		<u>NVA</u>	
				126 KIA	882 KIA(CONF) (824 KIA BY USMC)		
				448 WIA	929 KIA(PROB)		

Figure 17: AAR

# APPENDIX A

## US NAVY/USMC SPECIAL LANDING FORCE (SLF) 1965 (Vietnam Era)

**NAVY/ MARINE: SPECIAL LANDING FORCE (SLF) 1965-1971**

**US NAVY**  
2,200

**UNITED STATES NAVY**

**SLF: Amphibious Section**

- **First (Flag) Ship:**
  - LPH USS Valley Forge or USS LPH Iwo Jima
  - Embarked Command Element
  - Multipurpose Assault Ship
  - Well Deck
  - Helo-borne Company
  - Artillery Battery

Total: 1,075+

**UNITED STATES NAVY**

**SLF: Amphibious Section (Cont'd)**

- **Second Ship**
  - APA USS Talladega
- **Third Ship**
  - LSD USS Montecello

Total: 420+      Total: 470+

**UNITED STATES NAVY**

**SLF: Strike Section**

- **Submarine**
  - SSN 714 USS Norfolk Class
- **P-3 Orion**
  - Anti-submarine and maritime surveillance aircraft.

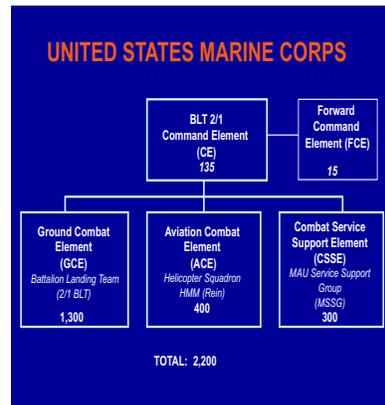
Total: 130+      Total: 11

**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

**SPECIAL LANDING FORCE (SLF) 1965**

2dBn/1st Marines (Rein)

**Battalion Landing Team (BLT) Capabilities & Organization**



**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

**BLT 2/1 CAPABILITIES**

- Amphibious Operations
- Reconnaissance Operations
- Supporting Operations
- Military Operations other than war (Humanitarian)

**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

**AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS**

- Amphibious Raid
- Amphibious Assault
- Amphibious Withdrawal
- Amphibious Demonstration
- Rapid Response Planning (6 Hrs)
- TRAP (Tactical Recovery of Aircraft and Personnel)
- Limited Expeditionary Airfield Operations
- Airfield/Port Seizure

**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

**GROUND COMBAT ELEMENT (GCE)**

**Battalion Landing Team: 2d Battalion/1st Marines (BLT-2/1)**

- Rifle Company (3)
- Weapons Company
- Artillery Battery
- Amphibious Tractor Platoon
- Engineer Platoon
- Reconnaissance Platoon
- Tank Platoon

**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

**AVIATION COMBAT ELEMENT (ACE)**

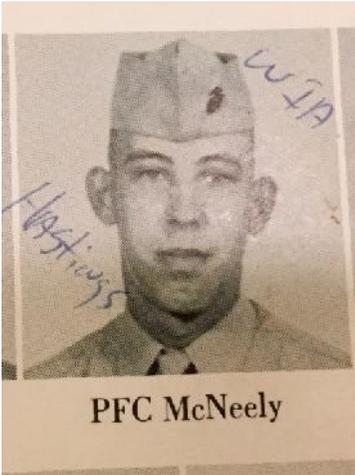
**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS**

**SERVICE SUPPORT GROUP (SSG)**

- Maintenance
- Engineer
- Supply
- Motor Transport
- Shore Party
- Medical
- Communications

## **APPENDIX B** **A Night I'll Never Forget**

*By Sgt Mike McNeely, USMC*



Shortly after the beginning of 1966, I joined Hotel Company. We pulled patrols and ambushes around Chu Lai and were involved in some operations. Operation New York was one of the bigger ones, during which Hotel Company was to guard our base perimeter along with Echo Company, while Foxtrot and Golf Companies went out on the operation. Foxtrot lost quite a few men, one of whom was a real close buddy of mine, Larry MacDonald, from Detroit, Michigan. Larry was killed 28 February 1966.

From what I have been told, there was a lot of heroism among those Marines from Foxtrot. Without a doubt, Foxtrot was the hard luck company of our battalion. It seemed that if anything went wrong, it went wrong for Foxtrot.

In July came Operation Hastings, in northern I Corps against North Vietnamese Regulars. We jumped off on Hastings on 15 July. A friend of mine from Echo Company lost his whole squad in Helicopter Valley when their chopper was hit and caught fire. He told me he was supposed to be on that chopper, but because there were too many men on it, they took him off and put him on another chopper. He said that while they were still in the air and the other chopper was burning, they could hear the men in it screaming above the noise of the helicopters.

The first night on Hastings, we had to go back to our landing zone, as we had gotten into some elephant grass and had no clear fields of fire. That night the North Vietnamese opened up on us with mortars and wiped out a listening post of five men. I think two were killed and the other three wounded. We had spotted the flash of the mortar and heard it coming out of the tube and waited for it to come in. We had nothing to dig in with and so

just spread our perimeter out to keep more of us from being hit.

We had been told to leave our E-tools behind so we could carry more ammo and C-rations. We moved over to the Rockpile, and they continued shooting at us during the night. We could hear and see the tracers come over, but as long as they didn't come close, we just went back to sleep until it was our turn on watch.

Echo Company was ambushed on the other side of the river one day, and we could hear them on the radio and watch the action from where we were, but we couldn't do anything to help them.

We ran across some anti-aircraft positions that the enemy had dug just shortly before. We found some batteries that were made in China. The enemy was pretty bold, as they would climb up in trees to check on us. But they weren't close enough for us to knock off.

We got into some triple-canopy, and while we were moving through it I had an eerie feeling, as it was really dim and quiet in there. When we stopped, I felt something crawling on me and I began stripping; I knew what it was. We didn't wear skivvies while in Vietnam, so as fast as I could I just took off my cartridge belt, flak jacket, and utility jacket. I lit a cigarette and started burning leeches off my body. I had accumulated five in the short time it took us to move through the canopy. They had evidently fallen out of the trees. I have often wondered if that was from their natural doing or from being sprayed with Agent Orange.

My last night on Operation Hastings was 21 July 1966. It was a night I'll never forget. We were tied in with Echo Company as a blocking force, situated on a small hill. I had two gun teams, and one of my gunners was on a listening post in front of our perimeter. Around 2030, the North Vietnamese opened up on us with small-arms fire. We watched the bluish red tracers go over our heads. Then they dropped 82mm mortars on us. That was when I was wounded.

I received shrapnel wounds to the left side of my head, to my left leg, and to my right arm. Blood ran into my left eye and I couldn't see out of it. And I had a hell of a headache. I was rather reluctant to touch the area around my left eye, fearing that I had lost my eyesight. I was pissed, to say the least, since I had only nine days left of my tour in Vietnam before rotating back to the States.

The squad leader of rockets was under my poncho with me, and he picked up shrapnel also. Even my brand new air mattress got nailed: I had promised to give it to Staff Sergeant Ramirez when I left Vietnam.

Pedro Martinez was about six or eight feet from me, and he was hit around the knees. So, I hollered for a Corpsman to come take care of him. One arrived and put an Ace bandage on my head wound. I told him to take care of Martinez, but Pedro had lost too much blood and he died from shock and blood loss. A corporal by the name of [Richard] McNichols was wounded in the head by a .50 caliber round, and he lived for about 15 minutes before passing on.

SSgt Ramirez called the listening post back in, and my gunner, B.J. Fowler, told me he could have reached out and touched the North Vietnamese. He was shaking, and this was the first time I had seen Fowler shook up in all the time we were together in Vietnam.

The company commander (John Giles) called in artillery all around us that night. It was so close that when it landed and went off we could hear the shrapnel hitting the bushes around us. I asked the first sergeant what was happening, and he told me it was our own guns. I thought the North Vietnamese had let loose again.

Sometime around 0200, a helicopter came in and those of us with head wounds were flown back to Dong Ha to get patched up. I was taken to a dimly lit tent where I was cleaned up and designated to be sent out to the USS Repose to recover. On the Repose, I was lying on a stretcher stripped to my birthday suit when a chaplain came up to me and asked me if I would like him to say a few words for me. I agreed, wondering if my next move was to the mortuary. I thought he saw something I wasn't aware of.

Over the past few years, I have learned more about Operation Hastings. A member from our outfit told me he'd had to go out on a body count the next morning, and they counted more than 200 dead North Vietnamese. I think they were probably killed by the artillery. Also, Bob Redfern--from Utah, a friend from the old 3/3 outfit--told me he was attached to Foxtrot Company, and they were on their way up to help us when they ran into the North Vietnamese who were going to try and surround and overrun both us and Echo Company. He told me he had shot and killed a North Vietnamese with his .45, and had run out of bullets and taken the .45 and knocked another one to the ground. He had picked up five rounds himself. Without a doubt, that was where the action was. What really upset me was that I thought I could leave Vietnam without being wounded or killed, but that was not to be. §

**APPENDIX C**

**MIKE MCNEELY MEDEVAC**

22 July 1966

FROM	TO	TIME	MESSAGES
S-3	TFD	0050	<p>E - Called for fire missions on entire stream bed with excellent results.</p> <p>F thru Q - Negative</p> <p>Message sent at 0020H.</p> <p>SPOT REPORT - Final</p> <p>A - 2/1</p> <p>B - 220030H</p> <p>C - XD 984564</p> <p>D - At 2100H Echo Company, H and 3/4 Mike Companies were probed. Heavy attack was mounted against 2/1 F and H Companies laid small arms and mortar fire on suspected enemy positions and areas from which movement was heard were taken under intense 4.2 mortar and artillery fire. The attack was mounted from all directions by an unknown number of NVA's. Enemy activities gradually subsided and they broke contact at 220030H.</p> <p>E - Enemy attack subsided.</p> <p>F - 2</p> <p>G - 13</p> <p>H thru H - Unknown</p> <p>I - NVA seem to be trying to destroy our blocking position vicinity XD 9950 in order to slip-out in a westerly direction.</p> <p>J - Prepared and ready to fire mortars.</p> <p>K - Unknown</p> <p>L - SPOT REPORT - Final</p> <p>M - 3/4 Mike Company</p> <p>N - 212300H</p> <p>O - XD 992582</p> <p>P - Sighted 6 NVA, fired 5 rounds M-79, observed NVA retreating in northerly direction, at same time heard heavy movement to northwest and in front of our position. Also metal on metal clankings like mortar tubes.</p> <p>Q - Requested 81mm fire mission. Fired 6 missions until no further movement. Will search area at first light.</p> <p>R - 0</p> <p>S - 4</p> <p>T thru Q - Negative</p> <p>Hotel requested med-evac for 3 people.</p> <p>FINAL SPOT REPORT has been sent.</p> <p>The helo is on its way to our position.</p> <p>Request to know situation at your position at the present time.</p>
S-3	TFD	0050	<p>S-3</p>

DECLASSIFIED

**McNeely & Kubalowski  
medi-evac'd.**

Tab A to Appendix II