

The day after Christmas the company makes a practice combat assault with helicopters. I spend my time typing ration cards and sorting the mail left over from before our departure from Schofield. I could whip out the ration cards in a couple of hours but with Sawyer prowling around, I manage to make the job last the entire day.

Captain Jones returns completely soaking wet, railing about how close the gunship machine gun bullets landed to him, the noise, and then jokes about stepping into what looked like a small drainage ditch and sinking clear up to his armpits. "I told Joe my RTO not to follow me, but he didn't listen, and in he falls too. We are lucky that thing wasn't any deeper, we'd have both drowned."

The Captain uses Joe for his RTO because he has some radio and electronics experience before his friends and neighbors drafted his ass. Joe is one of the AIT trainees acquired in Hawaii and is a nice guy except he is a bit slow mentally and stutters when he gets excited. Morris the Medic relays a story about watching Joe cooking a hotdog using a coat hanger plugged into an electrical outlet, "Old Joe here just cut that coat hanger in half; stuck the wire into each end of the hotdog then plugged it into the electric socket, and presto, he cooked that hotdog in about thirty seconds." Azzalino uses him as a driver from time to time, and Joe splits his time with us in the headquarters tent and pulling bunker guard at night with second platoon.

"How did you like those flex guns firing over your head, sir? Didn't they sound like your head was stuck inside a popcorn machine?"

"Yeah they did, Lupton, and those bullets landed only yards away from us as we got out of the helicopters too. I was surprised at how much noise there was."

"Wait until you go one where the VCs are firing back, that will be your loudest CA?"

At the end of the month, we are paid; with the money I have not spent and my pay of \$288 dollars; I am able to send home a money order for \$310 dollars. Lieutenant Sawyer takes the money from everybody as they come through the pay line, and we make a list of the amount of each man's check. He makes me add a long column of numbers to make sure we have enough money. I give half the list to Sergeant Doan to add up and we both walk to the opposite end of the tent where it is quieter to do our math. My list comes up to the right amount after the XO verifies it, but Doan's is not right and I have to count his list too. The whole project takes hours.

Lieutenant Sawyer and I hop into a jeep with all the loot to find the temporary post office to buy our money orders. The Lieutenant insists on driving, so I occupy the front passenger's seat until we meet Lieutenant Lipsett coming the opposite way. Both jeeps slow down, and as we pass each other, Lipsett says in all seriousness, "Don't let Colonel Beers see you driving." It seems the colonel feels

it is beneath his officer's dignity to drive around with an enlisted man. Sawyer hesitates a few seconds then pulls over, and we change places. I have not driven a car in over a year, but I handle the stick shift okay, and we find the mail conex without incident. Our purchases take a long time and the lieutenant is in a shitty mood by the time we buy the last check. As I drive down the hill, it occurs to me to speed up and run the jeep right into the big tree in front of where he sits, but with hopeless trepidations, I abruptly make my left turn without spilling the lieutenant into the road.

With not a whole lot to do at 1600, the Captain grouses about the length of our locks and then offers to cut hair. Several of us get a passable haircut. My hair is very thick and it is amazing how cooler my head feels afterwards.

Hearing a commotion outside the tent, I peer around the tent flap to see Colonel Beers with Major Bell at his side. Both are hotter than a popcorn fart. It seems Payne was driving around wearing an Australian Army hat, the one with the brim pinned up on one side. Beers sees him riding in a jeep looking stupid under that hat. From where I stand, the melodrama playing out turns comical. The Colonel is pissed to no end, and as he makes Payne stand at attention in front of Jones, Beers berates the captain to slap an Article 15 on his ass. Captain Jones is all, "Yes sir, yes sir, yes sir," right up until the two staff officers drive away perched catatonically in their respective seats, Beers in front, Bell in back.

Now all of this bullshit is falling on me. I do not have any more Article-15 forms, to be candid, I am not overly interested with this trivial breach of protocol, and with nothing else to do, I lie down on my bunk and relax. When Captain Jones enters the tent, he chews my ass vigorously.

"I don't have any more article 15 forms, sir," I plead defensively. This is the only time the Captain ever displays his displeasure at me.

"Why not," he demands.

"We used up the last of them in Schofield and S1 boxed up all the remaining supply."

"Go find some," the captain orders me sternly; I walk over to C Company and ask Ski if he has any he can spare.

"What for," Ski asks.

"The Colonel caught Payne riding around wearing one of those stupid Australian army hats, you know, the ones with the brim pinned up on one side."

"You gotta be shitting me," Ski declares as he scrounges around his filing cabinet, "here take these," he says to me; hands me four forms.

"Thanks, Ski, I owe you one." Upon returning, I try to load the original and three carbons into my little Smith Corolla portable, and I hunt and peck my way through the first line. When I use the carriage return, all the copies slide up except the original fails to advance. I look up, see I have typed over the prior line, and

now have a large correction to make. I have to whiteout all of the copies and the original and start over by stapling the whole composite together so all the papers will roll up in the carriage at the same time. After struggling through all this, Jones forgets about the whole thing the next day.

With too much time on our hands, and the company occupying itself with training, Lieutenant Sawyer and I find ourselves discussing the fine points of infiltrating vs. invading. He reads classified information identifying the North Vietnamese as infiltrating I Corps, and, as always, he is right without a doubt. Napoleon behaves testy after I tell him that General Westmoreland used the word invading in regards to the NVA invasion into I Corps when he visited with our battalion at Cu Chi. I know it annoys him to no end that I have prior Vietnam experiences. Only a few minutes into the conversation, I realize I am outclassed in a contest of nitwit, and instead of arguing with him, which is impossible, he declares victory and walks out affronted that I could not agree with his semantics.

This afternoon Jones gets clearance to test fire our M16s on the bunker line. Jones returns to the orderly room complaining bitterly to Sergeant Sorenson that his orders were that everybody was to fire only three rounds and stop. Some men run through a whole magazine on full automatic. It is a bit naïve thinking anybody would waste an opportunity to fire off a whole magazine than three lousy rounds.

For some reasons best know to himself Taylor the Mole, walks up to me and hands me an antiwar tract. “What do I want with this, Taylor?” I ask him.

“I don’t know, I just thought you would want to read it, that’s all,” replying as he walks away. I examine the tome quickly; read only the first paragraph whining about how the enlisted men must make do in a windowless ward at Walter Reed Hospital while the officers recuperate in a bright sunny ward with plenty of ventilation. Like most of the radical left crapola of the day, it is acerbic and trite in its singular antiwar approach with an inflated sense of urgency that the world will end if this stupid fucking war would just stop tomorrow. The gripe appears petty because everybody knows officers could not survive in a cramped, stuffy ward of enlisted men. I toss it into my bottom drawer thinking I will peruse it at a more convenient time and promptly forget about it. A day later my indiscretion comes back to haunt me when I hear Lieutenant Sawyer asking, “What is this thing doing in your desk, Lupton?”

“What’s that, sir?”

“This antiwar pamphlet,” he answers acrimoniously.

“Oh, that, Taylor gave it to me yesterday, I thought I might read it later.”

“Taylor, where did you get this from?” Lieutenant Sawyer demands of the Mole.

“Oh, they were giving them out on the street down in Honolulu.” Taylor shrugs his shoulders and walks to the opposite end of the tent, indifferent. I

resume sorting the mail without thinking anything more of the situation. Sawyer continues reading the missive in silence finally asking with a sneer, "Have you been dwelling on what your *friends* are saying in this, Lupton?" I look up bewildered.

"No, sir, I haven't read it yet," I answer dismayed. I want to ask him if maybe he is dwelling on what they are saying, but after the other day's conversation, I think better of furthering the discussion. With this spiteful comment, I know nothing good can come of it.

"We'll *see about this*, Lupton." I realize now I screwed up by even sullyng my hands with this bleeding cry for justice from the left. Tossing it back to Taylor would have been the prudent thing to do, but my curiosity is always my undoing.

The tension in the orderly room is palpable to put it mildly. Sawyer's comments are troubling, and finding them disturbing that he would even think I would sympathize with the antiwar movement. To be truthful, I think the movement of the antiwar crowd is cowardly. The one thing I learned in the army is when one person slacks off then somebody else has to pick up his slack.

I have the first guard outside the tent tonight and it is still light when I take my rifle and walk across the mud road to the soil bank and dwell on the attitude of my executive officer. I must talk to Jones soon or Sawyer will poison him completely to me. No matter how much initiative I try to show, Napoleon harasses me in the most offensive manner. Night falls for the remainder of my guard when finally I have to go find Brown to relieve me. I have a letter from home and I sit at my desk trying to read it by candle light as a soused Sergeant Azzalino prances up and down before me holding his fifth can of beer. He notices my web gear on my bunk and surmises I did not have that as I stood guard. I try to ignore him in between swigs, but he is incensed I forgot to bring my ammo with me. Surely, an oversight on my part, but normally the VC does not cause problems a mere hour after sunset.

"What made you come back to this, Lupton, living like this," he gestures with his beer can. I look up from my letter to see the vile in his face.

"This isn't so bad, Sarge, I've lived worse than this," I answer him; hoping he will just go away.

"There's gotta another reason, Lupton, this isn't normal." To stultify him I tell him I needed the combat pay. "That can't be it, *Lupton*, nobody in their right mind lives like this for sixty-five dollars more a month." I take my letter, fold it up, and stick it in my shirt pocket. He is too drunk to mollify; there is no sense in trying to read it, and this asshole will not go away.

"Well Sarge, that's the reason." I reply while folding my arms in defiance of his obtrusiveness.

“Bullshit,” he scoffs with derision then staggers a bit in disgust and slithers through the tent flap to make sure Brown has his ammo with him. I pull out my letter and resume reading it. Azzalino disappears into the dark night never to appear until sunrise. I have plenty of time to postulate tossing a hand grenade into the bunker as he slumbered but finally conclude the CID would surmise it was me no matter what I said.

On January 4, The whole battalion is moving up the road to the top of the hill and the line companies move by convoy to occupy a series of bridges to the south of Duc Pho. D Company will conduct field operations in the villages a short distance away from Route 1. Our orderly room and supply will move up the hill too. As the company waits for the trucks, there is a hubbub of activity. The field phone rings, and I answer it to hear Major Bell arranging a conference call between all of the companies. “Is everybody on the line with me?” Ask the Major, yes sirs ensue to assure the integrity of the call. Major Bell makes his announcement but the trucks arrive just as he is doing so. “Did you hear me? A Company?”

“Yes sir,” answers A Company

“B Company.”

“Yes sir.”

“C Company?”

“Yes sir.”

“D Company?”

“Can you say again, sir, I did not hear you. The trucks...”

“You get your company commander on this line right now!” Bells scream over the line. I can almost hear the other companies laughing their asses off at me. Fuck, is there anything that can go right in my life.

“Yes sir, wait one,” I tell him, drop the receiver in disgust, and go look for Captain Jones. I cannot find him. When I pick up the receiver again the major is not there, fuck it I say. I never do know what the message is but it must not be that important because I never see Jones again and the convoy departs within minutes.

I spend the rest of my day taking down our tent and folding it as best I can by myself while the others take load after load of stuff on a jeep trailer up to our new staging area. Afterwards, I cut up and empty the sandbags we used to surround the orderly room and join them.

Sawyer, Azzalino, Doan, and I set up our bunks in one tent while Taylor the Mole and Brown live among the packing boxes in the supply tent next to us. There is just enough room to set up my desk on the left side of the entrance facing the road, Sawyer’s bunk is right behind me, and Doan’s bunk lies past him. Azzalino lives opposite my desk, and my bunk comes after his along the other wall. Doan makes a table from a crate top between the two tent posts, and we rig up a stand where we can make a sink out of our steel pots for shaving in the morning on the

other tent pole. The tents are on the top of a hill so below us past a bunch of trees and scrub bushes are the line bunkers. A thoroughfare runs in front of us to the battalion TOC and the mess hall while the other companies' orderly rooms line the road on both sides. Living in a tent of lifers becomes insufferable.

The next day Sawyer dispatches Doan, me, and The Mole to visit Duc Pho where Doan claims he can scrounge some hard to get supplies from a buddy of his. We take a jeep and trailer for the ride from Bronco the Duc Pho on the short road between the two compounds through the main gain and finally after a few wrong turns we arrive at some unit's supply room. Doan makes a real performance of camaraderie as if this supply sergeant were his dearest friend. His dearest friend acts as if he just met the leach he wishes he never knew. The Sarge is nice enough to offer everybody an ice-cold beer, and as Taylor and I sit on packing crates drinking our brew we watch Doan perform his charade to weasel as much out of the supply sergeant as he can while the weaseling is good. A half an hour later all we leave with is a cooler for the orderly room and a few rolls of target cloth, all to the apparent relief of Doan's best friend.

The next morning as we are shaving, we hear a large explosion in the direction of the Duc Pho compound but think nothing of it. Sawyer dispatches Azzalino, Taylor, and I to the village of Duc Pho to find a Catholic orphanage that does laundry. Duc Pho is off limits to the GIs except for laundry. As we drive through downtown proper we approach a naked little two year old girl standing at the edge of the road and watch with horror as a pissed off water buffalo charges the little tyke. At just the last moment, an ARVN dashes into the road and does jumping jacks in front of her, which distracts the beast causing it to veer away just in time to cause Taylor the Mole to slam on the breaks to keep from hitting it. Azzalino is all upset but we resume our journey and wave to the ARVN as we pass.

At the orphanage, we survey the milieu of the laundry as the nun counts out our clothes and give us a receipt. All of a sudden, we hear yelling and screaming in Vietnamese, and I tighten my grip on my rifle as I look around expecting a patrol of VC to come charging through the washtubs. The yelling is between a pair of scraggly old washerwomen in a verbal shout-fest that looks as if one of them is going to be cold-cocked with an antique cast-iron clothes iron full of hot coals. A nun hustles over to them and scolds the belligerents with a sharp rebuke.

Azzalino surveys the scene and wonders if this is where we can get some "strange stuff" as he cares to phrase it. "I doubt it Sarge. This *is* a Catholic orphanage ya know."

"I know that, Lupton, but if you see a place we can stop, give me a shout," he says as he keeps looking around for a boomboom girl. Because Duc Pho is a dangerous place even in the daytime it is off limits to GIs, so we cannot spot a

whorehouse anywhere. The only things we can buy are candles from the gooks at a roadside stand.

After chow that night, I stop off at battalion and join a poker game in progress. I am 36 dollars up when the landline rings and the clerk hands me the receiver. It is Sergeant Azzalino calling to find out where I am; and then he tells me I need to come back to the tent. When I return, I ask what is up. "We just want you back here," he replies.

"I was up 36 bucks," I tell him but that is of no concern to him though he just wants to keep tabs on me. It is no use to haggle with him though, so I lie down on my bunk and begin reading *The Flimflam Man*. I wish I could flimflam my way out of this situation I am find myself.

The next morning as I walk back from chow I see Lieutenant Sawyer talking to Captain Grenier, the S2 officer. I slow down as I pass them so I can see Grenier handing that antiwar pamphlet back to Sawyer telling him there are plenty of them around, and he should not to worry about it, it is not big thing. I have to feel a pang of smugness mixed with insult that Sawyer would take show stupid thing to somebody else as if he were trying to 'get' me, which is exactly what he was trying to do. His remark in the afternoon cements his vindictiveness about the whole thing. "Lupton, what are you going to do when you get out of the Army?" Sawyer asks em without pretense.

"I guess I'll go to college sir."

"What are you going to study?"

"I don't know, sir, maybe political science," I tell him without much thought. I have never given much thought to what I will do after I am out. I just know I want out of the Army when my time comes.

"I take it you are going to join your radical antiwar friends in rioting," he declares unexpectedly. I do not know what to say to something that absurd. I should have turned and confronted the little prick, but I know where that will go. He is doing this on purpose to goad me into making a strategic mistake, so he will have a reason to court-martial me. Lieutenant Sawyer is a deranged little man I conclude.

"I doubt it very much, lieutenant." His obsession with this pamphlet is simply ridiculous, bizarre even, and not worthy of a reply, so that is what I do, shake my head and say nothing. How this little dickhead concludes I am an antiwar agitator after wavering to return is virtually absurd, and the frightening part about the whole thing is he has the power of life or death over me. I have to find a way to get away from this monster, and quickly too.

That night battalion calls a meeting for all of the XOs, First Sergeants, and clerks. Lieutenant Lipsett steers us into the TOC and makes sure everybody there has a seat and a cold beer; it is a pleasant ambiance compared to the tension in our

tent. He goes over the SOP for the rear echelon covering the disposition of things like burning our orderly room waste paper, declaring that no mail shall be sent to the field, and even destroying old copies of the Stars 'n Stripes newspapers even though the gooks sell them on the streets of Saigon. Afterwards, the clerks have to do a quick typing job and the executive officers go to a briefing by the S3 operations and S2 intelligence officers. I sit waiting for my turn in front of Lieutenant Lipsett's desk. He nonchalantly asks me how things are going in D Company, and I respond with some trepidation that life is difficult for me. He seems a bit dismayed at my response, but I know it is of no use to complain further, especially within earshot of others.

Later that night, Lieutenant Sawyer returns and holds an impromptu discussion with us using a large laminated operational map. He explains that battalion is expanding its AO to include running operations further west of Route 1. D Company will rotate with the other battalion companies responsible for guarding three bridges, #107, #108 and #109 South of LZ Thunder and just north of a tiny firebase overlooking an engineering outfit located at a place called Sa Huynh Port, which the U.S. Army's 159th Transportation Battalion Headquarters maintains. Here the company will run patrolling operations to the west and provide mortar support for the bridges. It will be our job to supply the bridges with ammo and logistics while the firebase provides a mess hall for those occupying the LZ and the three bridges running along Route 1. It really did not mean very much to me at the time, but it would later.



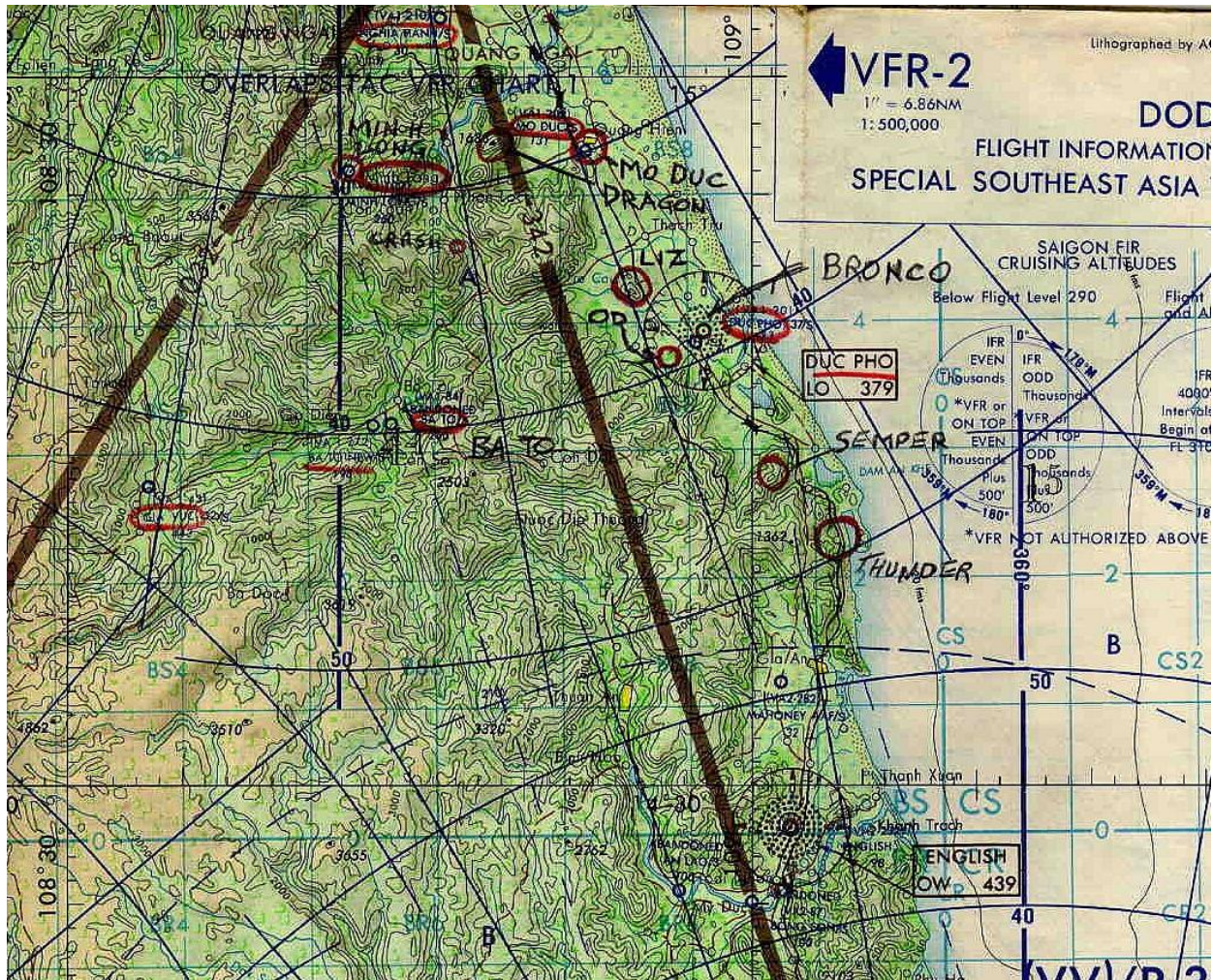


Figure 1 Military map shows Duc Pho and LZ Thunder the eventual headquarters of 1/20 Infantry. Chu Lai lies to the north.



Figure 2 This map shows Route 1, south of LZ Thunder, south to Sa Huynh Port aka LZ Charlie Brown.





**Figure 3 This is a picture of Gilligan's Island at the right of the hardstand where sixty-ton LARCs ferry troops to LZ Charlie Brown; landing on the white sandy beach at the upper right of this picture. LZ Charlie Brown lies farther to the right out of the picture.**



**Figure 4 Greeting sign on the crest of the road (Installed later in 1968). Charlie Brown proper is to the right and my bunker lies just to the right of this road.**