

Maryann

In Early '71 I was assigned to train a new Artillery LNO
He was a Captain in a Captain's slot but I was a rank below
Lacking a tan line or leanness, he was clearly a field "newbie"
My guess is that my experience had trumped his seniority

So I became a teacher again with great subject familiarity
Coordinating the air and artillery in support of the infantry.
Teaching him in a week all I knew of the liaison role
Minimizing friendly casualties was my ultimate goal

He went to the 1st of the 46th on Maryann to coordinate their artillery
And I would stay with 2nd of the 1st and go next to the DMZ
Only later would I come to know the basis for his selection
That he was sent there instead of me, gives pause for introspection.

Maryann's location was quite remote
With steep sides that would challenge even a goat
It was out of range of most offsite artillery support
So the organic defensive fire plan had a very special import.

The base overlooked a critical route to keep the enemy supplied
They would fight very hard to assure they would not be denied.
And although it had been many months since the beast last raised its head.
One would have to be ignorant to lose a sense of dread.

And so it came to pass that a base closure plan was drawn.
The hill would be turned over to the ARVN, which would then become the pawn.
But in any withdrawal action the defensive strength becomes reduced
And clearly this weakened opening the enemy quickly deduced.

The enemy attack plan was well conceived and obviously rehearsed
They came quietly thru the ARVN lines and then pounced in a fiery burst
It appears the ARVNs were complicit and the US forces without a clue
They were able to reap great havoc before at dawn they finally withdrew.

They team sappers were well trained and followed their plan to a "T"
Tear gas, satchel charges, small arms and grenades created a confusing melee.
When they were done the casualty list was actually quite appalling
The 30 KIA and 82 WIA compared to 12 VC was particularly galling.

My pupil made a courageous stand in the Artillery TOC annex.
And although he was severely wounded his mettle was heroic.
For his actions in the battle he received the Silver Star
But as a scapegoat, he was admonished and his career would not go far.

John Henningson 2015