



**Conrad H. Easley, M.D.**  
**Senior Medical Advisor**

There are events in the life of a man that are unforgettable, and going to war must be at the top of the list. This is a portion of my story. I completed Basic Training at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, September 1967. While at Ft. Sam, an entourage of the renowned 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division visited Ft. Sam and informed me they had a job for me. Several weeks later I was at Fort Benning, GA, for Paratrooper Training, - something I had longed to do. After Jump School, I was stationed at Fort Campbell, KY as the Commanding Officer of Bravo Company, 326 Medical Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 101<sup>st</sup> ABN DIV. While there, I worked hard to prepare my Medical Company for the inevitable, the management of mass casualties.

My unit departed Ft. Campbell for the Republic of Vietnam on 12 DEC 67, and my second child, another daughter, was born twelve days later - I did not see her until a year later. The 2<sup>nd</sup> ABN BDE convoyed to Cu Chi for orientation and climate acclimation with the 25<sup>th</sup> INF DIV, but it did not take long for us to start receiving casualties from field combat and incoming rounds. The 12<sup>th</sup> Evacuation Hospital was at Cu Chi, but the lightly wounded and the dead came to our Medical Company Dispensary.

We were sent to Bu Dop and Loc Ninh near the Cambodian border in anticipation of our Brigade being a blocking force for the Ho Chi Minh Trail at its entrance into RVN. That move never took place. There were rumors about a major Offensive by the Communists, and that resulted in our being quickly sent on 27 JAN 68 to the Hue- Phu Bia area at Landing Zone El Paso; replacing the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry that was being moved further north. As all Red Hats know, the Tet Offensive struck with power during the early hours of 31 JAN 68.

At 0330 hours, an explosion awakened me, and moments later the second 82mm Chi Com mortar hit directly on top of our Admission and Diagnosis tent. We had dug in to above the height of an average man, but we were yet to have the time to construct a roof for substantial protection. This resulted in an airburst that hurled shrapnel downward onto the sleeping troops. There were eleven men with me in close proximity, and four paid the ultimate price for their country while six were wounded. My second in command and I did not get a scratch, because between us and the exploding ordnance, was a layer of sandbags.

The Tet Offensive continued unabated for many days. This had the effect of placing my Medical Company for the better part of February 1968, at the

Naval Hospital in Phu Bai. Until 2 MAR 68 we worked with the Navy surgeons and corpsman taking care of a steady stream of wounded from The Battle of Hue and many other bloody engagements.

On 9 APR 68 I was traveling on a Dust Off ship back to LZ Sally when we received an urgent call from field medics with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. They were in close contact with an enemy unit that resulted in an abdominal injury to a paratrooper and a head injury to another. As we swooped in to make the pick-up, we came under intense small arms and automatic weapon fire. This resulted in a quick departure and two gunships coming to pin down the enemy. We circled the battlefield for 15-20 minutes, followed by our returning to the ground for a successful pick-up of the two wounded paratroopers; both troopers survived. There are many more days and stories of the brave men with whom I served as a proud member of the 101<sup>st</sup> ABN but it's time to move to the second half of my tour during what has been described as the "bloodiest year" of the Vietnam War, 1968.

My opportunity to become a Covan with the Red Hats of the Vietnamese Airborne Division became a reality when my predecessor, Dr. George Smith, departed the Advisory Detachment without MACV making a replacement available. I relinquished command of my company on 19 MAY 68, the birthday of Ho Chi Minh; an interesting coincidence. During my first visit to Team 162, I met LTC Harold Dill, the Deputy Senior Advisor. Following a trip Bangkok for R & R, I reported to Advisory Team 162 as the Medical Advisor and met COL Dwight Dickson, the Detachment Senior Advisor.

What I didn't realize at the time was I would be a pawn in a manpower struggle between USARV and MACV. USARV apparently considered a successful conclusion of the war depended upon my continued services as a Medical Company Commander with the 101<sup>st</sup> ABN and MACV needed me as the Senior Medical Advisor with the Vietnamese ABN DIV. This tug of war jerked me back and forth between Team 162 and the 101<sup>st</sup> until the debate was officially finalized 20 AUG 68. Because the 101<sup>st</sup> ABN considered me on loan to the Red Hats until a replacement was available, and because Team 162 placed me on their roster beginning late May, my records "fell through the cracks." I frequently did not receive a timely paycheck, my personnel records were "lost" for some time and I did not receive the complete recognition and military awards from the 101<sup>st</sup> ABN. During these six months with the 101<sup>st</sup> ABN, I learned that war is not GLORY; it is GORY! My personal journal is a depiction of the horror of maiming and killing men, and occasionally women, day after day, and then on into the night.

At Team 162, I met MSG Isaac Patino of San Antonio, TX, the assistant Medical Advisor and he became my friend and "sidekick" for the next six months. He was already well established within the Detachment, and one might say he knew the ropes. He took me on a tour of the Do Vinh Hospital, a facility of 100 beds strictly for the Vietnamese paratroopers. Later that day I was

introduced to my counterpart, LTC Lan, the Airborne Medical Battalion Commander, who gave me another tour of the hospital. I learned there were nine doctors at the hospital, including Bac Si Lan, and there were nine doctors in the field, one with each Infantry Battalion. It did not take long for me to get to know 1LT Minh, an administrative officer at Do Vinh and a close assistant of LTC Lan. That evening was spent with CPT Joe Kinzer, OCS '64, assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> ABN BN, 3<sup>rd</sup> BDE, and soon to depart Team 162. Years later he was destined to wear three stars as a Lieutenant General. We were joined by CPT Wes Taylor of Kingsport, TN, West Point '65, who was assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> ABN BN, 3<sup>rd</sup> BDE. Wes completed his military career as a Brigadier General. Forty-one years later, in retrospect, these two men becoming General officers should surprise no one - they impressed me and many others when they were young officers.

Although two members of the 101<sup>st</sup> and I had received Honorary Vietnamese Jump Wings; that was not satisfactory. Early one morning MSG Patino notified me to grab my gear and get ready to make a jump. Just a couple of hours later, I exited a C-119 at 1,200 feet as the second man in the door behind the only other Covan on the plane, 1LT Joe Kuykendahl. After hitting the ground, I was swarmed by Vietnamese children asking to bundle and carry our parachutes for 20 Piasters – and we were glad to oblige them. The following day I made my second Vietnam jump and my third and final jump with the VN ABN was on 3 JUL 68. On my last jump, I was just behind Marine LTC Allen, who appeared to be startled just before he exited the aircraft and I thought I heard an unusual noise before I followed him. Once we hit the DZ, the Marine told me that just prior to exiting the aircraft; we had received four hostile shots. I am yet to know who was doing the counting, because it definitely was not me! I found myself completely preoccupied trying to reduce the 180 degrees of oscillation the fairly high wind had produced in my T-10 parachute. The landing was the easiest of my three jumps in Vietnam, and with a total of ten, I closed the door on my active paratrooper days.

Following one pleasant Saturday night dinner at the Rex Officer's Club, I was alarmed to find my Japanese Airborne jeep was missing! I would have been served better if my loyal Montagnard driver, Le Chuc, had been in charge of guarding my wheels. Needless to say, vehicle security was a topic of concern within the Detachment. I fully expected to never see my vehicle again, and I was already planning to “commandeer” another jeep when I received inside information that the Vietnamese Police, who were fondly called the “White Mice”, had impounded my jeep. MSG Patino and I went to the USAF motor pool where I got a chain welded to my steering wheel so I could properly secure my vehicle.

The 100 bed Do Vinh Hospital became too small to handle the number of casualties coming from our Airborne Battalions, and an additional sixty beds were added. Patino and I scrounged 12 bottles of champagne for the Dedication Ceremony. Some of the attending dignitaries were MG Minh of the Vietnamese

Air Force, Surgeon General Huan and MG Du Quoc Dong, the CG of the Vietnamese Airborne Division.

The MACV Command Surgeon was BG Hal Jennings, who took personal interest in the Do Vinh Hospital and helped us out. Later, BG Jennings earned 3 stars and became the Surgeon General of the U.S. Army. While we were enjoying the day at Do Vinh, the 8<sup>th</sup> ABN BN was recovering from heavy combat that took place the night of 26 SEP 68, just two kilometers from the Cambodian border. Word reached us that our troopers took 2,000 mortar rounds followed by a massive assault, but our paratroopers held their ground. CPT Pat Canaan took shrapnel in the buttocks, but nothing serious; however my opinion may have been challenged by Pat. My good friend, MAJ Wayne Dill, joined the 8<sup>th</sup> ABN BN shortly after this battle.

Around the Detachment HQ there were frequently activities to occupy us other than work. I especially remember our Covan basketball team. We actually had several practices and became sufficiently fit to play the Vietnamese Airborne Division team. This took place on our outdoor court in front of a large contingent of Vietnamese cheering loudly against us. We had a group of Covans rooting for us, but we were definitely not the most favored team. We were composed of Red Marker McKessy, CPT Jim Stapleton, several NCO Covans, a few others and me. The score was neck and neck to the finish, and as the crowd cheered wildly, the Covans went blissfully down in defeat to the Nhay Du professionals, 45 – 47. Other basketball Covans that come to mind are Jim Redding, Pat Canaan and Bob Hillyer.

Along with some good times, and making friendships for life, there are sobering times that bring a man back to the basics of life and death. One such moment was during October 1968 when the VN paratroopers had been involved in the bloody Battle of Binh Xuyen. We took 77 WIA and 9 KIA. Another incident was the loss of SFC Moore near Tay Ninh on 14 SEP 68. COL Dickson had loaned him to the ARVN Marines because they were short on Covans, and this good soldier gave his life to the triggerman of an AK- 47.

In November I made a trip to Vung Tau to visit the 6<sup>th</sup> ABN BN and the 36<sup>th</sup> Evacuation Hospital. While visiting the Club de Sportif, I saw how the French lived! On 30 NOV 68, a “wild and wooly” Farewell Party was arranged for Jim Stapleton and me, and it was not a disappointment. After I roasted several of my Covan comrades, particularly MAJ Bill Mozey, COL Dickson approached me and said, “Well, there’s no doubt now that you are one of the boys.” He got that right!

I remember a plethora of Covans and my interactions with them. This was an impressive assembly of Officers and NCOs; I consider them the cream of the crop. This is justified by reviewing the careers of those who chose to remain in the military. The leadership heights they achieved are manifested by well over 100 reaching the rank of COLONEL and over 20 becoming General Officers. The NCOs fared just as well with a minimum of 100 getting six stripes ranging

from First Sergeant to Command Sergeant Major. The NCOs are the men who are the true Executive Directors of the United States Army. Every superior Company Commander must have a First Sergeant of the same caliber, or the mission is in jeopardy. A Battalion Advisor / Covan required a top notch NCO by his side to get the job done; I know this from personal experience. First Sergeant Lucas with the 101<sup>st</sup> ABN DIV and Master Sergeant Patino with the VN ABN DIV filled these positions for me, and to them I will be forever grateful.

There are many names of the men with whom I served under the auspices of Team 162 and the Red Hats. I am going to list just a portion of those who are indelibly written, as follows, in a special corner of my mind: Jim Stapleton, John "Lebanese Trip" Martin, Jim "Snake" Collier, Wayne Dill, Don Erbes, Al "the Glass Eater" Fiumano, Mike George, Jim Grimes, Bob Hattler, Joe Kinzer, Bill Knapp, Bill Mozey, Wes Taylor, Isaac Patino, Ty Cobb, Alex Scaglione, Joe Kuykendahl, Pat Coleman, Dick Pond, Mac Stromberg, Jim "Southern Indianan" Redding, Al Champ, Cliff Fouty, Jim Long, Red Marker Jack McKessy, Red Marker Pete "BG to Be" Drahn, Pat Canaan, LTC "Hathaway Replacement" Bomberger and Jim Alexander. These are some of the men, and there are many others, with whom I worked, jumped, ate, laughed, drank, and partied.

There is much left to tell, and some day I plan to complete my story. I departed RVN on 10 DEC 68, and my new duty station was McDonald Army Hospital at Fort Eustis, VA. After release from active duty, I returned to the University of Virginia and completed the last four of my five year post-graduate medical work. I returned to my home in Dalton, GA, and just began my 37<sup>th</sup> year in the private practice of Orthopedic Surgery.

BG(R) David L. Grange, North Georgia College, The Military College of Georgia, Class of 1970, and a Red Hat advisor received the Hall of Fame Award in 2006, the highest alumni award presented by the college and university. In 2000, I had the privilege of receiving the Distinguished Alumnus Award, and in 2007 I was honored, as a member of the Class of 1962, to follow David Grange into the North Georgia College and State University Hall of Fame - I have received no greater recognition. As fate would decree, the date on my Hall of Fame plaque is April 21, 2007, the date thirty two years after President Thieu bitterly resigned and left the country to Premier Tran Van Huong, a man I met ceremonially at the Do Vinh Hospital, and "Big" Minh.

The war in Vietnam continued until April 30, 1975, and I have not been able to forget what I saw. As the years have passed, the tears of grief and regret have flowed more freely. The death of the young in any war is the denial of a life lived. The Duke of Wellington had observed war up close and personal, and his thoughts are succinct. "Take my word for it. If you had seen but one day of war, you would pray to Almighty God that you never see such again." Unfortunately, Plato may have said it best when he stated, "Only the dead know the end of war."