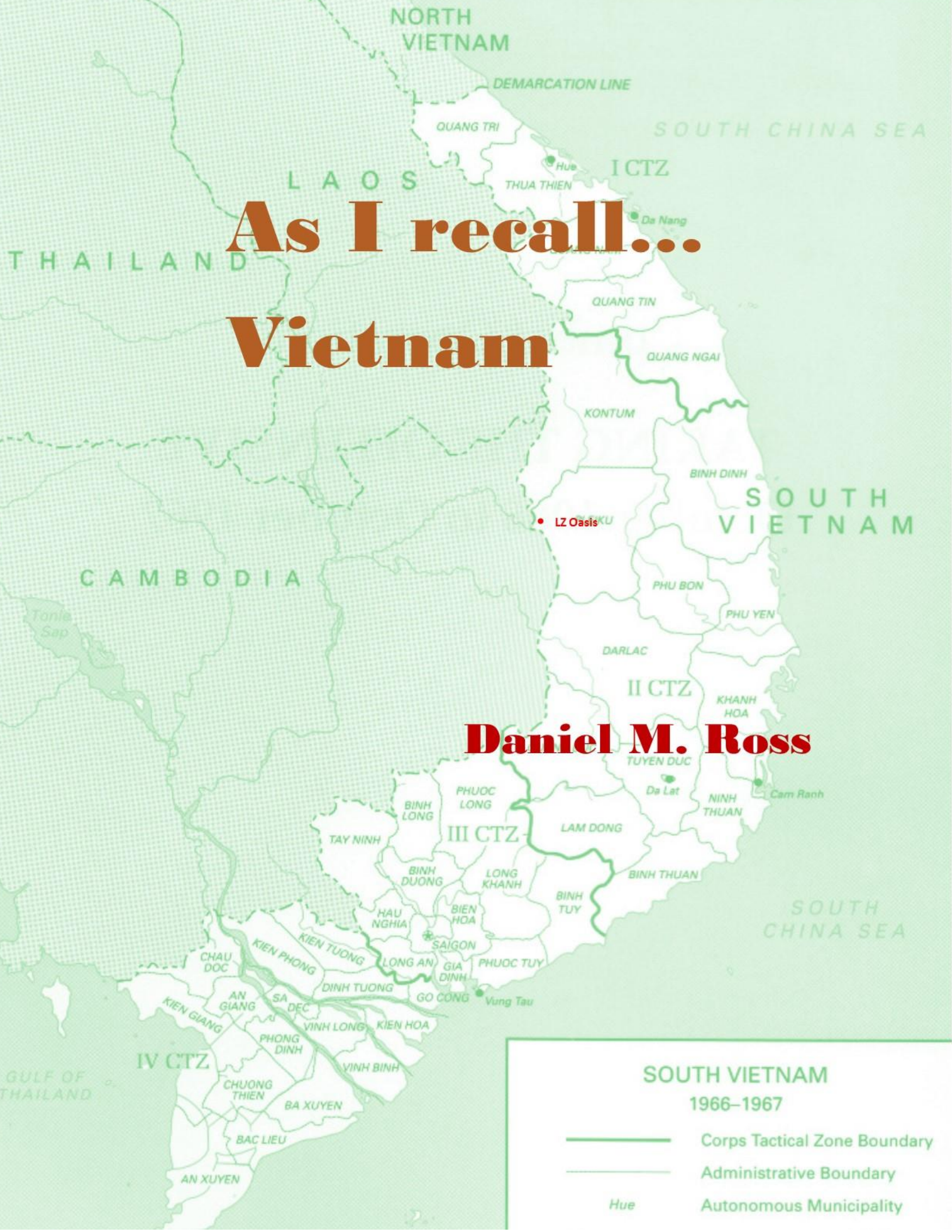


**As I recall...**

**Vietnam**

**Daniel M. Ross**



**SOUTH VIETNAM**  
1966-1967

- Corps Tactical Zone Boundary
- Administrative Boundary
- Hue Autonomous Municipality







## Arriving in Vietnam Pleiku Province—LZ Oasis

Arriving in Vietnam Pleiku Province - Landing Zone Oasis. On September 30, 1970, I received orders to report to Duster Track B122 located at Landing Zone Oasis, Southwest of Pleiku and about 10 miles from the Cambodian Border.

A M-42 Duster was a Twin 40mm Self - Propelled Anti - Aircraft Gun. A crew consisted of 6 men but we usually

operated with 4 men. Prior to this, I had never heard of or seen this type of weaponry and, to be honest, I did not see the manuals until I went to my first reunion. I was trained on the 40mm Duster by the person I was replacing. I had the choice of any position, and I chose to be the gunner.

The shortage of manpower was so great we were shipped to our new units without going through the mandatory in country indoctrination. The majority of the crewmen were finishing their 12-month stint in November. We trained all new arrivals as they came to the unit.

As to how I could be placed onto a piece of weaponry on which I'd never trained, the Army brass had recommended that when a shortage of 16F personnel exists, personnel with a 13A MOS, such as I had, can be trained as air defense crewmen with excellent results.

The Dusters were all Army surplus from World War II and Korea that were shipped in from National Guard bases, one of which was in Mansfield, Ohio. Many of them had been built in my home town at the Cleveland Allison Tank Plant.

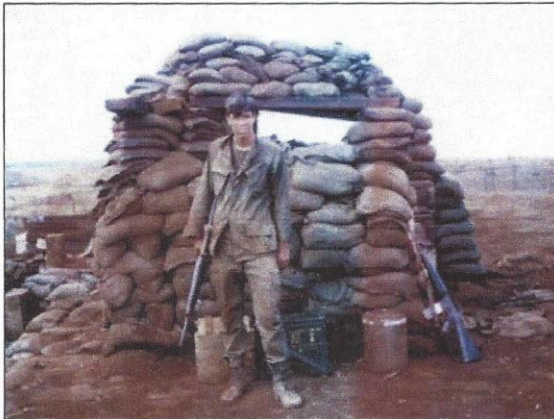


**Track 122 on Bunker Line at Oasis**

In Duster hierarchy, the last man to arrive becomes the loader—a job that provides little protection as the loader is standing out in the open from the waist up. I was the loader for the first 60 days. While training, we also spent a lot of time clearing and burning foliage, burning human waste, doing routine maintenance and nightly guard duty. Our track's hooch was on the perimeter with our bunker mounted on top.

## All hell broke out

On the dark and moonless night of October 29, after a full month of virtually no enemy activity, I was on guard duty. A seemingly quiet night turned quickly into an unholy hell within just a few seconds.



**Track 122 Damaged bunker**

The trip-flares were set off in front of our bunker. I operated the M60 and fired toward the flares. They returned fire with a barrage of B40 rockets, mortars, and live bullets. Explosions were everywhere inside the compound. The enemy had breached the perimeter, and hell had truly broken out. While exchanging gunfire, a B40 rocket hit the left corner of my bunker, damaging it and the M60.

## Facing the enemy

I grabbed my M16 and ran toward the edge. As I was about to jump, I glanced back and saw the flash of an explosion. I flew off the roof and almost landed on a few of my squad members. “What’s happening,” they shouted. “We’re being hit with mortars and the enemy has penetrated our perimeter,” I yelled back. Next I attempted to run toward our Duster, and I spotted two figures on the other side of the road. I paused a second because they were wearing what appeared to be army issue flak jackets. I glanced at Spec. Richard Price who was to my left. He shook his head to indicate they were not ours, so we took aim and let loose with our M16s. I got up and started running toward our Duster. I reached the center of the road with small arms fire landing all around me. I dove to the ground and returned fire. We had effectively stopped those intruders from entering but multiple others were fast approaching and our Duster was between us and the enemy. There was a standoff. We stopped their progress but we couldn’t advance either. I was told some years later that in the corner in which we were penetrated there was an unmanned foxhole.

The NVA, with a superior force both in numbers and weaponry, fired every weapon at their disposal, even directing artillery fire upon us. I sought cover behind an empty 50-gallon drum and continued exchanging gunfire with my M16. The rest of the squad was able to get behind a sandbag wall, a more defensible position. I heard someone yell out for me to get back because I was exposed to enemy fire power. He shouted that when we return fire I was to move. When the firing started, I maneuvered through the shooting to rejoin the squad. Within seconds of jumping behind the sandbags, I heard a loud explosion from the other end of the hooch, and then a voice shouting for help. I immediately entered the interior of our hooch which had been heavily damaged. I moved slowly through the dark and rubble where I found Pvt. Paul Ruhl. He was lying against some debris with what appeared to be a shrapnel wound to his chest. To relieve the tension, I reassured him that I was there to help. I ripped open the front of his uniform to give him some relief and I noticed a piece of scrap metal about the size of a silver dollar burned into his chest. At this point I was operating on pure adrenaline rush, which drove me through the rest of the night.



**Pfc. Paul Ruhl**

## Dealing with the wounded



**Destroyed bunker**

Private Murphy entered the area and reported that he heard someone in the next bunker shouting for help. Without hesitation, I grabbed my M16, ran past Murphy, and told him to keep an eye on Ruhl. Then I passed through the entrance and never stopped until I reached the next bunker. At first glance of the bunker, I didn't know what to think. It was completely collapsed. How could anyone have survived? I knew where the entrance to the bunker should have been, so I went to that area and heard a voice. I cleared debris from the entrance, reached in, grabbed hold of someone, and pulled him out. Taking him by his shoulders, I started back to my hooch while keeping low to avoid the intense heavy explosions and gunfire.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a shadow between us and the wire. I stopped and wrapped my body around the wounded man and closed my eyes. We waited for what seemed like a lifetime, but when nothing happened, we moved on.

When I reached my hooch, I laid him down and made him as comfortable as possible. I realized then that his legs were missing from just above his knees. He was not bleeding much and the wounds appeared to have cauterized themselves. He was conscious and seemed relaxed. I calmly asked if there was something he needed, and he asked for a cigarette. Private Murphy provided one. I gently told him I was going for help and that I would be right back.



I got up and walked to the entrance. It was very dark. All I could see and hear was heavy weapon fire and explosions everywhere—and I mean *everywhere*. A look toward the bunker line showed that they were taking heavy damage.

These two soldiers and all of the wounded needed swift medical attention. I had only arrived at Oasis one month prior. I knew where the field office was, but had only been there during the day. Swift action needed to be taken, so without hesitation, I made my way towards where I recalled the field office was located.

The enemy was pounding us with everything they had, but I made it. Outside, there was a captain and a sergeant that had just killed two sappers who had tried to breach the Command Center. I needed the medic and informed the captain, but he replied, “The medic is dead.”



**Damage around command bunker**

I recall that it seemed to me that both the captain and the sergeant were visibly shaken. If the two enemy combatants had cut our communication, the site was considered overrun. The base would be destroyed along with everyone in it. I told the captain that the bunker line had taken a heavy hit and that there were numerous casualties. He asked what portion and I said, “There is no bunker line anymore.” He paused, as if in disbelief, then turned to the sergeant and told him to get two men and a stretcher to assist me.

We were told to bring the wounded to a staging area for helicopter evacuation. For the rest of the night, while amidst the constant explosions and continual sightings of shadowy figures moving about, we retrieved the wounded and the dead. It was a gruesome and heartbreaking duty going to the bunkers, assessing, retrieving the wounded, and leaving the dead until later.

During the evacuation, it was still dark so we assisted the landing of the helicopters. Each time a helicopter would come in, we formed a circle big enough for them to land, as we stood with our arms outstretched in the air holding flares. After the wounded were evacuated, we gathered the dead.

The next morning, Captain Zophy and Master Sergeant Worlds arrived by jeep. After they were given a report from our base Captain and our squad leaders, I was asked to report. I was winding down; I was tired and the night seemed like a blur. I gave them a report as best I could, which wasn't much. To this day, I know what I did and what went on, but back then it seemed so surreal. The battle lasted five hours. Despite the enemy's superior forces and weaponry and completely overrunning our compound, we held our ground. NVA losses were sizeable.



**Captain Zophy**

As for the rest of the squad, I can't recall what happened with them since I didn't meet up with them until dawn and everything had calmed down.

Captain Zophy and Sergeant Worlds both told me that I would be recommended for the Silver Star. Even though I didn't receive an award, I received something that a medal could never match. I knew in my heart that I had been able to save several lives. I was personally thanked for saving the lives of their friends by every C/6/14<sup>th</sup> personnel that I ran into or who sought me out. I can't pin that memory on my chest, but I proudly wear it on my heart.

Standard Form 1034 * (Last issue 1034-113) 1034-113		PUBLIC VOUCHER FOR PURCHASES AND SERVICES OTHER THAN PERSONAL		VOUCHER NO. 650822	
DEPARTMENT, BUREAU OR ESTABLISHMENT AND LOCATION HEADQUARTERS I FIELD FORCE VIETNAM OFFICE OF THE STAFF JUDGE ADVOCATE APO SAN FRANCISCO 96350		DATE VOUCHER PREPARED 11 December 1970	PAID BY		
SJA FILE NO: 70-4135 PAY CHECK TO: FC Daniel M. Rosa		CONTRACT NUMBER AND DATE	REGISTRATION NUMBER AND DATE		
PAYEE'S NAME AND ADDRESS Btry B, 4th Bn, 60th Arty APO SF 96318		DATE INVOICE RECEIVED			
DISCOUNT TERMS		PAYEE'S ACCOUNT NUMBER			
SHIPPED FROM TO WEIGHT		GOVERNMENT B.I. NUMBER			
NUMBER AND DATE OF ORDER	DATE OF DELIVERY OF SERVICE	ARTICLES OF SERVICES <i>(These descriptions give number of contracts in Federal supply catalog and their military or general services)</i>	QUANTITY	UNIT PRICE COST PER	AMOUNT
		In full settlement of the amount allowed by the Secretary of the Army or an officer duly designated for such purpose, under authority of 31 USC 241 and Chapter 11, AB 27-40 upon the claim of the above named claimant for property lost, damaged, destroyed, captured, or abandoned in the service.			\$80.00
TOTAL \$80.00					
PAYMENT APPROVED FOR		EXCHANGE RATE	DIFFERENCES		
PARTIAL \$					
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PROGRESS TITLE		Amount verified, correct for \$80.00			
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I warrant to authority vested in me, I certify that this voucher is correct and proper for payment		WILLIAM J. HEBEL, Maj, JADC Claims Judge Advocate			
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Our hooch was heavily damaged; we were issued Payment Vouchers for our personal property. I received the max allowed by law, which was \$80.00.

There was a question asked by a general that still bothers me to this day. The morning after, the general flew over Oasis and wanted the body count. I didn't understand, but someone explained that he wanted to know the number of enemy killed. I asked, "What about ours?" He just shrugged his shoulders. It made me feel that our lives didn't matter. Our deaths didn't even rate a number count.

# PICTURES FROM THE MORNING AFTER

Pictures by Robert Byrne



LZ Oasis Track 122



What left of the Motor Pool



Sachal charge throw at 122 hooch



Damaged chow truck



Another damaged truck



8" Gun hit by mortar rounds





**Guard duty morning after**



**Searching for body parts**



**Bunker hit by mortar**



**Destruction everywhere**



**Unbelievable Devastation**



**Most important Building on Base**



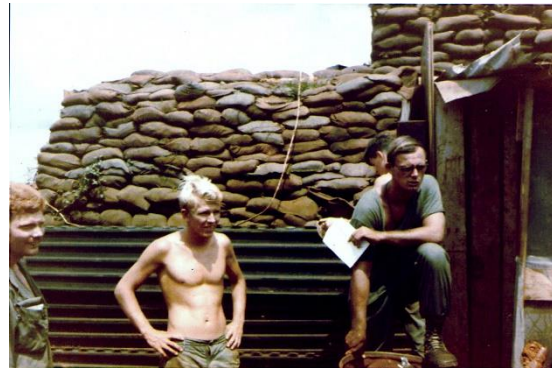
**175 Gun in Parapet**



**Found several trip flares in the wire were tied**

Looking over the pictures I never realized the extent of the damage that was inflicted upon the base. It's a miracle that I survived the battle as we rapidly moved about the base. To this day, I'm still haunted by flashing shadows.

There was a detailed map of all the building locations found on one of the dead NVA. They found the locations by following the footsteps that someone paced off during the day. They were marked off according to priority.



**Spc. Murphy Sgt. Byrne SSG.Yeager**

Ron Almon went to NCOCS class at Fort Bliss with SSG Larry Yarger and SGT. Robert Byrne at the time he was stationed at LZ Blackhawk. Ron wrote a letter and the following is what he had to say about the battle for Oasis.

“I was stationed at LZ Blackhawk that day and was listening to the radio as the battle started and continued thru the event. I could see gunships working in the area from Blackhawk. There was a constant stream of tracers that filled the sky. It was a moonless night as you wrote about. I can also verify the devastation that occurred that night. Late that night or very early the next morning I received a radio message from Capt. Zophy ordering me to get to Artillery Hill the first thing in the morning. Having no idea what this was about, I caught the first chopper out of Blackhawk and as soon as I arrived on Artillery Hill was greeted by Capt. Zophy and was told he wanted me to drive him and Sargent Major Worlds to Oasis. We rode in a convoy to Oasis where, upon arrival, we immediately



went to both Duster placements to survey the damage and check on all the crew members. I remember standing next to one of the artillery bunkers and saw a dog run into the bunker and in a couple of minutes it came out with part of a human leg or foot. I knew then the horrors that you all went through that night. I will never forget the events that took place that day.”



**Quad 50s used mostly for convoy escort**

A few years ago, at our annual reunion, I met a man who served with the two Quad 50s who had taken over our squad's perimeter duty after our departure from LZ Oasis. He came over and vigorously shook my hand. He said that up until that point he always thought that there had been no survivors from our squad because of the unbelievable devastation his crew saw.

At our reunion in Nashville, E6 Larry Yeager (Shake) was attending for the first time. Larry was our Platoon Leader, but we didn't serve together long and didn't know each other that well. While talking about Oasis, I began telling about assisting an artillery soldier from C/6/14 (the soldier with the missing legs—who I have thought about every day since then). Before I could continue, Larry mentioned that he heard a story about a Duster soldier who went to the aid of an artillery soldier while he was wounded. Larry didn't know it was me until I related my story and the two stories matched!

That night, I was able to aid many soldiers, but rescuing that one soldier was much more personal. I interacted with him more and, as mentioned above, I've thought about him daily, doubting but wondering if he could have survived with the extent of his wounds. Yeager informed me that not only had he survived, but that he is married and has three children.

There hasn't been a day that I haven't thought about this soldier, and it often brings me to tears. I wounded, maimed and killed many North Vietnam Army soldiers while servicing in Vietnam and I find myself questioning whether I was justified. I have been seeking closure for what I did in Vietnam knowing that it was my job to do whatever possible to defend the lives of the soldiers under our protection. If I could meet with him, maybe this would bring about the closure that I seek.