



## On the Cambodian Border

by Richard Shand

Firebase Fort Defiance, February 1970

*In 1967, the area between An Loc and the Cambodian border to the east was the scene of an extensive U.S. military operation called Junction City. More than two years later our section of two [Dusters](#), along with the 11th Armored Cav and artillery, comprised the first regular unit into the area since the operation. On the way in through the rubber plantations, we saw evidence of the fierce fighting - burnt out hulks of M-48 tanks and the wreck of a Hercules cargo plane. Our job, as I was to realize later, was to help prepare the way for the incursion into Cambodia in April.*

I finally have some spare time to send off another letter. Right at the moment I am sitting on the barrels at a crossroads in the middle of tangled jungle near Cambodia. We are supporting a survey team which is fixing the coordinates for a new fire support base in this area. Home is a fire support base named Fort Defiance which is still in the last stages of completion. The guns have been dug in but the engineers haven't pushed up a berm yet and are blowing up the big trees (*mainly giant bamboo*) and burning the undergrowth around the camp.



After a year in country, I am the old man as I shepherd a green crew towards Cambodia.

At night, Fort Defiance is surrounded by a ring of fire and glowing embers sending up a thick pall of smoke. The fire frequently sets off tear gas canisters around the camp to make the smog even more unbearable. I don't think LA even comes close as far as air pollution is concerned. The smog has a good side effect, however, for it keeps away the tigers, snakes, vicious monkeys and hordes of insects. No villagers live within scores of miles from the area because it is so wild and impenetrable. Occasionally I will see a company of Montagnards (*with their Special Forces advisors*) humping along the road but that is all. We were overjoyed to leave Concorde to come to this place as it is so far away and isolated our own people do not come around to bother us. The morale is very high.

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At this point the account ends. The NVA dropped a couple of mortar rounds near one of the civilian surveyors who had to run for his life to the other Duster. (We thought it was funny as hell.) Only a few years ago I read *A Viet Cong Memoir*, an autobiography by Truong Nhu Tang, the former VC Minister of Justice. In it he reveals the location of COSVN (Central Office of South Vietnam), the secret jungle headquarters of the Viet Cong. It was inside the Cambodian border, only a few clicks (kms) northwest of the area we were operating in.

[Back to Vietnam Memoirs](#)