

**NOT UNNATURALLY** by Bryant E. Middleton

517 Mooney Road NW., FT WALTON BCH, FL 32547-1855

It was the summer of 1967, and I was fighting Charlie's war and really putting a hurt on them. The 4th Division was also fighting the VC and the NVA in short engagements through out the Central Highlands. The major difference was we were 42 Montagnards and one (not so wise) Army NCO advisor. Let me explain advisor: fire fights, just another grunt trying to stay alive; resupply expert, knowing how to use the radio and requesting the right items, medevac, and artillery support FO. No glory, no medals, no one to talk to on those lonely nights when I was afraid, and no one to tell me if I were doing the right thing. The NVA were fighting a war we had not been trained to fight as this was not Europe but it sure as hell was the jungle. The division deployed its immense firepower against the NVA and VIETCONG only to find that they had never been where we thought they were of had vanished back into the mountains leaving nothing. It was about this time that the CIA had their great plan and made an offer to General Peers to which he just could not say no. He was offered a special and different type of fighting organization. One which knew VC and his NVA northern friends as each one had been a VC in the past. General Peers liked the idea but who would he send with them? Here is where Major Blanchard came into play as he was the Division LRRP Commander. So this was the beginning of Cowboy-4-Juliet or what was more commonly known in the division staff as the "RATS."

Lieutenant Fairchild, our detachment executive officer, was searching for an NCO to deploy with the RATS. It is funny how the first three letters of LIEutenant should always be the warning sign. He asked if I would give up my recon team to become, now get this, a special advisor for a CIA recon team? I was not his first choice. However, I was the fool who did go with the RATS. I have asked myself a thousand times over and over was I just too young or stupid to know better. By now you already know the answer. The RATS were a highly skilled, strongly motivated (former VC) Montagnard tribesmen whose life had little changed from the Bronze Age. The Montagnard tribesmen's hatred for the VC and NVA was well known, as they had fought with the French Foreign Legion against the Vietminh in 1952 and were still fighting anyone who came to the mountains of their home territory. When you are 20 years of age and told that you would be working for the CIA and a "Special" recon unit, something deep inside you says, "Say, No!" However, at 20 who makes good decisions? So, I said, "Yes" and that started my fighting with Cowboy-4-Juliet and began some of the worst nightmares that I still have to this day. It seems that we were deployed to anyplace the Army did not want to send troops, at least not less than battalion size. But one lonely Army NCO was just fine! We became a specialized deep recon unit mostly in places where I had to return the Maps upon completion of the mission. We were trail snatchers and village visitors late at night finding unfriendly and sometimes just down right rude soldiers who were awakened from a sound sleep. We were getting the type of results the 4th Division wanted but sometimes they did not like the means by which we obtained them.

We were obtaining massive amounts of enemy equipment, food supplies, medical, and many bodies (hence my nightmares). Our actions were really hurting the VC/NVA and it was beginning to show in our area of operation. However, we did not know how badly until a Vietcong tracker stumbled into our rest area one afternoon and was taken prisoner. I finished eating my bag of rice and what looked like "minnows" while they "talked" to our new found friend. My Montagnards began questioning him and after only a brief point in time he wanted to talk to me. The Montagnards' way of making men/women talk was brief, special and practical. Most of the time I did not approve of their means, but when I was briefed by the boys of the CIA/G2, rule number one was, "Stay out of briefings between the Montagnards until rule number two came about; the prisoner wanted to speak with me without playing games." We learned that we were the most sought after persons in this area. We were number one on Charlies' "Hit Parade" and I was one of the most sought after persons in this area. I did not speak much of the Montagnard dialect, however, the looks from my people said it all. We were in deep trouble and they wanted to move out and very soon. Our new friend indicated that the VC/NVA had about two hundred trail watchers looking for us. The word was they wanted me alive. I knew what that meant and I did not want to be on the receiving end of one of their interrogations. I made contact with our radio relay station and passed the information we had and requested extraction. About twenty minutes later word came back, a chopper was on its way for the prisoner but we were to carry on with our mission.

The Intel boys back in their warm tent with hot chow wanted us to "CM" (Continue Mission). The chopper arrived in about thirty minutes for our new found friend and boy was he thankful. Thankful that he did not have to remain with us any longer. Most of the chopper guys knew us and tried taking care of us when permitted. We always got our rice and fish, squid and some kind of meat that none of us could eat. They always bought ammo and sometimes, a case of beer and cokes. (THANKS GUYS). To this day I always remember the chopper boys with a smile. So we saddled up and moved out knowing it would be a long time before we saw Catecka fire base. The Central Highlands is a beautiful area, except when you are being hunted and are carrying 80 pounds on your back. The dominant terrain features were the Chu Pong Massif rising over 2,000 feet. It is an area of mountains, deep valleys, ridges that just drop off to nowhere and ravines which stretched west into Cambodia. Cowboy-4-Juliet was going to ground and we were going to hide like the RATS that we were. So we vanished. If there was one thing I had learned from my brave loyal Montagnard friends, it was the lesson of death. Death waits for you to make just one mistake and then you pay with your blood pouring into the dirt around you. So we moved out with more ammo, a case of warm beer and hot cokes. We vanished into the wet and cold mountains to wait until we could return and put another hurt on the VC/NVA in a way he understood. You see we were fighting their war and they did not like it because we were winning. No one remembers Cowboy-4-Juliet today or asks what ever happened to those loyal Montagnards and what we fought for and won. However, I will never forget

how these so called savages changed my life forever. I often wonder where they are today and what stories they tell their children about that damn fool American from the 4th Division who gave his heart to a people and his loyalty to his Division in 1967 and did not even get a thank you, job well done. Major Blanchard had promised all departing LRRP's that we would be taken care of, however, he got his ticket punched and we enlisted men were forgotten. Later, when I received my commission, I vowed to always take care of my troops first. I was not going to forget the lesson Major Blanchard had taught us departing LRRP'S under his command.

Cowboy-4-Juliet, Cpt. Bryant E. Middleton

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **A SPECIAL 4TH DIVISION FAMILY**

Major General Warren D. Hodges, Retired, 3104 Rolling Green Drive, Churchville, MD 21028 has written to Roger in a letter dated 12 March 1997 - "Just thought you would be interested in knowing that a third generation of my family is now serving with the 4th Division.

As you know I served as Commander of the Second Brigade and Division Chief of Staff in 1967-1968. My son, Captain Richard Hodges served with Co A, 69th Armor Battalion and 704th Maintenance Battalion in 1969-1970. My grandson, Captain John Strange is now serving in Headquarters, 2d Brigade at Fort Hood.

I regret that I have not been able to be more active in the Association but I have been having a relatively serious problem with my back and have recently undergone special surgery to try and alleviate the problem.

Best Wishes and Good Luck to one and all.

Sincerely,

**Warren D. Hodges"**

\*\*\*\*\*



Fred R. Tannery, 4th Signal Co shaking hands with Alphonse M. D'Amato, U.S. Senator, New York State at the half-size Vietnam Wall, Bay Ridge NY area display for Memorial Day 1996. (Photo by Fred R. Tannery)