

My tour in Vietnam was 1969-1970. I was with the CoB, 1/7 Marine. 1st Marine Division. I was in the bush for the majority of that tour. Private when I got to Vietnam and a Sgt E-5 when I left Vietnam. All the years since 1970 I've been mentally living in Vietnam. I am learning to live with PTSD.

ONE DAY CLOSER TO THE WORLD and WAKE-UP!!!!

by William (Bill) Hammond

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One Day
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William (Bill) Hammond

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMENTS FROM THE AUTHOR	v
THE BUSH.....	1
PFC K.....	5
JERRY.....	9
BIG BUG.....	11
BLOOPER TROOPER.....	13
FIRST TIME AT POINT	17
BUDDAH HOOCH.....	21
A HELPING HAND.....	23
ROGER	25
HAPPY NEW YEAR'S.....	27
A SWIM	29
GRUNTIN	31
THE BIG ONE	33
THE GOOD THIEF.....	35
SELF-INFLICTED.....	37
SPEEDY—BIG OP 2.....	39
USS REPOSE.....	43
LITTLE TOM.....	47
ICE CREAM	51
WHITMORE	53
KILLER TEAMS	55
PLATOON PIMP??.....	57

William (Bill) Hammond

ANOTHER DAY IN NAM	59
DYSENTERY	63
MANUEL	65
GRAMPS	69
RELOCATION OP	73
WATER BUFFALO	75
MONTANA	79
SEARCH AND DESTROY	81
DEAD EYE	83
RATS	87
THE PERFECT PICTURE	89
A JOKE	91
NVA CHICKEN ??	93
3rd PLATOON	95
3 rd AGAIN	97
FIREBASE ROSS	99
BOOBY TRAP	101
THE BIG BOOBY	105
UNSCHEDULED TRUCE	107
AWARD OF ART	109
TOM	111
ODDS AND ENDS	117
GLOSSARY	119

THE BUSH

In July 1969, I arrived in Vietnam and was assigned to Bravo Company 1/7 in the Arizona territory. On my second day in the Bush we met up with Delta & Charlie Companies. That night our squad was put on LP (Listening Post). For some reason that I'm not sure about, they pulled us back to the perimeter at midnight and put another squad on that LP. At about 0300 (3:00 a.m.) the NVA hit. The squad that had replaced us was wiped out, all but one, he was WIA (wounded in action), his buddy who was KIA (killed in action) fell on top of him and in death more or less saved his friend's life.

Meanwhile we were being hit hard and I got my first confirm. Someone was hit in the CP (Command Post) and called for the Corpsman up, our squad leader whose last name was Coreman, thought they were calling our squad to the CP, so he pulled us off the line. When the misunderstanding was straightened out, the Lieutenant hollered at us to get back to our positions. As we were moving back, I saw a person running with a rifle, he aimed at us and started shooting. I looked to either side of me and noticed no one was there but me. I looked back and he was down on one knee aiming at me and shooting. I started shooting back, although my sights were on him, I couldn't seem to hit him. I kept thinking to myself, "I know this rifle is on, what's the matter." I could feel the adrenalin cutting loose and a fear that made me want to run. I kept standing there thinking "I got to get him." So, I kept shooting and he finally fell over backwards.

After daybreak the Cobras came over the hill and opened fire. They about scared the hell out of me, I was sure glad they were on our side. After the Cobras did their work Bravo Company was to sweep the immediate area. There was an NVA officer WIA in a bomb crater. He had a pistol and kept diving under the water and coming back up. I pulled up on the back of his head but couldn't shoot, then he went back under water and someone threw a frag into the crater. The shock of it brought him to the surface and several grunts opened up on him. We swept on capturing a couple WIAs for interrogation, one had been hit between his knee and ankle somewhere, I'm not sure where, all that was left was the knee and three little strips of skin holding the foot to it. All signs of meat and bone were gone. There was a good number of KIA NVA. Then we came to my confirm. I had hit him dead center just above the eyes. His face was flat with everything gone from just in front of the ears. His brain was just a little way from the top of his head, it looked unhurt..... nice and pink. No other part of the back of his head was to be found. I was told to grab hold of him and help search him, but I had to walk away. It took every bit of will power I could muster to keep my guts where they belonged. I didn't want anyone to think the new guy wouldn't hold up his end and I kept thinking him or me, him or me.

Charlie Company then took up the sweep of the outer perimeter. Out by the tree line there were Medevac choppers coming and going real steady. I could see Charlie Company on-line sweeping towards the tree line, and then I could hear a volley of small arms fire. I could see several grunts fall to the ground, Charlie Company with the Marine Corps superior firepower opened up and then I could really hear some shooting going on. I saw the Corpsman running from wounded to wounded as Charlie Company continued to sweep and the

choppers flew in to Medevac the dead and wounded. I sat and watched and wondered how anyone ever went home.

We rested the next day then started to sweep towards the river. Bravo Company had the left flank, we didn't hit too much resistance, but Delta & Charlie Companies did. Colonel Dowd, our Six, was KIA. We set up at the river edge under sniper fire. A Cobra flew over and fired a rocket that landed about 10 feet behind me. It was loud to say the least, no one was hurt unless, that is, a couple NVA laughed themselves to death. That night a machine gun opened up on us, so I started shooting back, walking my tracers into his muzzle flash. It seemed like forever and I kept thinking to myself, "why isn't anybody else shooting," but I took him out. Just then someone hollered, "Fire in the hole!" An NVA threw a chicon at me, at the time I didn't know so I started to shoot at his silhouette. I saw a couple of tracers go through him, and then it felt like someone hit me in the face with a board. I landed on my butt in the fighting hole (Marines don't have fox holes those are for hiding). Then all hell broke out again, part of Bravo and Charlie Companies caught the NVA trying to slip across the river. Old Ho got his ass beat bad that night.

The next morning, we made a sweep, the NVA that I shot wasn't quite dead; I'm glad a Salt was there to check him because he booby trapped himself and blew pieces of himself all over us. The Salt knew enough to be watching, and when he heard the spoon pop on the frag, he rolled the NVA back over it, which kept everyone from getting hurt. I learned a good lesson that day, 'Old NVA, he plays for keeps.' That was day six in the Bush for me; I had many more fun filled experiences over the next 359 days in Nam. I lost the best friends I ever had. I was WIA a couple of times, but the most I was ever scared was when they took my gun away and sent me home.

William (Bill) Hammond

By the way I was still too young to drink in a bar when I got home. I had to find a buyer. Life is a bitch. Have a beer on me.

One day closer to the world and Wake-up.

GRAMPS

There was a man in our outfit who was an M60 gunner that we all called Gramps. His number came up at age 25, the limit for draft age back then. Rather than be drafted into the Army he enlisted in the Corps. Now Gramps was one of those good old boys you liked at your back, he would be there. He was 26 and our old man.

One night we were out on ambush, Gramps and the gun position was off to my right rear. Things were pretty quiet; all were getting sort of comfortable when I heard a sound of an excited rustling noise coming from the direction of Gramps position. I started to turn and stand when all hell broke loose. There was an explosion. I felt a pretty good slap in the face. I could see a VC running away in the dark, I pulled up to shoot, but a grunt in the gun position was flopping around like a chicken does when you cut its head off. (If you have never seen a chicken flop around with its head cut off, I'm not advising you to experiment. They jump around a lot). I was afraid I might hit him, so I hesitated and then the VC was gone. Larra, the M79 man, started putting up rounds of illumination. The radio man was in touch with the CP (control post) and of course our trusty Corpsman, Doc Andy, was on the wounded, a well-oiled machine. I grabbed the man that was flopping around and got him to hold still so I could look him over. He was a new guy that I hadn't even had time to get to know. He was crying and saying, "I don't want to die," over and over again. I couldn't see much wrong with him, all I could find was a little bit of shrapnel in his neck.

I told him to calm down, that he was going to be OK and I wrapped his wound telling him over and over that he was OK. I could tell he was still scared but Doc hollered at me to come and help with Gramps. I went over and Doc said, "Hold his head together while I bandage him." I took his head in my hands and held it in shape. I could feel his head trying to slip through my fingers. He had an eye blown out, a hole in his neck and some pretty bad chest wounds. He was conscious and kept saying my name and asking me to pray for him. The Doc did all he could and then the chopper arrived. We carried Gramps to the chopper and handed him over to the crew. The Corpsman on board took Gramps head out of my hands and off they went. I asked Doc Andy what chance he had, and Doc told me he didn't think Gramps would make it to the rear. We were pulled back to the perimeter and everyone was divided up on the line.

In the wee hours before daylight we were hit again. Thanks to the black market the VC and NVA had more American-made frags than we did. They snuck up close to the lines and commenced throwing frags at us. There were frags going off everywhere. I was woke up very rudely by one of the first ones going off near the top of my head and the feeling that someone had just kicked me in the head. Just as soon as it started, it stopped. I don't know how many more were Medevacked, but there were quite a few. That next day we had to move into position to sweep.

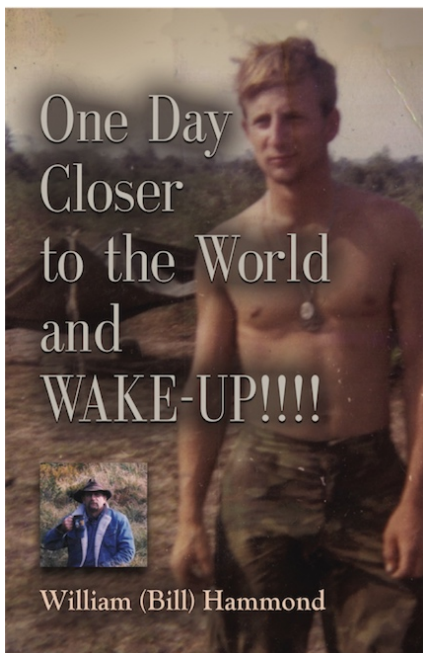
I think Charlie Company was blocking for us that day. It was an uneventful day, but that night I noticed that my left eye was swelling shut. I'm left-handed so it was my shooting eye. I went to the Corpsman and he said that I had been wounded, we got to looking and I had quite a few holes in me. First a chopper ride to Ross that evening, to the Doc the next day and back to the

bush that night. They told me, "It's only an eye," and I could still see through the swelling, so no skate time for this fool.

A couple days later we got word that the kid with the wound to the neck had died of shock on the chopper. To this day it bothers me that I didn't say or do the right thing to calm him down. As for Gramps, we didn't hear anything about him for a little over a month, then one of the boys got a letter from Gramp's sister. She said that Gramps had lost an eye, that his head was full of wire stitches and that he had been paralyzed, I think on his right side. She said that he was recovering quite fast and that he was able to walk around with a cane. Only thing different was that he seemed to cuss a whole lot more than he used to. I don't think anyone told her that that was his Marine Corps training kicking in. I never knew his real name but was proud to know him and I truly hope he is doing well.

Here's to you Gramps.

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