

THE TOILET BOWL

It was probably in late April or early May '70 when the battalion (1st Battalion 50th Infantry [Mechanized], Task Force South) was ordered to conduct an operation out of LZ Betty. I was assigned A Co as Platoon Leader-1st Platoon. We were given the mission of conducting Search and Destroy operations in a section of the region called "the Toilet Bowl." It got this name because it consisted of a ring of mountains that formed a sort of circle that was open on one side and was a bit elongated. On a topographic map, the birds-eye view of the area it looked a little like the seat you find on a public restroom toilet bowl. This 'toilet seat' encircled a valley that was almost entirely composed of rice paddies, so that, from the air, the bowl also appeared to have water in it.

The officers of the battalion were called to battalion headquarters to get a warning order for the mission. While we were there the Battalion Commander announced that I had been promoted to 1st LT. He then decided that the operation needed a name, so he said he was going to call it "Operation Page" since I was newly promoted. After the essential elements of the mission were outlined the CO told us he had arranged for choppers to carry us out to fly over the area for aerial reconnaissance. When we all got to the airstrip the aviation unit had changed the number of aircraft available and there was not enough room for everyone. There happened to be an Air Force Lieutenant among the group who was going to be flying his assigned fixed-wing aircraft, a Cessna Skymaster, which he used in his capacity as a Forward Air Controller. He volunteered to take one person along with him, and I was designated to be the one.

I climbed aboard the plane with the LT and we got acquainted while taking off. Because his plane was a fixed-wing craft that meant that we could not conduct the reconnaissance with the slower Hueys, thus we got to the area long before they did and flew over it several times and left.



We did not want to spend too much time there and alert the VC that something was about to happen. The LT still had time left on his flight plan so he decided to do a little sight-seeing and perhaps a little showing off.

He started putting the plane through some of its paces. At one point he even fired off a marking rocket at nothing in particular, just to show me how they worked. Eventually, my stomach started getting a little queasy and I asked him to ease off. He said he just wanted to show me one more thing-and then he did some kind of loop. As we came around and leveled off I felt my lunch coming up. I had no airsick bag so I grabbed my cap and filled it up.

Now I had another problem. Here I sat, two-thousand feet up in the air, with a fatigue cap full of that day's breakfast; and it was beginning to drip. I started to open the window to get rid of it when the LT shouted, "No, wait. If you throw it out now it will blow back in on us." So I stopped and he said, "Here, let me put the plane into a slip." Then he did some piloting things and suddenly I realized that the plane, instead of going straight forward, was sort of crabbing sideways. The he said "OK, now toss it." I opened the window and tossed the cap and its contents out. Because we were going very slowly now, I watched my little 'package' glide away from us and then fall down toward the ground until it was so small it disappeared.

To this day I imagine some unsuspecting Vietnamese farmer quietly walking through the woods and suddenly, out of nowhere, "SPLAT!" And there he stands, looking at a stinking, dripping US Army fatigue cap, reeking of bile and half-digested food. What do you suppose may have gone thought his mind?

Bob Page

A Co. 1/50th, 1970



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