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"Troopers of the 7th Cavalry "

Greetings and Salutations to all troopers of the 7th Cavalry. I am Karl Swenson, your new scribe. I am excited to be appointed to this position, as it will give me the opportunity to tell the history of this historic unit with the stories that you provide to me.

I am truly humbled by this opportunity; recounting the heroic efforts of fellow members of the 7th Cavalry is an honor. A little about me. I was assigned to Delta Company 1/7 on my initial tour in Vietnam in 1968. I was as green a platoon leader as could be. Fortunately for me, I had an excellent platoon sergeant who gave me control of my platoon when he thought I was ready for it. One day in October of 1968, LTC Doug MacMillian, the battalion commander, asked me to head up a new team he was putting together that would specialize in long range recon patrols along with stay-behind ambushes. He gave me authority to go to the line companies to hand-pick up to 12 men for this "hunter-killer team." We operated independently under the control of MacMillian until he was moved up the chain of command and we were assigned a new battalion commander. That commander reassigned the hunter-killer team in its entirety to Echo Company and we joined CPT Dave Niles and the rest of Echo

Company at LZ Buttons just outside of Song Be. Buttons was a huge fire support base just east of Nui Ba Ra, large enough to support an entire brigade and Echo Company was the only unit assigned to protect the base. At a strength of around 50 troopers, the perimeter was spread thin.

After Echo Company's stint at LZ Buttons was over, the unit worked its way further west toward the Dong Nai river outside of Bien Hoa. There, we found ourselves on top of a little hill in the middle of nowhere. This hill, dubbed Hill 54 on our maps but known to the locals as Nui Loo, had been occupied by a full-sized rifle company prior to our arrival. This small hilltop was key to the defense of Bien Hoa from the south because the entire plain of the Dong Nai river was visible from there. Any troop movements could easily be detected.

The resident company had been spending the majority of their time patrolling and had not yet put to use the piles of PSP, the bundles of engineer stakes, the pallets of empty sand bags, and the coils of concertina wire that lay around the top of this small hill. The hill was so small that when we arrived in a CH-47 Chinook the pilot was able to put only the rear wheels of the aircraft on the hilltop – the front

wheels were hanging out in space.

CPT Niles, our CO, decided that our defense of the hill was paramount. So, we began to fill all those empty sandbags and used them to provide overhead cover for the holes that had been dug around the perimeter of the hilltop. Some of our 52 troops were sent down the hill to clear fields of fire out of the thick bamboo and underbrush. When the sun went down, we worked hard into the night to prepare those defensive positions. Finally, it became too dark to adequately build, and we retired to our defensive LPs and to the perimeter defensive positions. Some of them now had overhead cover, but not all.

Around 2300 hours, it began to rain – one of those great rains for taking a quick shower, and that's what we did. What a great feeling after a grueling day of back-breaking work.

At 0030 hours on 17 March, we were attacked by NVA regulars. Intel after the fact listed the enemy size as a reinforced battalion. Their mission was to completely annihilate the company on Hill 54 so that troop movements could take place headed for Bien Hoa. The NVA gave it a hell of a try. By the time the sun came up that morning, Echo Company had suffered horrific casualties – we had 11 KIA and 16 WIA and evacuated to hospitals. Over 50% of our company had been lost in that battle.

The reason I am telling you this is Joey Petrarca. He was one of the 11 KIA that night. Joey had grown up in a small Pennsylvania town just a little south of Pittsburgh. The town had lost only one son to Vietnam and that was Joey. But the town of Scottdale never forgot Joey's sacrifice and in 2016 a bridge was rededicated as the PFC Joseph A. Petrarca Bridge. And the town invited Echo Company survivors to attend the dedication. Eight of the troopers from that terrible night were able to be there, it was a magnificent tribute to a young man who had sacrificed all for the rest of us. We were joined by VFWs, American Legion posts, and Vietnam Veterans of America for 50 miles around. Joey's memory lives now forever.

And for those of you who may be close to the Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania on November 4th, the Army Heritage Foundation will be honoring two of our own. Bill Beck of A company 1/7 will receive the Living Legend Award for his contributions as a Soldier during the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley. His individual achievements deserve recognition and serve as an inspiration for others. Bill was drafted into the Army in 1964 and during the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley in November 1965, much like Joshua Chamberlain did for the Union Army at Gettysburg, he secured the flank of his unit's position. He was awarded a Silver Star for these actions while serving as an assistant machine gunner in the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment (1/7 Cav), 1st Cavalry Division. Then and now, he represents those Soldiers who joined the Army and fought in the initial battles of the Vietnam War.

Recognizing individuals or organizations that make a very positive contribution to the lives of Soldiers and their families, the Foundation has selected Joe Galloway to receive the Foundation's Boots on the Ground Award. Galloway has not allowed our Soldiers to be forgotten. His service as a military reporter, columnist, and author has helped publicize and humanize our Soldiers, especially related to the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley in Vietnam. Joe Galloway was a 23 year old United Press International reporter who was assigned to Vietnam in 1965. He wanted to tell the stories of Soldiers in war, and to do so, he had to serve with them in the field. In November 1965, he accompanied the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment into the Ia Drang Valley. To save his and Soldiers' lives he had to take up arms. He received a Bronze Star with V Device for his actions and forged a deep friendship with Soldiers of the unit. He would later tell their stories in the best-selling book, *We Were Soldiers Once and Young*.

Thanks for your attention, this first column is my attempt to tell the stories of our brothers-in-arms. Please send to me your stories so that we all can be proud of those we served with. This issue

*centered on the Vietnam war, but the 1st of the 7th has proudly fought and served around the world.
Let's hear about some of those.*

Until the next issue, Garryowen, my friends!