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Officers build 'slum hootch'

By Sp5 Daniel McVann
Field Correspondent

CHU LAI (39th Bn) – When two lieutenants initiate a vertical construction project, the results are bound to have a different slant.

When the enlisted men of Company C, 39th Engineer Battalion (Const) conducted a visual inspection of the hootch their lieutenants had built all by themselves, they had to agree the building had a slant all its own.

Finding themselves with some extra scrap lumber, the two lieutenants decided to build a combination orderly room and officers' hootch inside the company's Night Defensive Position.

Since no troop labor could be spared, Lieutenants Bruce Gooding of Golden Valley, Minn. and Michael Shaw of Forest Park, Ga., took it upon themselves to engineer the project without even consulting their platoon sergeants.

The results stunned even the most skeptical observers.

One bemused PFC described the hootch's architectural style as "early slum."

A much more knowledgeable NCO, however, called it "'avant-garde.'" In a critical inspection he noted at least twenty different sizes of lumber were used on the hootch, giving it dimensions of 12-by-21-feet, and 11 feet high.

Everyone on the scene agreed that the building abandoned established and classical principles of vertical construction.

The creators of the hootch, two unabashed lieutenants, were quick to admit that in order to assert their full imaginative powers, they forsook such conventional tools as levels, squares, and batter boards.

Despite all their remarks, however, both enlisted men and NCOs had to admit that their lieutenants' hootch was both comfortable and sturdy. And no less an authority than a Vietnamese K.P. testified that the hootch was "Numbah Wan. This where I go if we get trouble."

Thus the lieutenants proved they could build a house that was functional, and to say the least, different.

Landclearers find enemy bunkers

By SP4 Bobby L. Howard
Field Correspondent

LONG BINH (62nd Bn) – How does it feel to move into a heavily-mined, enemy-infested area to start a land clearing operation?

"You just go in and pray one doesn't hit you. All of the guys pray and they can't tell me they don't," says Specialist Four David J. Meilhammer of Baltimore, Md.

When the 984th Engineer Company (Land Clearing) moves into an area to clear out sections of the jungle, the men expect trouble.

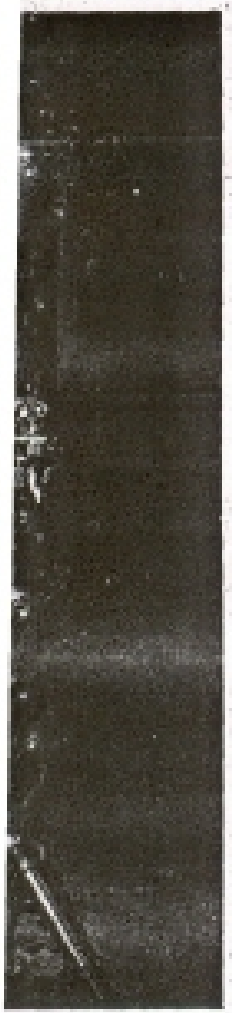
North Vietnamese (NVA) soldiers are well aware that the engineers' giant bulldozers will quickly clear large areas of wooded cover, leaving them no room for conducting operations without being observed. The enemy does not give up this territory willingly. Adding insult to injury, the Rome plows also rip out hundreds of feet of trenches and tunnels, and smash dozens of NVA bunkers each day. When their food and ammunition caches are found and destroyed, the NVA soldier's will to resist soon crumbles.

As soon as the enemy realizes the land-clearers are moving into the area, they make contact immediately, trying to stop the dozers and the men who operate them. The engineers are harassed with numerous mines, countless booby traps, mortar and rocket attacks, small-arms sniping and ground attacks.

Last month the 984th moved into the Ho Bo Woods, a large area 26 miles northwest of Saigon, long known as a stronghold for the NVA. The first day of operations proved this to be valid information. Eleven booby traps were hit by Rome plows and many more were found before they could cause damage. Many of the booby traps are 155 mm artillery rounds attached to trip wires with blasting caps as detonators.

An unknown number of small caches have been uncovered during the operation. Food, ammunition, and medical supplies account for most of the hidden stores. The area is well seeded with bunker complexes. About once a week a large complex is unearthed. One bunker-city was over 1,500 meters long, containing an NVA hospital, a machine shop, an ammunition loading facility, and a hand grenade manufacturing shop.

"Some days we have to leave a few bunker complexes unblown," said Sgt. Johnson. "We blow so many, we run out of explosives before the day is finished."



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...o By SGT Alan Dodd)

...rescue downed Marine flyers

...king off from nearby ...fountain, a Marine ...ter following its ...air traffic route, was ...over 84th Battalion ...rs when its engines ...ure and the prope...

...quick action, the ...copper pilot diverted ...ed ship which was pilot crawled out and on top of a section of the wreckage. Aviation fuel was swirling everywhere and everyone was afraid that it would burst into flames before we could help the victims out," said SP5 Richard Hassett of East Weymouth, Mass. Two more crew members were extracted from the sinking debris and medevacced.

The setting sun dropped below the horizon, making it difficult to see. A bucket loader drove down to the beach and helped pull the twisted wreckage onto dry land. Men of the 536th Engineer Detachment (Port Construction) inspected the dripping wreckage for explosives, removed and cleared loaded weapons.

"It was tremendous how the men reacted–as if they had rehearsed for it," said SP5 Larry Padilla of San Francisco.

The sun rising on the beach the next morning revealed the shattered helicopter, its emptiness silent evidence of a courageous effort by the men of the 84th Engineer Battalion.

NOTE