



Note: Not all members of the C 2/5 Cav family were assigned to the company. As with any infantry unit, we traveled with three men whose job it was to coordinate the artillery. These Artillery Forward Observer Teams consisted of a lieutenant (forward observer), a sergeant (Recon Sergeant) and a radio operator (RTO.) Charlie Dickey was from Battery A, 1st Battalion, 77th Artillery, and was attached to C 2/5 Cav in May of 1969. He stayed with us until February, 1970 - a long time to be out in the weeds with the grunts. As with all artillerymen, these men are not authorized to wear the Combat Infantryman's Badge. See a picture of the team in [October, 1969](#).

Blue text is written by Charlie Dickey. Red text was given to Charlie by the pilot for publication in this article. Following the article is a special note.

A Few minutes in the Life of a Forward Observer and a Cobra Pilot

Birth Control 28 Delta, Forward Observer - Recon Sergeant.

On or about 4 October, 1969, C Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile) was inserted into a clearing northwest of Fire Support Base Ike. Our mission was to locate and destroy North Vietnamese Army Forces crossing over from Cambodia to mount an attack on Tay Ninh, a Provincial Capital. The following morning we made contact with the enemy and thus began a running firefight that lasted to its climax on 6 October. We thought we had encountered a supply party aided by a small contingent of NVA Regulars. This, however, was not correct. We had run into a well-trained, well-equipped, disciplined and dedicated unit of soldiers numbering at least our strength (100) or more.

I was a member of Artillery Forward Observation Team assigned to the Infantry Company. Our job was to bring Tube Artillery and close in support from the 2nd Battalion, 20th Aerial Rocket Artillery (Cobra Gunships). I was senior man on the Team based on length of service in the field.

6 October dawned much like another day in the jungle. But that morning there was apprehension; somehow we all knew that this day would be very different. After breaking up the night position, we moved out. The company was in the standard three files. My position was behind the Infantry Company Commander, center file. (Note: See diagram in the Charlie Alpha page) What we did not know was the NVA had set up a large U-shaped ambush and they were trying their hardest to suck the entire company into their kill zone.

Luck or Divine assistance caused us to stop just short of the ambush. A machine gun opened up on the right flank, killing the point man. We first thought that we had run into a linear ambush. According to the tactics of the time, I moved to the left flank and joined 3rd Platoon and attempted to move around and behind the ambush.

In a very short time we ran into the left U machine-gun. Taking heavy fire, the platoon broke and a few of us moved to the right front while the rest of 3rd took to ground. In the space of a few seconds those of us in the front encountered a fixed .51 caliber machinegun which opened up on us at a distance of about 15 meters. The fire drove us to ground.

At this time I sent word over the radio to "Bounce Max." (Max was the call sign of Blue Max the 2nd Battalion, 20th Aerial Rocket Artillery Battalion). This call meant that we needed close in support to defeat the enemy or to save our lives. The Cobra's of the 2/20th stood 24-hour watch. Upon receiving a call to bounce, they could be airborne in as little as two minutes and enroute to render assistance to Sky Troopers in contact. Words cannot express how I felt when a Cobra flight leader came up our net. His call

sign was *Bravo27*, and he and his wingman were inbound to our location with a full load of 2.75 Rockets, 40-MM grenades and 7.62 mini-gun.

This flight of ARA performed in a most exemplary manner, laying down the fire where I wanted it and holding back the enemy. During the time *Bravo 27* was on station, their helicopters were subject to intense enemy fire every time they rolled out. I could hear the enemy fire shift as the snakes began their runs. (Note: Most of us referred to Cobra gunships as "snakes.") To this day I can still hear the sound of bullets impacting the thin metal skins of the ships. When *Bravo 27* had expended his ammo, and another flight was inbound, *27* returned to base to do a "hot turn around" (rearm and refuel) and return to the battle. It was this flight that saved not only my life, but also the lives of the other four men who were cut off with me.

During the time *Bravo 27* was off station, the other Cobra flight did a good job of trying to keep the enemy away from our position. However our situation on the ground was becoming extremely deadly. Our small force was not only cut off from the rest of Charlie Company, we were also being reduced in number by intense automatic weapons, rocket propelled grenades, and Chi-Com hand grenades. It had been a long, terrible ordeal. The men I was with were wounded and the enemy was pushing closer to our small circle. We could see them maneuvering to attack and overwhelm us. There is no doubt in my mind that they intended to kill all of us.

But, a familiar voice came up on my radio - the warbling, reassuring voice of flight leader *Bravo27*. At the same time I was talking to him, the NVA began a rush our position. I remember *27* telling me he was at 3000 feet, in bound, but still a few minutes out.

Bravo 27, Cobra Flight Leader.

I will always remember the missions I flew for you that day. The noise, smell and pulling out of rocket runs, wondering if my fire was getting too

close to the friendlies and being very scared - and someone (probably you) telling me that I was taking a lot of ground fire each time I rolled out.

After completing a hot turn-around at Tay Ninh, I was returning to the area of contact. The RTO (you) was screaming at me to fire, but I was too high and too far away. When I told you that, you told me to fire anyway, but I wasn't sure where you were. All I could see was jungle and a little smoke coming through the trees.

As I closed on your position, you were screaming that you were being over-run and to fire on your location. I had to guess where you were and hope and pray that I wasn't going to hit any friendlies.

28 Delta:

As I talked with 27 Bravo. I could see the enemy rushing our position; I knew that our small group was in serious danger of being wiped out. The only chance we had was the inbound Cobra Flight. I screamed for the Flight to shoot. We were going to die by the hands of the NVA or live by the grace of God and the skill and courage of 27 Bravo. As I was speaking with 27 Bravo, there was an explosion in front of me.

Bravo 27:

Still unsure of your exact location, but knowing you were in serious trouble, I just blasted away. On my first run of the second mission I put down 19 pairs (38 rockets) in an area about 50 meters long and 10 meters wide. My goal was to try and put as much firepower as I could between you and the bad guys. I knew that anyone under them was going to be hurt because most of my rockets were going off in the trees and only a few were making it to the ground. I can still see my rockets hitting and going

off in trees. I remember hearing them explode over your radio because you had a hot mike. Suddenly everything went silent.

This mission has always been on my mind. As I was circling around trying to re-establish radio contact with you, another RTO came on and told me that they had just gotten to your area and that my fire had hit the RTO (you) and several others. I got sick. I stayed on station for a little longer, was released, flew back to Tay Ninh and reported the friendly fire incident to my CO and Ops Officer.

28 Delta:

The explosion that went off in front of me was NOT an ARA rocket. *Bravo 27* was still too far off to fire. As Forward Observers, we relied on three very important events to guide the Snakes.

1. The pilots would tell us when they were starting their run.
2. We could hear the pitch of the rotor blades change.
3. We could hear the sound of the rockets being fired.

This information helped us on the ground to direct fire on the enemy. None of these three had happened when that explosion went off in front of me.

I believe to this day that the explosion to my front was from a B-40 (Rocket Propelled Grenade). I was blown backward and knocked out by the blast. Sometime later, (10-15 minutes?), as I came to my senses, I was leaning against the stump of a tree; an infantryman was to my right and about 10 feet behind me. I remember me telling him not to go up there, that the whole area was solid NVA.

I was wrong - *27 Bravo* laid down the most perfect ordnance on target that any human had a right to expect. The area worked by the gunships was right on the money. The

enemy assault was broken. Troopers from Charlie Company moved the five of us to safety and secured a perimeter. I was told later that when the explosion went off, I had the handset on the radio keyed (hot mike) and kept it that way for some time, rendering the net unusable until I released the button.

April, 2000

Birth Control 28 Delta:

How does a story like this get put together after such a long time? For one thing, I never forgot that my life was saved by the skill and daring of a Cobra flight leader. It has been over 30 years since that incident in the jungle. But almost everyday something jolts my mind, the wop of a bird's blade, an oldie on the radio, a sight, a sound, a smell, that takes me back to that place where the courage of the crewmen of the 2nd/20th ARA gave me my life while others were trying to take it from me.

The years have taken a toll on my memory but the name of the Flight Leader; Captain Hogg, remained etched as if in stone. I have dreams about that day. No, they were not the horrible dreams of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. They were good dreams - dreams that would leave me with joy in my heart. I knew each day was a gift from God and a Cobra pilot. However when I awoke, I knew I would always feel incomplete. I had to find this man and thank him for giving me my life.

Then came the Internet. Coming on line in 1999, the first sites I surveyed were military, especially the First Air Cav Association, and this led me to the 2nd/20th ARA site. I sent accounts of the incident and asked if anyone could help me find *Bravo 27*. I received very little information, just enough to keep me going.

The 2nd/20th ARA web site, gave me the full name, Joseph C. Hogg and an old address. First attempts to find Old Joe were fruitless. However, in my spare time, I would surf the Net looking for clues. Bingo! One day I landed in a nest of Hoggs. I got lucky; the

second number I called directed me to Captain Joseph Hogg.

I called him. At first I don't think the good Captain believed me. Thirty years is a long time. However, as I reported actions of that incident he came to realize that I was there on the ground as he brought fire on the enemy.

I sent him my account of the action and he sent me his account. We crossed in the mail. After reading his account I called him again. I asked him if he remembered me; his response was "Yes, we met one day in the jungle of the Republic of Vietnam".

My object in writing this down is three-fold. First, I wanted to thank the man who gave me my life. Second, after reading Bravo 27's account, I realized that this man had spent the last 30 years thinking he might have killed or at least wounded American soldiers on the ground.

Bravo 27 Flight not only did not hit any friendlies that day, he saved the lives of five young American soldiers whose lives were about to be cut short by the enemy.

The RTO who reported that we had been hit by friendly fire had not been close to our position that day. He could not have known of the heavy fire laid down on us by the NVA. He was not in a position to see the final assault.

But I was there and I know that the skill and daring of Bravo 27 Flight saved our lives.

Third, I want this man to be recognized for the Hero that he was and is today. We were all heroes in those days (We Were a Band of Brothers). But there were true Heroes. I was awarded the Silver Star for my actions that day. For what? I looked to my front and saw the enemy advancing on my position. I knew that I could not hold them off. Knowing that I was about to die, I called for Bravo 27 to fire. I believed I had a better chance with the Cobras.

The Cobra Flight Leader had a serious problem. He knew that he was not to fire without

knowing exactly where the friendlies were located. On the other hand he had a young soldier on the ground being overrun and about to die. Captain Hogg used his memory of the battlefield from his mission earlier in the day, coupled with his own initiative and personal bravery, and chose to fire.

The result of his action was the saving of five young American lives. This man received no recognition for his heroic deeds of that day. This issue should be rectified.

The name of Joseph C. Hogg, Captain, United States Army, needs to be added to list of true American Heroes.

Charlie B. Dickey

AKA Birth Control 28 Delta

C 2/5 Cavalry and A 1/77th Artillery

First Air Cavalry Division (Air Mobile)

Republic of Vietnam
