

Speakers 2015 MRFA Reunion Speakers:

GMG2 Jack Kitchura and SGT Ed Eaton

Presentation to MRFA on River Division 153 By GMG2 Jack "Gunner" Kitchura

A) A Few Opening Remarks, Acknowledgements and Thanks

1) MRFA Officers, Board Members and Support Staff:

For all their hard work and efforts putting together our reunion and all they do to keep us informed and updated through the year.

2) Other speakers:

Chris Noel
Sgt Ed Eaton

For their presentations and their lifelong and ongoing service to our veterans and our country.

3) I'd like make specially acknowledgement and thank my friend and friend to us all who could not be here today and without who there would be no MRFA - That of course would be - Al Moore.

4) I would also like to acknowledge my teammates from River Division 153 - Gentlemen Please raise your hands and identify yourselves.

5) Lastly I'd like to acknowledge all my brothers in MRFA from the 9th Infantry and all River Boat Divisions for their dedication and service. You are all owed a Debt of Thanks - You earned it.

B) Prelude

In my opening I referred to you as my brothers. This is an old and heartfelt theme echoed many times through history. It is also stated on the opening home page of MRFA's website.

It comes from a play written by Shakespeare in 1599 telling the story of Henry the 5th's rallying speech to the outnumbered English troops in preparation for a battle with the French at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415.

It reads in part:

"We few, we happy few, we band of Brothers, for he today that sheds his blood with me, shall be my brother."

C) Division History

My own brothers in Vietnam in 1969/70 were the men of River Division 153. We were remote enough I guess that when I first contacted Al Moore back in the early 90's to inquire about the MRFA association he questioned my recollection of a Division 153 and advised he had no record of us..... I assured him we were there!

Unlike most other Units further down in the delta we did not tie up to or raft off the troop carriers but were instead destined to be a land based and an ASPB only unit.

We started life around April/May of 1969 as part of TF 116 and briefly as a part of River Division 595. Initially we were based out of Nha Be on the northwestern edge of the Rung Sat Special Zone. Over the next few months we picked up and provisioned additional newly delivered ASPB's and ran patrols in the Rung Sat. Concurrently we began building hooch's and running new patrols out of our soon to be new second base in Tuyen Nhon further in country on the South Western side of the Plain of Reeds just a few clicks south of the Parrot's Beak, in close proximity to the Ho Chi Minh Trail and Cambodia.

By July of 69 we were at full staff with a Division numbering about 100 men and a fleet of 16 ASPB's (or Alfa Boats). At this time we were transferred to TF 117 and River Assault Squadron 15 comprised of River Assault Divisions 151,152 and ourselves 153. We ran a 5 man

boat crew and a standard 2 boat patrol which then included on additional Patrol Officer. Later in 69 we would add a Vietnamese trainee for a compliment of 6. Rounding out the Division was a CO, XO and several Operational Officers plus shore side support staff.

Our Division and operations were split with about 10 /12 boats in Tuyen Nhon at any given time and 4/6 in Nha Be. The only other military unit in our Tuyen Nhon area was a small Green Beret Special Forces detachment with whom we shared a perimeter on the south side of a small canal a click West of the village of Tuyen Nhon. We worked the area together but independently. Things happened, like everyone here could attest to. We had everything from VC sapper squads operating in the area up to full companies moving through. Once our division even ran into a company in broad daylight. We could only guess that because of the close proximity to Cambodia that the enemy got off map at night and lost on the wrong side of the border midday.

Standard opts in Tuyen Nhon were roughly 4 or 5 night ambush patrols, a day patrol, and a day off. At night everything outside of the villages was a Free Fire Zone. If it moved it was not friendly. Most of you know an ASPB's standard armament was substantial. We did however have a tendency to get even more resourceful adding everything we could get our hands on. There was no such thing as over armed! No wonder why our spouses and friends can confirm we are all somewhat hard of hearing.

On the lighter side we did take advantage of some of our day patrols. We were young (not always smart) and occasionally explored at random through the Plain of Reeds and made visits to villages to barter for ice..... and beer. On occasion we even got to fish. It is amazing how well a lure a pound of C-4 wrapped around a percussion grenade can be. C-4 proved very valuable resource in many ways..... I am sure many of you remember cutting it into cubes to cook over.

At our alternate base of operations in Nha Be and the Rung Sat. our patrols really varied. We could find ourselves working alongside Army Special Ops advisers with anyone from Popular Forces to the Montagnards. We also worked with Seal team one on insertions and extractions one of these leading to the discovery of a large permanent

base camp in the Rung Sat followed by a joint operation and its engagement. In quieter times we also took out humanitarian medical and dental teams into some of the the more pacified and friendly areas. Nha Be also served as our repair facility. Through everything we generally managed to keep all boats up and operating most all the time.

River Division 153 lasted past my time in country. At the end it underwent its own transformation and like all other units was handed off the Vietnamese forces somewhere around the end of 1970 or early 71.

D) In Closing

In reality we were the lucky ones, we did our duty, had good leadership and good teams..... And we had our " Band of Brothers ".

Theodore Roosevelt said it best in a speech given in Paris, over 100 years ago, in 1910 entitled " Citizenship in a Republic " (a piece of history well worth reading, in it's full, when you get some time). It emphasized clearly the success or failure of a Republic rests firmly on the shared values of both it's leaders and it's citizenry. The part most remembered was called " The Man In The Arena "

It is not long and I'd like to share it with you..... It reads as follows :

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end triumph of high achievement, and who at the worse, if he fails, at the least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

You gentlemen dared greatly, dared for a worthy cause, and while our cause did not see immediate victory, neither did we see defeat. Our victory came over time by instilling the idea of freedom. Beginning 10 years later in 1985, escalating in 1989 in Poland, Berlin and 14 other Soviet Satellites, our victory culminated on December 25th, 1991 with the lowering of the Soviet Hammer and Sickle over the Kremlin to be replaced solely by the Russian Tricolor.

You my brothers, by your service, contributed decisively to cause that to happen, individually and collectively you were that - " Man In The Arena"

Thank You. Gunner Jack Kitchura

Sgt "Sniper" Ed Eaton B/CO 3rd/60th 1968-69

Well; me being up here is proof you've reached the bottom of the barrel. But it's nice to know that Old Warriors still have a calling. Old being the key word.

You know: I've reached the age that I've quit buying green bananas

I joined the Army so long ago that I pulled KP at the last supper. Don't laugh; Albert was the Cook!

Recently, I was asked: 'Why do you go to your reunions? Are you some kind of war junkie?' They don't, won't and never will understand why we do it. They don't understand it's about the men next to you; it's about your brothers. It's about the brotherhood.

We gather because we yearn to be with our comrades who once acted their very best. Who once sacrificed and suffered while their humanity was stripped of them.

I'm amazed as to how many people that have seen the hist channel story or read my book: have ask me why I refused extraction and went back to be by Captain Perkins in a situation of dire consequences. Plain and simple: it's the brotherhood that drove me; not heroism, it was the brotherhood.

John Wayne said: Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway

Maybe so but:

"Courage in war is not the absence of fear but rather the reality that the survival of brotherhood is more important than fear.

The way I look at it: Whoever coined the phrase: Army of One -- ought to have their ass kicked.

**Military power may win battles, but spiritual togetherness wins wars.--
Something our Politicians and fellow Americans need to learn.**

Webster defines Brotherhood as: feelings of friendship, support, and understanding between people.

Even Webster doesn't fully understand:

Sebastian Junger says: War is life multiplied by some number that no one has ever heard of."

I say to you: Our Brotherhood is a Brotherhood that is multiplied by a number no one has ever heard of!

We in the brotherhood know that; You've never lived until you've almost died. For those who fought for it, life has a flavor of sweetness the protected will never know.

The brotherhood becomes like family; willing to fight and protect each other from being killed.

Ours is a Brotherhood of blood, sweat, tears, and fears We are the ultimate brotherhood that transcends, race, color, creed and in our case Branches of the Military.

Yes; I really do love you Swabbies contrary to some writings!

One of the most rewarding things about our reunions is the smile on the faces of those who are here for the 1st time. The smiles in themselves are and should be reward enough for those who pushed, conjured, urged, begged—did whatever it took to get our brothers here. I know that personally it's about as rewarding as it gets.

Yet our brotherhood is diminishing as we grow older. Those of us who have been here since the mid 90's notice the reunions getting smaller and smaller.

Let's make it our resolution to make a concerted effort to contact our brothers and rally the troops for our next reunion. Let's not wait till we're all dead and gone. We're still a brotherhood and those who have never been or have not attended for a while need to be reminded why we go.

This my brothers should be your contribution to the brotherhood

As they say: *"Time is like a river; you cannot touch the same water twice."*

When we go our last thoughts will be of family and of our Brotherhood