



**Hq's 1st Infantry Division (LRRP)
F Company 52nd Infantry (LRP)
I Company 75th Rangers**



OUR HISTORY

The 1st Infantry Division has always lived by its motto: "No Mission Too Difficult; No Sacrifice Too Great; Duty First." Organized in 1917 by Major General John J. Pershing, the 1st Infantry Division, later known as the "Big Red One," was the first American division to see action in Europe during World War 1. Again, in World War II, the Big Red One was the first to reach Britain and land in North Africa, Sicily, and France (at "Omaha Beach" in Normandy). It held the Eisenhorn Ridge northern line against the counter-attacking Germans during the "The Battle of The Budge" and then pushed them back into Germany, ending the war. It was later to be the second entire US. Army infantry division deployed to Vietnam, the remainder joining its 2nd Brigade "in country" on 1 Oct. 1965.

Faced with aggression from communist North Vietnam and widespread terrorist and guerrilla activities of the Viet Cong, the government of South Vietnam asked the Free World for assistance. By 1965 the situation had reached the point where US units had to be summoned if South Vietnam was not to be overrun by the communists. The bulk of the 1st Infantry Division reached Vietnam in October 1965 after the 2nd Brigade's advance party had arrived in July of that year. The division was established in III Corps (War Zones C and D), with basecamps located in Phouc Vinh and Lai Khe and its division headquarters at Di An. Division headquarters was subsequently moved to Lai Khe.

While each maneuver (or "line") battalion in the 1st Infantry Division had its own "Recon" platoon, it soon became clear that a separate, dedicated, long range reconnaissance unit was needed for operations throughout the division's extensive Tactical Area of Operation

(TAOR). Accordingly, in April 1966, 1st Div. CO, MG William DePuy, ordered the creation of a provisional Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) platoon. Since the divisional reconnaissance role was the designated mission of its armored cavalry squadron, 1st Sq/4th US Cavalry, the LRRP platoon was placed under the squadron's D Troop (Air) aerial scout unit, based at its Phu Loi basecamp. It would be directed and supported by D Troop's transport and gunship helicopters and work in concert with its Aerial Rifle Platoon (ARP). In recognition of the unique and solitary combat role of the LRRPs, they were given the radio call-sign "Wildcat", followed by the actual team number. That call-sign had the additional value of letting any division aircraft receiving a call for assistance from any "Wildcat" station, would know it had emanated from a very small infantry team and relief was needed immediately. The D Troop pilots became especially adept at and dedicated to supporting LRRP missions. After initial recruiting and training, the first LRRP teams were created and commenced operation. Another unique aspect of the LRRP detachments and their successor organizations (the LRP and Ranger companies) was that, regardless of whether they were part of an airborne division or brigade or a non-airborne parent unit (in our case, the 1st Infantry Division), all their 'airborne-qualified' soldiers were to receive their highly-valued 'jump pay' while in the unit.

Long-range patrol detachment teams were designed to infiltrate objective areas prior to division operations and obtain information on enemy locations and perform terrain analysis, lengthy ground searches were required, because many trails and streams were covered by thick jungle canopies and not observable from the air. Missions were normally three to four days and, as most would be conducted 15 or more miles from the nearest friendly lines contact was only by radio, though use of ground identification panels, mirrors, strobe lights or flares could be used 'in a pinch'. Most teams consisted of six men, although there were occasional 12-man hunter-killer teams, who at times carried out 'prisoner snatch' missions. UH-1 'Huey' helicopters inserted teams into targeted areas, often making false landings to fool the enemy as to in which Landing Zone (LZ) the team had exited the aircraft. The teams would then quickly scramble into the nearest cover and "lie dog", listening intently while ensuring their insertion had not been detected, before moving out on their mission.

Under its first commanding officer, Capt. John Sanders, the LRRPs conducted long range recon patrols within the 1st Div. TAOR (north and west of Saigon to the Cambodia Border), as separate missions or directly in support of large divisional operations. Their missions were conducted as far south as the Mekong Delta and north to Tay Ninh Province, Loc Ninh, and An Loc, near the Cambodian Border and were part of Operations Birmingham, Cedar Falls and many smaller "search-and-destroy" operations. Their doctrine and tactics were developed and tempered by combat during their first year of

operation. Through “lessons-learned” from their initial operations, additional teams were formed, and the various specialized team member roles were established. Their regimen of constant training included a focus on air and ground insertion and extraction, ambush tactics, land navigation and use of supporting arms (both air and artillery) as well as the myriad of specialized small unit tactics to their mission. A constant was the practicing of “Immediate Action (IA)” drills, designed to allow them to quickly break contact from enemy forces encountered in what became increasingly frequent “meeting engagements” with numerically superior Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) forces. Though reconnaissance was still their primary role at this stage, they often had to fight to survive. The LRRPs suffered their first casualty with the death of Sgt. Rudolph Algar Nunez, Killed-In-Action (KIA) on 13 June 1966 near An Loc Special Forces camp. He was to be just the first of a total of twenty-nine LRRP-Rangers killed-in-action over the course of the next nearly four years of the Big Red One’s tenure in the Republic of Vietnam. The LRRP Platoon was under the command of Capt. Hal London during the period May-July 1967, with Capt. Jack Price assuming command for the period Aug/67-July/68. Unit commanders for the rest of our unit’s operation in Vietnam were as follows:

1st Lieutenant Harold Lowery
F Company 52d Infantry (LRP)
August 1968 - January 1969

Captain Allen A. Lindman
F Company 52d Infantry (LRP)
I Company 75th Rangers
January 1969 - March 1969

1st Lieutenant Jerry M. Davis
I Company 75th Rangers
March 1969 - April 1969

Captain Reese M. Patrick - KIA 14 May 1969
I Company 75th Rangers
March 1969 - May 1969

Captain Hamor R. Hanson

I Company 75th Rangers

May 1969 -October 1969

Major James J. McDevitt

I Company 75th Rangers

October 1969 - November 1969

Captain Robert D. Wright

I Company 75th Rangers

November 1969 - March 1970

In September 1967, the 1st Division moved the LRRP platoon from under D Troop and to Lai Khe and placed it directly under the control of the division's G-2 (Intel) command. In recognizing the invaluable LRRP contribution to overall ground operations, in late November 1967, MACV Commanding Officer, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, directed that each Army infantry division and independent brigade in Vietnam was to augment its "provisional" long range patrol capability to a company-size unit. Accordingly, the new F Co./52nd Inf (LRP) was formed in Lai Khe, and accelerated recruitment and training begun (while nonetheless sustaining the current mission). New F Co. recruits had to be either airborne or Ranger-qualified and/or have a minimum of six months infantry combat experience. Many of those who volunteered from the "line" infantry units had decided that "there had to be a better way to fight [the war]. A selection process was quickly implemented, additional LRP teams organized, and team training commenced. As many team leaders and other team members as could be temporarily spared from operations were sent to the 5th Special Forces-operated "Recondo School" in Nha Trang. Its compressed but demanding three-weeks Recondo course (reputedly one of the best schools ever created by the US Army), refined and improved the combat leadership and tactical skills of experienced LRRPs, while providing new patrollers with the best possible "pre-combat" infantry training available. This training was to prove invaluable. In addition, as the new patrol teams would now also often pursue a more aggressive, "direct-action" combat posture, the second "R" (reconnaissance) was also dropped from their previous "LRRP" unit designation.

While helicopter-borne insertions would continue to be utilized by the F Co. LRP teams to conduct missions in the far reaches of the III Corps Military Region, a paucity of air assets, and the need for "screening" operations around major 1st Div. basecamps, fire

support bases, and “line infantry” units, a significant number of “short” and “medium” range patrol missions were also conducted.

Another insertion tactic which was utilized was the “stay behind” insertion, whereby a team accompanied one of the division’s ‘line infantry’ companies, as part of a standard ‘search and destroy’ sweep into a very remote part of the division’s Area of Operation (AO). The team would then slip away from the larger infantry unit and ‘stay behind’ somewhere along the route and continue with its own mission. It might accompany the line unit as far as that unit’s extraction, wait until they had been extracted, then set up its own ambush/overwatch in the jungle near the extract LZ to see what developed after the NVA thought all Americans had departed the area. It might instead just proceed to the team’s “recon box” to conduct its own mission. This was a highly effective tactic, resulting in the capture of either solid recon information or enemy body count.

Even shorter-range missions frequently resulted in the team’s use of ambush tactics, either employing small arms or, preferably, through directing artillery and air strikes upon enemy forces--engaging them at longer range. One demonstration of the success of this type of mission was on the night of 31 January 1968, when Sgt. Ron Luse’s team “Wildcat 2”, sitting in an ambush/overwatch position northwest of Phu Loi, observed first a platoon, then an entire enemy battalion crossing the open rice paddies from the village of Tan Phuoc Khanh over to the neighboring An My. Calling the impending contact to the Phu Loi base command, Wildcat 2 directed artillery and heavy-mortar fire upon the enemy formation, badly damaging it as it fled into An My. Thus was intercepted the first attack upon Phu Loi of the enemy’s 1968 “TET Offensive”. It was to require three more days of hard fighting by the division’s infantry and armored cavalry to eliminate that enemy unit, but Phu Loi was spared from a direct ground attack.

Though less well-known than the communist’s “TET 68 Offensive”, on 5 May 1968, the enemy launched their “Mini-TET Offensive”. Though somewhat smaller in scope, nonetheless, over 100 US and allied cities and base camps were attacked, again resulting in major contacts between allied troops and the NVA. F Co. teams were in continual contact with enemy forces throughout the remainder of the month, making many sightings and springing numerous ambushes, both directly with small-arms or through directing artillery and/or air upon enemy units. One such action, on 11 May 1968, again at the same spot where “Wildcat 2” had ambushed the NVA on 31 Jan. 1968, resulted in the destruction by Phu Loi-based artillery and helicopter gunships of another NVA battalion.

As many of the original F Co. LRPs were due to soon complete their combat tours, the need for replacing them became an urgent matter. Embarking on an aggressive recruiting

campaign, the company's officers and senior NCOs met with incoming infantry as they reported in to the 1st Division's replacement depot in its Di An headquarters base camp and word was also put out to each of its line infantry battalions. The criteria for new volunteers were that they had to be in an infantry MOS and airborne-qualified. Though the unit was, and always would be, totally comprised of volunteers, for at least a dozen or so young paratroopers, F Co.'s 'recruiting' may have more closely resembled their being '*shanghaied*'. These guys, all having just received their Jump Wings at Ft. Benning, Georgia, had arrived at the Long Binh 90th Replacement Battalion with preliminary orders sending them to either the 101st Airborne Division or the 173rd Airborne Brigade, when they suddenly found that they had instead been reassigned to a "mysterious" unit called F Co/52nd Inf (LRP), 1st Inf. Div., in a place named Lai Khe. These new 'volunteers' had no idea what 'LRP' stood for and virtually nobody at the 90th could tell them much (though a couple did shake their heads and give them the old "You'll be sorry!" taunt). After arriving in Lai Khe, they were, of course, given the opportunity to truly volunteer to stay, which all of them did.

As so many of the veteran Lurps had DEROS dates sometime in the July 1968 timeframe, F Co's officers and senior NCOs/Team Leaders quickly established and implemented a hasty, intensive and thorough Lurp combat training program. While most new Lurps had previously arrived in the unit largely as individual replacements, this new batch of Lurps eventually numbered over twenty—all to be trained at the same time. The company's highly experienced Team Leaders and its Training NCO, quickly established a much-needed training curriculum. The new volunteers were quickly rotated through classes on topics essential skills including land navigation, field communications, requesting and directing artillery and air support, helicopter insertions and extractions, rappelling, patrolling, team member roles and responsibilities, establishing ambush/overwatch and 'Remain Overnight (RON) positions, rifle marksmanship, deployment of claymore mines, and, of course, countless 'Immediate Action (IA) drills--eventually incorporating 'live fire' into the IA drills. Each Team Leader then selected new team members from among the trainees to bolster existing, veteran teams, or to form new ones, retaining at least a couple of veteran Lurps on each 'new' team to solidify them. The "new guys" then honed their newfound skills through team training, running short-range missions 'outside the wire' near Lai Khe. F Co. thus quickly expanded from its current 6-7 operational teams to nearly a dozen. The new guys learned their lessons well and went on to serve with the distinction throughout their tours.

Following the training and reorganization, a number of teams were sent to operate from our other 1st Division base camps of Quan Loi, Phu Loi and Dian, as well as some of the division's Fire Support Bases (FSB), located near its main north-south supply route of National Highway 13. Some missions required pre-establishment of a commo Forward Operating Base (FOB) to keep the teams in communication with their Lai Khe base and

key supporting units—particularly their artillery and helicopter and fixed-wing air support.

The need to grow F Co. was soon to be quite evident as, for it and the rest of the American military units in Vietnam, 1968 would be the bloodiest year of the war. Of our LRRP-LRP-Ranger unit's combat losses of twenty-nine men Killed-In-Action (KIA), seventeen were lost during the fighting in 1968. On 21 October 1968, all six of Sgt. Bill Cohn's team were lost on a single mission, along with the four helicopter crewmen who had attempted to extract them while all were under enemy pursuit. Exactly a month later, five of Sgt. Felix Washington's six-man team (including himself) were lost. On 27 February 1969, three men of SSgt. Enrique Cruz' six-man team were killed, with a fourth succumbing to his wounds a day later (for more information on this mission, refer to Sgt. Bill Goshen's book, War Paint).

All our KIA represented grievous losses—but to lose so many men on single missions was particularly devastating. The names, pictures, and other details of each of the wonderful young men we lost can be found at our unit website: <http://www.f52i75.org>, under the tab at top entitled "Our KIA". We toast each of them, individually, at each of our unit reunions, and will do so as long as we can still hoist a glass. RIP guys! You honored us by your brave service and will never be forgotten.

A major change was soon to occur for F Co. Rather than create an entirely new unit designation for such an elite force as the Army's LRP companies had become, the Department of Army looked to its rich heritage and, on 1 February 1969, designated the 75th Infantry Regiment as the parent organization for all Army LRP companies and replaced the parenthetical designation 'LRP' with 'Airborne-Ranger' for these units. Therefore, Company F, 52nd Infantry (LRP) was deactivated, and its members reassigned to Company I/75th Inf (Airborne-Ranger). On 1 February 1969, the 75th Ranger Regiment was reactivated and all LRP Companies in Vietnam became Ranger Companies. 'Same mission/different name'. Also in February 1969, the second TET offensive started. Our unit was ordered to send four teams to FSB 'Thunder Base II', on Hwy 13, north of Lai Khe. We were to patrol and observe the Song Be River corridor for enemy movement heading to Saigon. Teams were generally deployed only two at a time, though to adjacent recon box locations. This ensured that they would get adequate support from our all too often scarce helicopter transport and gunship resources. Most teams made contact within the first or second day after their insertion and had to be extracted quickly. The enemy now knew to be on the lookout for our teams, even employing 'counter-recon' teams throughout the III Corps Military Region in which we operated, in order to find and eliminate our teams. Our teams were a thorn in their side that they wanted to eliminate whenever possible.

In January 1969, to focus more of our assets in the southernmost portion of the 1st Division's AO, about half of the company was deployed down to the Big Red One's southern-most base camp of Di An. They took wall lockers, foot lockers, and everything else they would require, as it was not then known how long they would be operating in our of Di An.

In early 1969, Company I continued the shift away from a strictly 'area reconnaissance' tactical doctrine to the employment of aggressive ambushing and use of 'heavy' or 'hunter-killer' (comprised of 10-12 men) tactics pioneered in the just-prior LRP era.

The I Co. Rangers continued to operate aggressively and successfully, generally achieving higher enemy 'body counts' (the standard by which combat success was generally measured in the war) than entire line infantry battalions.

A conversation was held at Quan Loi between the division's First Brigade Commander and its Third Brigade Commander shortly before F Company 52nd Infantry (Long Range Patrol) was transformed into Company I (Ranger), 75th Infantry. The conversation concerned the Big Red One LRRP's loss of Sgt. Cohn's team and Sgt. Washington's team. At that time, the Rangers numbered only six active teams. The First Brigade Commander complained that Ranger intelligence had not been very reliable before the enemy had overrun of his Quan Loi base camp perimeter. The 3rd Brigade Commander said: "What do you mean that these Rangers did not perform up to expectations? Sgt. Crabtree's Ranger team had warned your staff in advance of that attack and that the enemy was heavily infiltrating the area and Quan Loi was in grave danger, but they rejected his assessment. Don't you know that their (Ranger teams') enemy KIA's exceed any battalions in your Brigade?"

Robert D. Law, Company I (Ranger), was the first member of the 75th Infantry Rangers to receive the Medal of Honor, having willingly sacrificed his own life for his teammates by jumping upon an enemy hand-grenade which had been thrown into their position. Only three Rangers LRRPs received our nation's highest combat valor medal while assigned to these type units.

From 1 January 1969 until deactivation, due to the US Army's 'Phase III Vietnamization' withdrawal scheme, on 7 March 1970, I Company (Ranger) teams conducted 372 classified tactical operations (with 205 recorded sightings of the enemy). The "Iron Rangers" of I Co. directly engaged the enemy 191 times.