

# August 7, 1967 – Razorback 33

January 4, 1991

Dear Bob:

I read with interest your letter to the editor and account of the action your unit was involved in near Bien Hoa. I became quite emotionally affected, as I was caught up in that same action – and your account brought back some memories long ago buried in my mind. Suppose it would be best if I could share with you my recollections of that fateful day. You are the first person, other than my crew, that I've found who was there and had some idea of the events that day. Possibly I should start by telling you how and why our fire team became involved in your unit's "ballgame."

I was Razorback 33 and was flying with Razorback 3\_? (Al Cornell) leading a light fire team working alone in the pineapple fields, just west of Saigon (DUC HOA or MUC HOA area). We had made a few attacks on bunkers when we received a call from a USAF FAC flying an 01 Birddog over your area of operations. He told us that the operation was in trouble – he spotted our smoke/explosions – and requested our assistance to help in a re-supply effort. We immediately broke off and headed for your area at top speed, following his directions – soon seeing smoke rising from your LZ and surrounding paddies. Upon over flying your LZ and adjacent rice paddies, we saw a number of burning helicopters, 5 or 7, it's difficult to remember. I do remember telling the team that "those guys must have been ambushed." I thought of command detonated mines or artillery rounds in the LZ, something such as that. Upon arriving, the FAX was telling a TOP TIGER ship to wait for my team, as we would accompany him in to re-supply. My plan was to suppress the dike area boundary to the east of the LZ, as it was heavily vegetated, or hit wherever we drew fire on approach. The TOP TIGER ship set up a left base into the rice

paddy, landing to the north – without waiting for my team to join up on him. We, the FAC and me, hollered for him to stop – not go in – yet he continued! Just as he approached the ground, centered in the paddy, he was hit and the ship rolled over. I couldn't tell if he was hit by a mine or went over as the result of other fire. One thing stuck in my mind – no one was getting out – I saw no one crawl out of the wreckage and no one went in after them. The aircraft was not on fire, so I wanted to get them out of the wreckage – before it burned. We told our wing ship to cover us, we were going in to get them out – granted in hindsight, not very smart – yet we didn't want them to burn.

We went in, took a close look at the TOP TIGER bird, saw the infantry troopers flat on their stomachs across the area, some pointing to the east dike. As we took this in, our ship took hits, my starboard pod of 24 rockets (we had a "HOG") was set ablaze and my starboard door gunner took a round through his neck – sending him through the air and almost out the left side. A round had also hit the oil reservoir, as you may remember it was positioned just aft of the firewall and on the right side of the engine. The pressure reservoir split open with a resultant immediate loss of oil pressure. I could see we were next in order of burning ships, and our concern shifted from the TOP TIGER bird to our door gunner. I didn't know what his condition was, but he was alive and knew we had only seconds left to get him out. Full power/pitch was pulled as we pointed our bird straight for the line of black pajama clad VC lined across the dike firing at will at us some 25 yards away.

The rockets wouldn't fire, so I raked my hand across the center console to hit the toggle switch, safety wired off, to activate the explosive bolts mounting the rocket pods to the aircraft. They did blow the pods broke off as we climbed out and over the VC. To this day, I don't know if or how many of the bastards we took with us – I can only hope all was not in

vain in that some of them bought it! We turned back west, along the waterway just North of the LZ and made it about two clicks before going in, no further damage to our ship, but our engine was gone – (that engine will run for a short while without oil!) and we wanted our wingman to get our door gunner to the hospital ASAP.

Well, that's what I saw of that day – the General officer – a BG landed at our ship to see how we made out – then took off to go back and orbit over the area where he then took fire and was hit, along with his aide, the same two you wrote about. That wasn't very smart of him as well. Shortly after, I went to your base at Tay Ninh. It was there where I bought your officers club a round of drinks after entering covered. I couldn't tell it was a club! It was also there where I learned from your pilots some more of the story. I was told that the Command and Control had not allowed your guns to hit the area prior to assault – supposedly there were no “enemy” and the LZ was cold. As usual, I was told that the “counterpart” wouldn't approve suppression of the LZ. Again, if factual – dumb as dirt! How many times has that occurred? I've often wondered how many were killed needlessly in the action of that day. I learned a lesson I never forgot on that one – thereafter and on the following tour in Viet Nam as a gun driver, C&C and as the Commander of the 162d Assault Helicopter Company, I never bought that line of bull – always, always, always shot up everything in sight on our assaults – Vietnamese like it or not!! One thing for sure – never an ambush, no burning helicopters in the LZ!

Well, I've said a little – “coming out of the closet”, I suppose as the result of your writing. Also please don't construe my commends to cast a negative light on the efforts of the TOP TIGER aircraft commander, whoever he was, as I hold all my comrades in highest esteem. Just another case of “maybe it didn't have to happen that way”. Why he didn't wait will only be known to him and God. So much has been held up inside

of me these past 20 years. I'm sure you understand.....

Sincerely,

Ken