

My Last Sniper Mission

By Dale (Hannibal) Hansen
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I was directed to report to the Command Bunker and meet with our Company Commander and 1ST Sergeant. There I was briefed that there was to be a three (3) Sniper Team Operation commencing that evening. This was a bit unusual, as typically only one (1) sniper would be involved with this kind of mission. But with further explanation from the C.O. it all began to make sense, well, most of it. The plan was to move off Hill 88 at dark moving east toward the South China Sea Beach and the surrounding mountains. Once there at the base of the target mountain, the 1st Sniper Team would break off heading SE along the base of that mountain to their pre-designated location. The 2nd & 3rd Sniper Team would ascend up the mountain to the location of two (2) previous Sniper Operations. Both those previous times we encountered enemy contact. The 2nd Team would occupy that location and the 3rd Sniper Team would be directed up a back trail that would lead further up the mountain.

It was at this point in the conversation I voiced my objections reminding the C.O. that we had been to this location two (2) times in recent history and both times we had contact. Every combat vet in Vietnam was fully aware that you never went to the same location twice, especially if you made contact, let alone three times!

I figured the C.O. and Top both had a fair amount of respect for me because they listened to my complaints and whining for it seems like hours before locking my heels ordering me to, "stay off the point!" This was in reference to being the point element of the troops, something I had done quite a bit of in the past.

Team 1 Sniper was to be Jimmy Barnett. Team 2 Sniper – me, and Team 3 Sniper - Ken Jolly. I was then released to get my gear together in preparation to move out in a few hours.

Moving at night off Hill 88 we had to skirt around several hooches housing the local farmers. It wasn't much of a village, but we never knew who was watching, reporting or entertaining our little VC buddies or worse. Heading towards the beach it was mainly flat land, albeit, there were a couple of times we had to cross rivers winding in from the sea. And fortunately for us, we didn't find until many years later from Ranger Tom Carpenter, that those rivers contained crocodiles. And at high tide, those crossings were about neck high on you. From Hill 88 to the beach and adjacent mountains was quite a hump and took most of the night.

Sometime I'm guessin' around 0500 hours our Pointman led us into some impenetrable brush near the beach. I say impenetrable because I had been in it once before and knew the only way out was back. I also knew that if we weren't in our positions by dawn, the mission would be compromised and a complete waste of time. I stated I was taking up the Point.

Once out of the brush we didn't have too far to go. At the base of the mountain, Jimmy and his team peeled off heading for their spot. My team and Team 3 moved in the opposite direction for a few hundred meters then began our climb. By the time we got into my spot the sky was already beginning to lighten. I dropped my ruck and only carried my sniper rifle as I led Team 3 through my location to where they would intersect the trail heading up the mountain.

We hadn't gone more than twenty (20) meters when I heard a click and looked down. Although the sky was getting light, the ground was still dark. The next thing I saw was a bright flash and heard an explosion as I was blown into the air that carried me back about 10 feet. I had snagged the device's trip wire and was momentarily stunned, but once I regained my senses I figured we were being ambushed. My rifle had been blown out of my hands so I crawled back towards the blast to retrieve it. I heard screaming to my rear and then saw Sniper Ken Jolly. He had been right behind me and took a large piece of shrapnel in his neck. The blast had also blown him back and down pinning his right arm behind his back and rucksack. Blood was pouring out of his wound and running down over his shoulder. It probably appeared to Ken that his right arm had been blown off and shock from loss of blood was setting in.

Behind Ken about fifteen (15) feet McGruder had stepped on a Bouncing Betty Mine. It popped up and detonated with only a puff of smoke, it was a dud and had it gone off, many troops would have been killed or severely wounded by the blast. Only feet away on the side of the trail from McGruder, Jim Scales and several others was an old undetonated five-hundred (500) pound bomb. We had found it on our previous visits, but this time it was rigged as another booby trap. Everyone stayed clear of the brute.

As Ken and I were being attended to a Dustoff was called. It took less than thirty (30) minutes before the Medevac arrived on station. Since we were on the side of the mountain surrounded by any number of the enemy's ordinances and no good place to land the bird, a jungle penetrator was lowered for Ken. I remember lying there watching the guys load Ken in the basket and as they began to raise it up to the helicopter it started to spin. Around and around it went as they hauled it up and into the aircraft. I would be next, but without the spinning basket.

I sustained multiple shrapnel wounds to both legs, right ankle and a small marble sized piece to my left arm. Quiñones grabbed me by the arm, bent over and threw me over his shoulder. Then with his right hand placed over that chunk of metal and my loud vocal complaints, we prepared for our decent. Once his hand was repositioned, we headed back down the mountain to the now awaiting airlift to the rear.

During the flight the onboard medic came over, looked at me and asked if I wanted a shot of Morphine. I declined as I studied Ken's ashen white face on the adjacent litter. He had obviously lost a lot of blood and was just quietly lying there. I assumed the medic had helped him out with his pain management for the ride back.

After a flight of about twenty (20) minutes, we landed at the 22nd Surg in Phu Bai to awaiting medical personnel that quickly boarded us on litters rolling us towards the surgical center. As one was pushing the wheeled litter another was cutting off my clothes and boots. It reminded me of scenes from the TV Program, "Mash".

I remember being taken into the X-Ray Room. It was cold and I was now shaking like a leaf as my body was sinking into shock. The X-Ray Attendant asked if I could just hold still for a few seconds each time to take the needed pictures. I complied by take a large breath and holding it. I guess it worked because I was soon headed into surgery.

In Recovery, our rear area XO came to check on me. I guess the sodium pentothal still had its grasp on me as ranted on how he was a sorry ass REMF among other nasty things. It was the drugs, I barely knew the man and had no adverse feelings towards him. I've felt badly all the years for how I treated him.

All my inquiries concerning Ken's condition were met with "he's fine" or "he's doing nicely" or words to that effect. And after a few days I was placed on a C-130 Hospital Transport. The cargo

bay was outfitted with multiple litters, like a large bunkhouse. We took off from Phu Bai for parts unknown to us passengers and soon landed. As the aircraft crew lowered the aft ramp we could see a couple of civilian jet liners. Someone declared we had landed in Da Nang, which made sense due to the short flight and civilian airliners.

As the plane sat on the tarmac three (3) or four (4) airline stewardess from the civilian jets walked up the ramp and began visiting with us. Other than one (1) round-eyed nurse from the 22nd Surg that smiled at me as I awoke one morning, it was the first time we had seen any American Women in it like, forever. They were so sweet and smelled good too!

Off again into the wild blue yonder we flew. Next stop, 312th Evac, Chu Lai. This is where I would spend the next month recovering from surgery, wire stitches for my open wounds and watching "Combat" on the Quonset Hut Ward's TV. I cannot express how happy I was to be sleeping in a bed with my meals served to me and be attended to by the sweetest 1LT nurse in the world. I believe she was the one that finally discovered Ken had been sent to a hospital in Japan and then from there would be headed home.

It wasn't many days before a nice, beautiful young lady from a USO Show came calling. I could get used to this, but alas, she was gone in a short time never to be seen again. However, I next received a visitor from the Americal Division. It was their AO at the time and he being a General could probably go wherever he wanted. Turns out he did have business there, to award me my Purple Heart. That really was nice of him and I appreciated it.

All too soon I was off again racking up more frequent flyer miles and still not knowing my destination. The longer flight was worth it though as I discovered beautiful white sand beaches, "Friday Night Fights" and outdoor movies. Welcome to Cam Rahn Bay and the 6th Convalescent Center! It was here I would spend the remainder of my healing time sitting on the beach, watching the Korean (mostly) soldiers beat the hell out of each other every Friday night and enjoying evenings at the movies. After several weeks of that, it would be back to the bush and my buddies.

It's now been over fifty-six (56) years since these events and time after time during these years I've searched the Internet looking for Sniper Ken Jolly, all to no avail. I've also thought about why some decisions were made. Of course, I'm mainly referring to our C.O., a man Special Forces Qualified with at least one prior combat tour with SF, now sending us to that same location for a third time. But as I grow older and hopefully, a little wiser, it makes far more sense that he was just following orders. Now here's the kicker . . .

Late Monday night 7.28.25, an email to hannibal@327infantry.org was received:

It was from Ken's daughter asking if this email was still valid.

Of course I responded early the next morning, just as soon as I read it, telling her that I have been looking for Ken for years.

She responded asking if I was in fact, Dale Hansen?

She then floored me by reporting that her father had passed on Sunday, July 20, 2025. And that she had been looking for me because while Ken was in the ER, he had a flashback. Ken relived the whole thing after we were hit on that operation and kept asking for me and wanted to know

if I was okay. She asked him, who was Dale Hansen? Ken smiled and told her that we were on the Sniper Team together.

Apparently, Ken never spoke about his time in Vietnam much and they didn't know any names of his buddies till the flashback. I think we all wish we could have reconnected a lot sooner.

Godspeed my brother, you are missed!