

The Battle of FSB Granite

101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), (Operation Texas Star), 29 April 1970; South Vietnam; located at MGRS YD439188 (approximately 9 miles northeast of the A Shau Valley and 16 miles west of Hue City); Company A, 2nd Battalion, 501st Infantry and Attachments



(THE MAP ABOVE IS AN EXACT DUPLICATE OF THE ONE I CARRIED THROUGHOUT OPERATION TEXAS STAR....1:50,000; EACH GRID SQUARE IS A KILOMETER SQUARE; THE BROWN CONTOUR LINES ARE AT 20 METER INTERVALS IN ELEVATION.)

I led A Company onto Fire Support Base Granite as its Company Commander; I was their leader throughout the fight on April 29th; I fought for and with them; I led them off of the hill when so ordered. They were (and are) common Americans of uncommon patriotism, valor, and fidelity. They fought for me and I fought for them for “greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”.

MY ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE OF FIRE SUPPORT BASE GRANITE IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE WE LOST BUT ESPECIALLY IN MEMORY OF SSG EDWARD J. BISHOP, JR.; MIA 29 APRIL 1970, DECLARED KILLED IN ACTION ON GRANITE; REMAINS NOT RECOVERED.



(CPT MITCHELL STANDING ALONG SIDE THE COMPANY COMMAND POST; THE PHOTO IS MADE LOOKING WEST TOWARD COC A BO MOUNTAIN.)

Following A Company’s weeklong battle (17-24 April 70) with a determined NVA force along the ridge line from HILL 902 (YD348171) southeast to the trail junction we named REUP HILL (YD362165), we returned to Eagle Beach for two days and then got back into the TEXAS STAR fight by air assaulting into Fire Support Base Granite on or about 26 April to begin our “shift” as

its defenders. Our battalion mission remained unchanged....to locate and destroy enemy forces, base camps, and cache sites within our assigned area of operations. During our short stint at Eagle Beach we'd picked up a precious few badly needed replacements and some of us were content to have a couple of days to get some shrapnel picked out, heal up a bit, and refit from the previous week's intensity. The short break from humping the mountainous jungles and the frequent engagements with the NVA on and around REUP HILL was a welcomed operational pause for every Avenger but we knew that our hours were numbered before we would head back northwest and we would be quickly inserted back into the fight.



(ON GRANITE'S NORTH LZ, MEN OF A COMPANY AWAIT INCOMING "SLICKS" AS THEY AIR ASSAULT INTO NEARBY RIDGES TO CONDUCT RECON PATROLLING.)

As we air assaulted into Granite's tiny landing zone one aircraft at a time on the north end of the hilltop and began to fill the hill's fighting positions we were joining the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) of the 2-501st Infantry (under command of LTC Otis Livingston), along with our direct support 105mm artillery battery from 2-319 FA and organic 81mm mortars as they continued to perform the routine activities associated with operating from and defending a forward support combat base. Granite's principle function was to provide a reasonably secure platform for artillery weapons systems forward deployed into the canopy in support of infantry

forces operating to our west and northwest. Our battalion's mission, as part of the 3rd Brigade's spring incursion into the mountainous canopy between the coastal lowlands to the east and the A Chau Valley to the west, was clear and unambiguous but the operational tempo, characteristic of an airmobile division, had kept the Geronimo Battalion's subordinate infantry companies constantly on the move in our efforts to "fix" an extremely illusive enemy. Having joined the 3rd Brigade the first week in April, we had been leaping by air from one landing zone to another and one fire base to another to locate specific enemy base camps and lines of communications and logistics. With the TEXAS STAR operation barely three weeks into execution, A Company had conducted at least three or four combat air assaults (as best I recall), and the 2-501 headquarters was now on Granite, its third fire support base since the operation began (Jack, Gladiator, and now Granite).



(THE COMPANY COMMAND POST [LOOKING SOUTHWEST] FROM THE LZ;
WEAPONS ARE THOSE OF OUR KIAs AND WIAs ALONG WITH COLLECTED AKs
AND RPGs FROM THE NVA KIAs.)

Immediately after my arrival on Granite I dropped my ruck at the Company CP and walked the hill's perimeter to get the lay of the land we were to defend and familiarize myself with locations of the hill's tenant units. My first impressions of Granite were that we were really

packed tightly onto the hilltop. Granite, like many of the mountainous hilltops in the area, was extremely rocky around the summit (making it difficult to dig), and the slope off of the western side was extremely steep limiting the effectiveness of grazing fires from our automatic weapons. On the eastern side of Granite the slope leading into the jungle was much less steep however a series of rocky outcroppings and boulders provided excellent cover and concealment allowing an excellent approach to within ten to fifteen meters of the existing fighting positions. From my initial reconnaissance of the hill I determined the most dangerous avenues of enemy approach were along Granite's eastern side and along the finger leading down from the LZ on the northern end of the fire base. After my short walk around the hill I recall thinking that we had much work to do to defend Granite's irregular shaped perimeter properly and I was concerned that we were short the numbers of infantrymen needed to fill existing fighting positions. Once A Company had closed on the hill and while the platoon leaders were sorting out the occupation of fighting positions and sectors of fire, I made my way up to the battalion TOC to gather the latest operational and intelligence updates. I found the TOC (with its maze of antenna masts) housed in sandbagged CONEX containers on the south end of the hill, and as is normally the case, the place was abuzz with taking situation reports from our three other rifle companies deployed to our west and northwest, preparing plans and orders for subsequent operations, and other such command and control functions. After a brief conversation and routine updates from the battalion's command group (and some warm hand-shakes with some old friends on the staff) I headed back to my CP to get to work with my platoon leaders and review our plans for the defense.



(THE PHOTO ABOVE IS LOOKING SOUTH ATOP GRANITE AND FROM THE LZ CAPTURES OUR ARTILLERY AND MORTAR AMMUNITION STOCKPILES AS WELL AS VARIOUS ARTILLERY AND MORTAR AIMING STAKES.)

Throughout the day as A Company settled into Granite's perimeter our howitzer battery fired numerous missions responding to calls for fire from subordinate units and between lulls in fire missions, continued to improve defensive positions around their guns. For A Company, our primary functions were to defend Granite while simultaneously conducting limited counter reconnaissance patrols, improving the fighting positions and defensive wire obstacles that ringed the perimeter of the hill, and refining defensive plans to ensure the security of the hill's occupants. We were, by all accounts, still a severely under strength organization (infantry replacements were a critical shortage division-wide) but a combat-seasoned, battle tested rifle company that had seen the bulk of the battalion's combat activity in the early days of the brigade operation that had begun the first week of April.

A Company's leaders and its veterans were fully aware that our work to defend the hill would be difficult and would entail never-ending hard labor made more challenging because of our severe shortages of 11Bs (Infantrymen). Despite virtually no intelligence describing the threats near Granite we all knew that the area had more than its share of NVA and we were no more than eight kilometers east of the location of our previous fights less than a week earlier. Every A Company leader understood the defensive priorities of work as we filled the perimeter and assumed sectors of defensive responsibility. We were certainly resource poor with respect to our labor pool of 11B infantryman but heavily laden with a host of new tasks to accomplish in a static perimeter defense. Our list of defensive tasks to be accomplished seemed endless but included counter reconnaissance patrolling around the surrounding hills, filling countless sandbags, improving fighting positions, clearing fields of fire to our front and flanks, emplacing dozens of rolls of defensive wire, positioning claymore mines and fougasse barrels (a flame 55 gallon barrel explosive), and most importantly, maintaining about a third of the force around the perimeter on full alert for possible probes or an NVA attack. As I watched the men of A Company close by air onto Granite I recall thinking that I was indeed fortunate to command such a great group of soldiers for, to the man, they knew what needed to be accomplished and understood the demanding physical effort required. Our morale was high...the "Drive On" spirit (the motto of the 2-501 Infantry) was evident in the work ethic of every soldier. The men of A Company and our attachments arrived intent in going about our work day after day on Granite without complaint from dawn until dusk with great pride and a sense of accomplishment. We were determined to leave our professional mark on Granite as its defenders and depart within a week or so "back into the bush" confident that we had left the hill far more defensible than we had found it. In retrospect, I suppose most of us were relieved to get onto Granite having had a couple of days at Eagle Beach after the REUP Hill affair. At least we could look at fire base duty for a week or so as a welcome break from heavy rucks to hump day after

day and the constant threat of ambush. On Granite there was no lack of potable water... resupply of food and other necessities was reliable, and we could get some sun on the cuts, scratches, and jungle rot that always accumulated while we were operating under the canopy for extended periods of time. (Our Battalion Surgeon was on Granite with us too so those needing special medical attention were quite fortunate). We also welcomed a break from the frequency and intensity of combat we had experienced during our stint in the jungles to our northwest. Fire base duty was a tough, arduous assignment but often perceived by many of us as a welcome break from humping the mountainous jungle with the constant expectation of meeting the NVA face to face around every bend in the trail. I always assumed that our point men welcomed the break because our contacts with the NVA in the weeks before Granite had been up close and personal from the moment we had begun the spring offensive as part of the 3rd Brigade. Most of our meeting engagements with the NVA were at 15 meters or less and we had ended almost three weeks of search and destroy operations sitting astride a critical NVA trail junction that drew their attacks or probes almost every night we were there. However, defending from fire bases like Granite occurred as a matter of normal rotation for rifle companies transitioning in and out of the canopy and therefore it was not an unexpected tasking. Our first few days on Granite were unremarkable and best described as business as usual. Other than seeing a few lights in the hills to our east (which we engaged with artillery) we had seen no enemy activity...no actionable intelligence had turned up and our patrols beyond our perimeter (including several air assaults into the surrounding hills) revealed no signs of any significant enemy presence. Our first few days and nights on Granite had been surprisingly quiet and we had worked relentlessly to improve our defensive posture.

Like every infantry company in Vietnam, as the sun approached the jungled mountain ridges to our west in late afternoon on the 29th of April, the mood and seriousness of purpose began its normal transition from tasks of preparation and improvement of our defenses to an increase in our alert status in transition for a night defense. With a sense of purpose, soldiers along the line of fighting positions turned to the tasks necessary to bring every fighter on the hill to a full "stand to" occupation of our night defensive perimeter well before darkness. As mentioned earlier, defending the hill was our primary mission on Granite therefore our first priority. The clammer and noise of picks, mallets, and entrenching tools around the perimeter positions was rapidly coming to a close. The normal joking and occasional shouts from position to position along the bunker line gradually subsided. The infantryman on Granite quietly and purposefully moved to emplace or check trip flares, claymore mines and early warning devices to their front, verified that there were no "friendlies" forward of our defensive lines and then, without order, slipped into their fighting positions to conduct weapons checks, lay out ammunition for easy access in the dark, arm claymore mines, and swap their "boony hats" for steel pots before darkness fell. As the light faded, the defenders of the hill were at "stand to" in their fighting positions...one hundred percent alert around the perimeter. As the darkness overtook Granite, A Company's leaders



(LOOKING SOUTHEAST INTO A DESTROYED FIGHTING POSITION.)

(including me) walked the perimeter checking individual fighting positions, whispering quietly with the occupants of each hole, and giving last minute instructions for the night defense.

Despite our limited counter reconnaissance patrolling around the surrounding ridge lines, we had no concrete indications or warning of an imminent attack....no tactical intelligence of any kind to suggest that elements of the 7th NVA Sapper Battalion and the 29th NVA Regiment were moving into their attack positions around Granite with intentions of destroying our fire base and killing or capturing its defenders.

As the darkness engulfed Granite on the night of the 29th of April, the clouds moved in and the heat of the day was replaced by a cooler, more overcast, almost light foggy condition. In my command post (CP), a roughly ten by ten foot hole covered by steel planking and sandbags just above our one-ship landing zone (LZ) on the north end of Granite, it was "business as usual" as we accounted for the activities of the day by radio with subordinate platoons, confirmed last minute defensive decisions, and laid plans for the next day's work. My Forward Observer and I were engaged shoulder to shoulder reviewing defensive indirect fire plans and confirming last minute indirect fire target lists to be executed just before dawn on the 30th. My radio operators

were also in radio contact with our three platoon command posts around the perimeter, busily gathering the often mundane daily personnel/logistics requests and relaying the collected information to our higher headquarters staff elements.....a usual activity each evening. As we settled in for the night defense I recall that all was quiet and quite dark on Granite other than the tiny red glows from our mortar and artillery aiming posts atop the hill. I recall one or two complaints of an occasional hand flare being fired from the bunker line along the northeast side of Granite but that ended with a radio call to the CP responsible for that sector. By candle light, red-filtered flashlight, and a few C-Ration cups of coffee the work inside our CP continued well into the evening.

At about 9:40 PM, the east and northeast side of Granite's perimeter suddenly, and without warning, erupted with igniting trip flares, small arms fire, and in rapid succession a series of large, recognizable explosions immediately identified as satchel charges (improvised explosive devices) and RPG's (rocket-propelled grenades). As our hand flares streaked skyward to provide immediate illumination, the hill shook from the largest explosions coming from along the eastern bunker line and near our 81mm mortar position some twenty meters or so to my right rear. Even more hand flares ran their familiar contrails up into the clouds to further illuminate our hilltop as the crescendo of exploding munitions continued to build. We immediately knew we were under attack by a sizable, well armed, and carefully rehearsed NVA force that had obviously penetrated our outer defensive wire barrier in multiple locations. The fighting positions to my front across the LZ and to my right along the east and northeast side of Granite were hit hard with sporadic RPGs, small arms fire, and a hail of satchel charges of various sizes , some weighing 10 pounds or more.

Our mortar position, an obvious NVA priority target, was neutralized almost immediately without firing a shot (as I recollect) and its occupants were mortally wounded. A Company's infantrymen along that side of the perimeter and to my immediate front were countering the NVA assault with an almost indistinguishable roar of M-16, M-79, and M-60 machine-gun fire as well as detonating claymore mines and throwing hand grenades. Within the first 15 to 20 minutes or so the flame munitions were detonated along the eastern perimeter momentarily casting a bright orange glow beneath at least a dozen or more hand flares now illuminating Granite. Our sheer volume and intensity of fire from the bunker line rapidly halted the NVA Sapper's mass advance into our positions. In fact, several soldiers who had been overlooking the flame munitions reported later that they observed scores of NVA soldiers on fire and running back into the jungle. However, for several more hours the fighting continued against a battered but determined NVA force as they appeared to attack piecemeal in small groups of two or three focused on specific fighting positions along and within our perimeter.



(81MM MORTAR POSITION DESTROYED BY EITHER RPG OR SACHEL CHARGE.)

The NVA Sapper teams were a determined lot...they clearly had specific targets assigned...they were well rehearsed and apparently were desperate to accomplish their missions. (Over the years I've often marveled at the courage and tenacity of the NVA infantrymen...they were a formidable enemy with enormous concentration and well rehearsed in their efforts to destroy specific assigned objectives within our lines). Throughout the remainder of the night there were occasional close combat engagements with small surviving teams of NVA still hellbent to penetrate our perimeter as we made adjustments in our lines to close gaps created by our own losses. Concurrently, as the battle raged, other supporting divisional and non-divisional assets arrived to augment the battle. While our supporting tube artillery pounded suspected NVA positions in the surrounding hills, aerial rocket artillery joined in the fight as did a USAF AC-119 "Stinger" Gun Ship and the hill was illuminated by welcomed general support aviation assets as we were becoming dangerously low on our own supply of flare munitions.

At first light on the 30th, the aerial rocket artillery along with the Division's Air Cavalry assets provided us greater precision in attacking suspected enemy locations as the visibility improved.



(ANOTHER FIGHTING POSITION HIT HARD BY SATCHEL CHARGES ALONG THE NORTHEAST PERIMETER.)

As mentioned earlier, several of the fighting positions to my immediate front across the landing zone and also to my right rear along the northeastern perimeter were destroyed within the first few minutes of the battle. In effect, my CP had immediately become a critical component of the perimeter fight overlooking the only LZ on the northern end of the fire base. During the most intense hour of the battle I could see a number of my own soldiers in face to face encounters no more than 15 to 20 meters to my front and front right. The advancing NVA attackers were being met with a hail of small arms fire and grenades. As is always the case, the close combat to my front and right was chaotic and there were moments when all of us had great difficulty separating friend from foe as we identified human targets in the shadows created by drifting flares overhead. Time and again I listened to and observed A Company's infantrymen engaging individual NVA soldiers as they crawled to within arms reach of our fighting positions. Above the pitch of the incessant explosions I could hear shouts between our fighting positions identifying approaching enemy soldiers and quick, violent engagements to stop enemy advances. For what seemed like

much of the night the men of A Company raked known and suspected enemy positions with withering direct fire and scores of hand grenades were hurled at enemy soldiers attempting to close on our fighting positions. From my CP we were able to dispatch several NVA Sappers as they stood to hurl satchel charges in our direction from across the LZ. At on point around dawn, we used a LAW (Light Anti-Tank Weapon) to blast one or more NVA from a protective rock outcropping just below and left of my CP.



(ALONG THE NORTH EAST PERIMETER THAT TOOK THE MAIN ATTACK AND IN THE AREA WHERE THE FLAME MUNITIONS WERE DETONATED; SEVERAL NVA DEAD ARE LYING WITHIN THE BOULDERS THAT CONCEALED THEIR ADVANCE.)

As dawn broke, the direct fire engagements along the perimeter had all but stopped and our priorities shifted to evacuating the wounded and those killed in action along with reconsolidating our perimeter, redistributing and resupplying ammunition, and sweeping our immediate front for security purposes. As we swept the eastern sector mid morning below our perimeter some 20 meters or so, I discovered a severely wounded but semiconscious NVA soldier desperately in need of medical attention. With some assistance we quickly began our struggle to get the POW back

up the hill to our Aid Station for treatment. As I struggled up the hill helping to carrying him we began to receive quite accurate NVA mortar fire (either 60mm or 82mm) for the first time and I recall dropping the enemy soldier at one point along our route to dive into a nearby foxhole to wait out the barrage. When the mortars finally lifted we got the POW back to our Aid Station and he was later evacuated from Granite. I returned to continue a sweep of the eastern sector just outside our defensive wire and found a number of dead NVA Sappers lying between and around several large boulders. Their bodies appeared to have been blackened from head to toe for the attack. All were shirtless; most were without footgear, and wore nothing but short pants. As I recall, most of them were equipped with folding stock AK assault rifles and a shoulder bag containing an assortment of satchel charges and one or more AK magazines. I must admit that the scene was a gruesome one and yet a testament of their courage and determination to destroy our fire base. Several RPG launchers and RPG rounds with propellant boosters were spread among the dead NVA as well and we collected their weapons and ammunition later that morning and piled them along side our LZ for evacuation.



(MY COMPANY CP ON GRANITE....DESTROYED RUCKS OF OUR CASUALTIES... SPENT HAND FLARE CANISTERS...MY M16 LAYING ACROSS AN AMMO CRATE FROM WHERE MOST OF MY FIGHTING OCCURRED.)



(THREE GREAT MEMBERS OF THE A COMPANY CP...[NAMES LEFT OFF INTENTIONALLY] BUT FOREVER REMEMBERED FOR THEIR SELFLESS SERVICE...WITHIN A DAY OR TWO I LOST ONE TO WOUNDS ON GRANITE AND ANOTHER TO WOUNDS ON HENDERSON ABOUT A WEEK LATER.)

For the remainder of our time on Granite there were no ground probes or direct fire attacks by the NVA although they were certainly anticipated. Our priority of effort at this point shifted to accountability of our own combatants, reorganizing our defensive perimeter, rearming/refitting for potential counter attacks, and evacuating our own dead and wounded. The NVA mortar attacks on Granite which had begun as we were getting the POW up the hill around 1000 AM on the 30th continued in earnest for the remainder of the day and were a serious threat to anyone moving around Granite. On at least five occasions we were forced to stop all movement around the hill to seek cover as mortar rounds rained onto Granite. Before the day was over we would sustain approximately thirty more casualties from very accurate NVA mortar fires. I would emphasize that these indirect fire attacks came largely without warning and were very accurate which made them that much more dangerous. We were rarely able to detect the sounds of their launch from the surrounding hills due to the noise of our own supporting helicopters involved in resupply, medical evacuation, aerial reconnaissance and almost continuous air strikes targeting nearby hills. The NVA mortars were both physically and psychologically a factor in hampering our recovery on the hill.



(AIR ASSAULT TAKING PLACE FOR ANOTHER DAYLIGHT RECON PATROL)

A Company air assaulted off of Granite under the threat of mortar fire late in the day and not without our own grave concerns for ourselves and the brave air crews that risked their lives to extract us. As we lifted off of Granite and out of harm's way many of us knew that we had left one of our own behind as unaccounted for. All day on the 30th, despite the intense mortar fire, we had combed the hill and the immediate terrain around Granite's eastern perimeter searching for PFC EDWARD J. BISHOP, JR.. Many of us knew his exact location along the eastern flank near the 81mm mortar position when the battle had begun yet his whereabouts after the ground attack subsided remained a mystery. In fact, Ed's position was no more than 20 meters from my CP to my right rear and bore the brunt of some of the fiercest fighting and the greatest density of large satchel charges coming from the NVA's main thrust in their effort to overrun Granite. Ed Bishop was a great soldier and well liked by all who knew him. None of us, not one, will ever rest until there is a full accounting of his loss and he has been brought home.

The 101st Airborne Division After Action Report lists seven U.S. killed, one U.S. Missing In Action, and seven wounded as a result of the battle on Granite that began on the 29th and another thirty-four wounded as a result of five separate mortar attacks on Granite on the 30th. NVA losses were reported as 18 killed in action. With some degree of certainty, I believe that the

total U.S. wounded on Granite remains understated for many soldiers were treated for wounds at multiple Aid Stations after we had departed from Granite.

The by-name list of those killed on Granite, as best I can determine, is as follows:

1. ROBERT SIDNEY BOGGS; MOS 11B; B Company, 2-501 Infantry; died of multiple fragmentation wounds.
2. LARRY NEAL JONES; MOS 11C; E Company, 2-501 Infantry; died of multiple fragmentation wounds.
3. DENNIS WAYNE HUNTER; MOS 11B; A Company, 2-501 Infantry; died from artillery, rocket, or mortar wounds.
4. CARL EUGENE PATTEN; MOS 11C; E Company, 2-501 Infantry; died from artillery, rocket, or mortar wounds.
5. ROY HARRISON SNYDER; MOS 11B; A Company, 2-501 Infantry; died from artillery, rocket, or mortar wounds.
6. FREDERICK EDWARD WORTMANN; MOS 64B; A Company, 2-501 Infantry; died of undefined cause.
7. ROBERT JOSEPH SHANNON; MOS 57A; A Company, 2-501 Infantry; died of undefined cause.
8. LINWOOD ALFERONIA WALKER; MOS 11B; C Company, 2-501 Infantry; died outright; misadventure.
9. EDWARD J. BISHOP, JR.; MOS 11B; A Company, 2-501 Infantry; initially listed as MIA; later classified as “died while missing-remains not returned”.

‘TO THOSE LOST ON FIRE SUPPORT BASE GRANITE, YOU WILL FOREVER BE REMEMBERED; TO THE SURVIVORS OF THE GRANITE BATTLE, YOU ARE BROTHERS FOREVER.’

The author of this account, Brigadier General James E. Mitchell, USA, Retired, served on active duty for more than thirty years. He led two rifle platoons (one in combat); commanded four Infantry Companies (two in combat); commanded a Motorized Infantry Battalion, a Light Infantry Battalion, a Light Infantry Brigade and served as a Light Infantry Division Deputy Commander for Operations and Deputy Commander for Support. Key staff assignments include: Infantry Battalion S3 Air(twice); Infantry Battalion S2(Intelligence) in combat; Infantry Battalion S3; Infantry Battalion Executive Officer; Light Infantry Division G3; Chief of Current Operations, U.S. Army-The Pentagon; Deputy Director of Operations-J3, The Joint Staff-Pentagon. He is a graduate of the Army Command and Staff College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces-The National Defense University.

