

# A Good Day



By Thomas L. Cuni

It may be self indulgent, but my column this month is about a day in my life. The story has nothing to do with the law or our profession, but it is a story from 40 years ago I still enjoy telling.

We had been out for three weeks. During that time the weather had fluctuated between raining a little bit and raining a lot. At first light, Charlie Company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 506<sup>th</sup> Infantry assembled and began moving. By late morning we descended the last mountain and walked out of the jungle onto the coastal plain. We crossed an area of rolling hills with scattered patches of scrub brush and some stands of bamboo in low areas. After weeks in the close confinement of the jungle, it felt good to be in an open space with a horizon.

We were within a few kilometers (“clicks” in the parlance of that time) of our destination, Fire Support Base (FSB) Jack, when the order was received to halt. The rain had stopped and an onshore breeze began clearing the clouds away. The 40 or so men of Charlie Company settled down on a grass-covered knoll. In a short time, we saw the sun for the first time in what seemed a very long time. We were out of range of any real threat, so the temporary halt turned into something of a picnic. Ponchos and poncho liners were spread out. Everyone shed helmets, rucksacks, ammunition belts and bandoliers. Shirts came off and olive drab boxer shorts substituted for shorts at what soon resembled a beach party. Well, there was no ocean, no beach, no girls and no cold beer, but otherwise it felt like a beach party.

To preserve noise discipline, it was against the rules to carry transistor radios in your rucksack. In that happy location, noise discipline was not an issue. Radios could be played loudly for everyone to hear. The song I remember best from that day was by Credence Clearwater Revival. A phrase from the song, *Looking Out My Backdoor*, stuck with me for all these years: “Bother me tomorrow, today I have no sorrow...” It fit my mood exactly.

I remember sitting in the warm sun, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes and talking quietly. A couple of games of spades were being played using the medic’s supply of malaria tablets as chips. The little white tablets were nickels. The big orange pills (the “Monday Monday pills”) were quarters. When taking the pills it was better not to think about their prior service as chips in the less-than-clean hands of the card players.

The reason for the delay in our march was to stay clear of the area in which brush and tall grass was being burned away from the potential enemy avenues of approach to FSB Jack. At a distance, the Chinook helicopters with cargo nets of 55 gallon drums of jellied gas looked like large dragonflies as they first hovered and then dropped the drums of gasoline on the vegetation to be burned away.

We lay in the sun and talked away the afternoon. I do not remember the conversations that day — they were probably about going home — but I do remember the mood.

For a few hours, we were dry after being wet. After being in the shadows

of the jungle, we were in bright, warm sunlight. The clean wind from the South China Sea was refreshing after weeks of the fetid odor of the jungle. Tension was replaced by relaxation. We knew that before nightfall we would be inside the relative safety of the earthen berm and razor wire surrounding FSB Jack. That night we would sleep on plywood beds in warm, dry bunkers — a true luxury. Best of all, there would be hot food after weeks of C-rations and freeze-dried meals called LRRPs (which stood for the rations designed for Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols). At some earlier time, they were given the name “lurps” by the soldiers who had to eat them. I think lurps is probably the best onomatopoeia of that long ago war.

There are only a few days in my life to compare to that day. I was 23-years-old. Forty years have passed. I remember these, and many more details of that day, as though it happened only a few months ago.

If it were mine to give, I would give a day such as mine to the young men and women who have served and who are now serving in this nation’s wars. It would give them at least one pleasant memory to recall as they sort through their experiences.

While I am making wishes during this season of hope and peace, I hope that you will also have the good fortune to experience such a day.

And thank you for taking the time to read this recollection. **R**

*Thomas L. Cuni is 2010-2011 president of the Cincinnati Bar Association.*