

### Barry Mishler U.S. Army Vietnam

**B**arry was drafted into the U.S. Army September 10, 1969. He had not expected to be called that soon since his draft lottery number was 357 but it was during the time when so many either went to school or left the country to avoid the draft and men were needed badly.

Basic training was at Ft. Jackson, S. Carolina. This consisted of 6 weeks regular basic where he was trained in the use of the M16, M14, M79, R.P.G. Launcher etc. plus first-aid, booby-traps and whatever they thought was needed if they ended up in the field which he had a feeling he probably would. This followed by an additional six weeks A.I.T. (Advanced Infantry Training) where he classified 11C specializing in 81mm mortars.

Following this training came a thirty day leave with advanced notice that he was amongst the men chosen to go to Vietnam.

Next he was sent to San Francisco where he stayed for one week awaiting orders and they were soon on their way. The flight took approximately twenty-two to twenty-four hours, destination Da Nang. Here he

was assigned to the 101st Airborne and when he heard that his first thought was "Oh no! Paratroops!" but was relieved to hear it would be the Infantry Division of the 101st Airborne also nicknamed "The Screaming Eagles". They were divided into groups for 'in country training' which lasted two weeks. This, getting them familiarized with booby traps, trip wires and acquainted with all types of field battle etc., also night guard duty, a necessary experience. From there they were transferred to Hue (pronounced Way) where the 101st unit he was in worked right in the jungle. Barry spent several months in that jungle and earned his CIB badge (Combat Infantry Badge) his second day out. He saw a LOT of action.

As far as friends go Barry related "I only had one real close friend and that was God. I think He was a very popular person over there. I would pray every night so that maybe I could make one more day."

They were always wet from either rain or sweat. "At night we would wrap up in our Poncho liners and it seemed to absorb the moisture and dry us out."

Jungle rot was always present. Just get a scratch and it would infect almost immediately. "It's a good thing I wasn't a fussy eater too," he remarked, "Guess the C rations didn't bother me too much. There was a sort of fruit cake and another can that had about three pieces of meat in it. I didn't like that so always saved it for last." Those two items more than once lasted him for four or five days when food could not be dropped to them because of weather conditions or enemy presence. They drank from the river, never even thinking about whether or not it was clean. "We would sometimes catch rain in our ponchos and drink that and sometimes we would find bamboo and pop a hole between the joints (knuckles). Each section was full of water, about 1 cup. "But the river water tasted better" he said.

Water was very important out in the field. Barry had sent home requesting a thermometer to check for himself how hot it was and was surprised to find it 120 degrees in the shade. "It's no wonder we were wet all the time!"

Then there was always the "Wait-a-minute vine". So called because it was covered with little hooks resembling fish hooks and if they became entangled in it they WOULD have to "wait a minute" to get untangled.

Barry's outfit fought the NVA (these were a trained soldier) who were in the mountains as well as the V.C. who were the 'little' farmers during the day but would kill the GI's if they had a chance at night. It was interesting to note that the farmers' wealth was assessed by the amount of water buffalo they owned. No one killed water buffalo. If anyone did they were in real deep trouble.

He remembers a time they were passing through a village when he noticed some of the villagers carrying something in large rope nets. Wondering what it could be he ventured closer and soon realized there were several bodies of NVA within the nets. Their color was awful, resembling wax. The villagers would claim the bodies. He wasn't sure what they did with them and perhaps it was just as well.

Periodically they would be rotated and sent to a fire base. This was a mountain that had been flattened at the top and stripped of brush to hold mortars and other big guns. When the men in the jungle needed mortar fire they would radio their positions to the fire base and in turn the men there would fire the guns in the direction requested. On the perimeter of the mountain would be bunkers dug into the ground and protected by sandbags etc. These would be manned by the infantry and the men in them could guard their particular area of that perimeter.

The firebase Barry was sent to was named Ripcord. This fire base was under constant harassment by the N.V.A. and it was believed they had an underground hospital in that area and were trying to eliminate the base to give them more freedom underground.

When not in the jungle Barry would be on Ripcord mostly drawing bunker duty which he actually preferred to the mortars above. However, it was while in one of these bunkers that he had to watch an entire platoon completely wiped out and there was absolutely nothing anyone could do to help them.

On a lighter note Barry also remembered a time on Ripcord when, from their bunkers, they could watch the men at the top getting food brought to them. They really ate good! Steaks, fresh fruit etc. while the men in the bunkers ate out of cans. Barry suggested to a buddy that he bet anything they could go up there and get in the 'chow line'. After some discussion they gave it a try and managed to get two good meals out of them before they were caught, at which time they were told to go back 'where the

grunts belong'. "We had some good laughs about that for quite a while."

On another occasion Barry remembered a young GI coming in for his first time. He was given 'point' (first man) and almost as quickly walked into an ambush and was killed instantly.

During his stay in Vietnam Barry was sent to Eagle Beach on what they called a 'stand down' where they could relax, have entertainment and improved food. This would last one or two days. He was sent there a total of three times.

For three months he was 'point man' in the jungle. "I guess I was really lucky," he said. "Usually, if you were walking toward an ambush the first three men were dead. Charlie could see us and had us in his sites and could pick off whoever he wanted. I don't know why I made it through that. I was just plain lucky!" Sometimes he would be assigned 'rear man' position which oft times could be about as bad as 'point' depending on the enemy tactics. He remembers that was how he became acquainted with 'Talking Lizards'. He had heard of them but really didn't pay too much attention until one time when he was 'rear man' he could hear someone saying "Hey!" "Hey!". His first thought was that Charlie was playing tricks but as he looked about he finally saw a small lizard and actually watched as the sound came from it. "They also are supposed to say several other words which I can't repeat to you," said Barry, "but I really heard them say some of them. They were strange creatures!"

Another time when they were in the field they were digging-in and saw a Bamboo viper slide into their area. Although they searched they could not find it and acknowledged that it had most probably kept going. That particular reptile was probably the most deadly. A man would die within one step of being bitten by one.

The bugs were awful he recalled and told of the time he was using a phone one night while on guard and was severely bitten behind his ear. He brushed his hand across the area bitten trying to find the creature but there was nothing there. He thought it might have been a snake but he then looked at the phone and this very large insect was dangling from it. "I don't know what it was but it had an awful bite. It swelled up pretty bad."

Then there were the bugs resembling centipedes. "Now those" he laughed, "were so big you just got

out of the way when you saw them coming!"



**Barry Mishler, Vietnam jungle**

He clearly remembers another night when the entire ground became illuminated. Exactly like a clock or watch with illuminated hands and numerals glowing in the dark. Probably caused by some chemical within the ground. It was so bright that had there been any enemy in the area they could have been picked off very easily for they stood out unbelievably. One could easily read from the light from just one twig. "I kept one twig to use the following night to see if it would work again but it didn't."

Barry then went on, "And worms -- you would not believe. They were black and when stretched out would be 5 or 6 feet long! I wrote my Dad and told him if he had one of those he could cut it up and it would give him enough bait for one whole year of fishing."

Sometimes, they would be lucky when in the field and find enemy cache's of ammunition and launchers. These they would blow up.

"One's sense of sight and hearing really develops over there. You get to where you can almost hear a leaf fall from a tree. When you set up at night, before it gets dark you MUST know what is out there in front of you. At night it got DARK, I mean BLACK. The only light you have is the moon or

stars. If you don't pay attention to what is out there it will play a real mind game with you. That tree or bush or clump of grass will move on you and drive you nuts!"

Once when they had been on the move in the jungle all day they all started getting heat rash. They told their lieutenant that they were not going any further until they had a 'bath'. Nearby was a bomb crater close by a stream and it had water in it so they set up guard around the crater to watch for Charlie and three or four of the men went in to get cleaned up.

Approximately twice a month while in the field they would get clean clothes. They would have to search through what was sent to find something that fit.

There was some humor too. Their back packs were so heavy that they were unable to lift them on to their backs. Instead they would sit on the ground and hook their arms through them and then stand up. Sometimes, if they leaned over a little too far they would not be able to stop themselves from falling down and they would start all over again, by removing the packs entirely and sitting on the ground, repeating the process. It took two or three days to get used to them after which it was no problem. When Barry was to be transferred to mortars which was actually his original M.O.S. 11C when he first went to Vietnam but was instead put in the field (Bush beater grunt), he didn't know if he wanted to make that move. He was afraid he would end up staying on Ripcord only this time at the top of it. Then again, he thought, maybe he wouldn't! He went to the rear to get his orders and sure enough, he was to be sent back to Ripcord. He did not want to go because he knew what to expect. Just prior to his transfer Charlie had shot down a chopper and it had landed on the ammunition dump on that firebase. It had just about knocked out all the big guns. When he went to get on the chopper another GI he went out with jumped in first. Barry was about to follow when the door gunner told him to go around to the other side. He did this knowing full well what was about to happen. He knew Charlie had the landing pad zeroed in so on arrival he made a jump before the chopper landed. He had no sooner hit the ground when a rocket came in hitting the aircraft. All aboard were hit by shrapnel. The GI that had entered the chopper just before Barry was killed. "It should have been me," he said. "All he had to do was move over when he first got in to make

room for me and I would have been sitting there. Instead I was on the other side."

During his 'tour of duty' and during the worst of the fighting Barry wrote a poem and mailed it to his mother. One cannot read it without feeling the emotion of that time. It is profound and emotion packed and described by a young journalist acquaintance as "powerful". I asked permission to copy it. This was given but with a reminder that one must remember the things that were going on during that period of time i.e. hippies, flower-people, draft dodgers, riots etc., and badly treated GI's when they returned home. This poem was printed in a newspaper shortly after it was received by his parents. Perhaps some have already read it but I felt this to be an important part of our interview.

### WHO CARES WHAT PRICE I PAY?

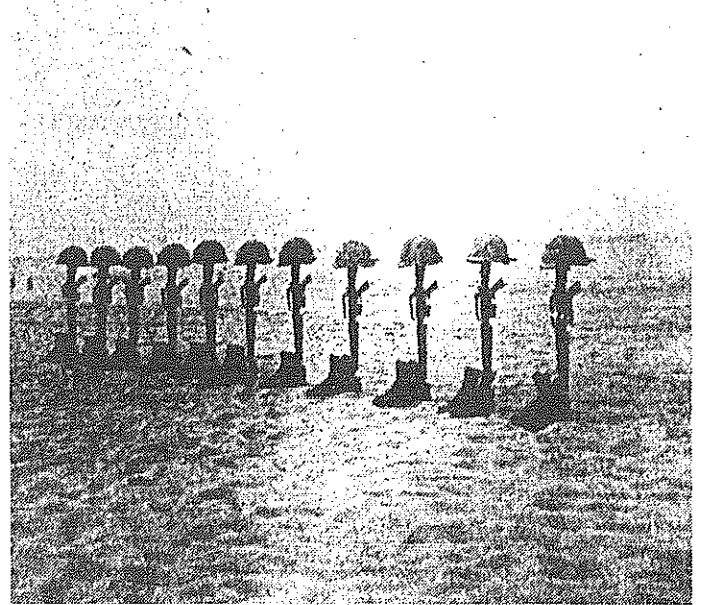
Take a man and put him alone,  
Thousands of miles away from home.  
Empty his heart of all but blood,  
Make him live in sweat and mud.

This is all the life I have to live,  
My soul to God I give.  
You peace boys "rant from your easy chair"  
But you don't know what it's like here.  
You burn your draft cards, march at dawn,  
Chant your songs on campus lawns,  
You all shout "Ban the Bomb"  
The real war is in Vietnam.

You use your drugs and have your fun,  
Then you refuse to use the gun.  
There's nothing else for you to do,  
And I'm supposed to die for you?  
I'll hate you "til the day I die"  
Because you made my buddy cry.  
I saw his arm a bloody shred  
I heard them say "This one is dead".

It's a large price to pay  
Not to live another day,  
He had the guts to fight and die  
He paid the price, but what did he buy?  
He bought your life by losing his!  
But who gives a damn what a soldier gives?  
His wife does, his mother, his father and sons,

But they're about the only ones.



**Tribute to men killed in battle**

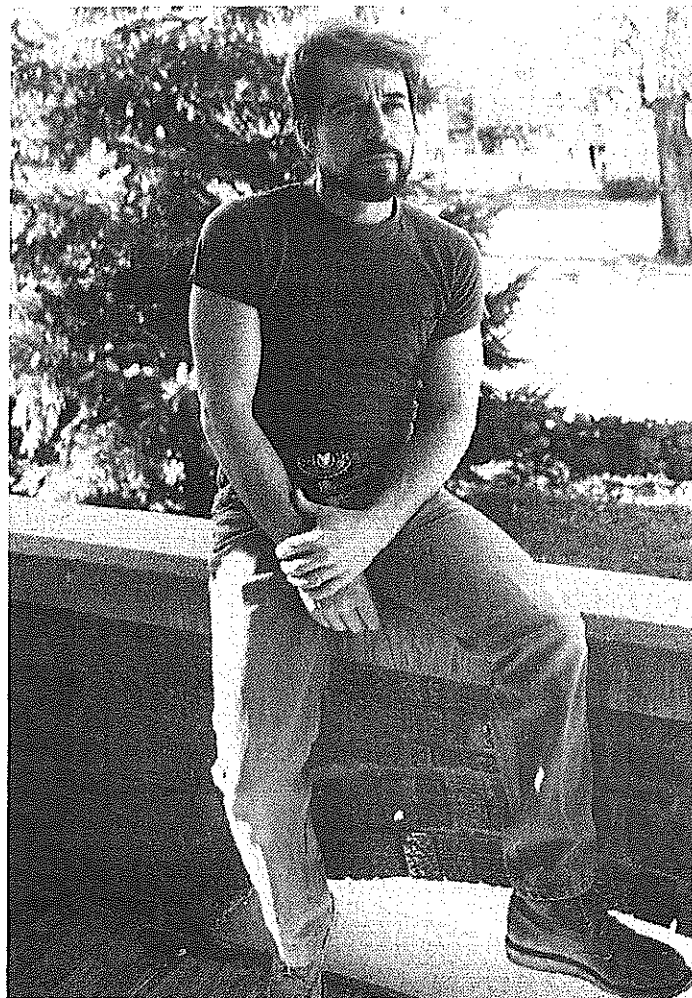
After over eight months in the field Barry was told he would be sent out as radio man to call in support for the Line Co. At this point he felt he was pushing his luck. It would be suicide. He had been too lucky already. For the first time he spoke up to the 'top brass' and told them what he had been doing all those months, at the same time reminding them there were four other men still in the field who had been out as long as he. Apparently, though he had risked punishment by speaking out, it did do some good. Somehow it must have been overlooked that these men had not received combat break and the other four men were called in from the field along with Barry.

"You know" he remarked, "that Charlie was a very smart enemy. We would set up our Trip Flares (a device that you would put out a short distance in front of you and when the wire was either cut or tripped it would go off, lighting up the whole area so you could get Charlie before he got you.) Also we would set up our Claymores (A device to destroy the enemy They would sneak up and turn the Claymore around to face us and then go back and make noise. Many of our men lost their lives that way. They

would set off the Claymore and instead of the enemy it would blow our men away. We soon learned to have a hole dug big enough to protect us and we would jump into it before tripping those wires."

"Ripcord eventually was wiped out. I was there. It was unbelievable. It was there and then it was gone. I just knew this time it was my turn. There could be no way out. They radioed in that Charlie was coming fast and they would get us out. I couldn't see how it was possible. I thought this would be my last day. But, they did it. I don't know how, they just did! I climbed into that chopper and never looked back. Some of the guys did though and said they couldn't believe it. They could see Charlie coming up the hill and it looked like thousands of ants climbing up there. I just didn't look!"

Barry was honorably discharged September 1, 1971. He was awarded several medals and commendations for devotion to duty and meritorious service. He is a quiet young man who has experienced horrors untold as have many of our servicemen. His pride in his birth-right is obvious. His remarks as our interview concluded was "You know, I could never go through that again. I just wouldn't make it. I learned an awful lot over there and I learned a lot about myself too."



*TWI photo by Tina Nystrom*  
Woodstock native Barry Mishler was drafted into the U.S. Army on Sept. 10, 1969. He earned his combat infantry badge only two days into his tour of duty in Vietnam. He was honorably discharged on Sept. 1, 1971.

*Barry S. Mishler*