

15th MEDICAL BATTALION



The crest of the 15th Medical Battalion is a shield, maroon and white, the colors of the medical corps. In the upper right is a bluebonnet, the Texas state flower, signifying the unit's place of origin.



COMMANDERS

LTC Jueri J. Svaginstev	July 1965—November 1965
CPT Charles Greenhouse	November 1965—December 1965
LTC Jueri J. Svaginstev	December 1965—January 1966
CPT Charles Greenhouse	January 1966—February 1966
LTC Jueri J. Svaginstev	February 1966—June 1966
LTC Kenneth E. Guenter	June 1966—August 1966
LTC Jueri J. Svagintev	June 1966—August 1966
LTC J. W. Rasone	August 1966—June 1967
LTC Henry A. Leighton	August 1966—June 1967
LTC W. Rex Davis	June 1967—July 1968
LTC Guthrie Turner	July 1968—June 1969
LTC Joseph W. McNaney	June 1969—

The 15th Medical Battalion, as it is now known, was organized in 1926 at Fort Bliss, Texas, and designated the 1st Medical Squadron.

The unit travelled with the 1st Cavalry Division throughout World War II campaigns in the South Pacific. The unit entered Tokyo with the Cav in 1945, and was stationed at Camp Drake, where in 1949, it was redesignated the 15th Medical Battalion.

In June, 1965, at Fort Benning, Georgia, the 11th Medical Battalion, 11th Air Assault Division, was deactivated

and the 15th Medical Battalion became the first airmobile medical battalion in the Army.

In World War II the unit participated in campaigns in New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago (with Arrowhead), Leyte (with Arrowhead), and Luzon. Seven campaign stars were earned in Korea.

The 15th Medical Battalion was decorated in World War II with Meritorious Unit Citation, streamer embroidered PACIFIC THEATER (three awards) and the Presidential Unit Citation, streamer embroidered LOS NEGROS ISLAND.

Additionally, three platoons were cited for actions at Leyte, Luzon and Manila for actions July 1950 to January 1951. Both the Ambulance and Clearing Companies earned Meritorious Unit Citations in Korea.

In Vietnam the Valorous Unit Award was presented to Company B for heroism on June 6, 1967, during Operation PERSHING. The battalion received streamer embroidered PLEIKU PROVINCE for its part in the historic Pleiku Campaign.



Providing medical support to an air-mobile division requires a special type of medical unit. In the 1st Air Cavalry Division, this unit is the 15th Medical Battalion.

The men of the medical battalion take great pride in the accomplishments of their unit. This pride was summed up by a former aviation platoon leader: "The wounded man on the ground deserves the best. He has done his job and then it becomes our job. He deserves to be taken care of."

Just how effective is an airmobile medical battalion? During Cardinal Spellman's Christmas visit to Vietnam in 1967, he met and talked with a 1st Air Cavalryman in the field. The next



day the Cardinal departed Vietnam for Okinawa. As he began his visit to the Army hospital there, he was surprised and amazed to meet and talk with the same young Skytrooper he had talked with the previous day. The soldier had been wounded that afternoon and evacuated in less than 24 hours to a modern hospital thousands of miles from the battle zone.

A 15th Med medic prepares to lower the jungle penetrator (left), a device designed to slip down through towering and thick jungle trees and growth to rescue wounded from locations which do not permit landing. The Medevac pilot must hover his helicopter (below) with little or no movement until all wounded (below left) are winched aboard.



In 1965, the 15th Medical Battalion was deployed to the Republic of Vietnam with the 1st Cavalry Division. The battalion headquarters was quickly set up at An Khe, as the companies were assigned to forward areas. As Cavalrymen quickly underwent their baptism of fire, the advantages of aero-medical evacuation became more and more evident. In fact among the first Skytroopers killed in action was a Medevac pilot.

Throughout the division's operations in the mountainous jungles of the central Vietnamese highlands, the personal devotion to duty and bravery of the men of the battalion became written in the history of warfare as examples for all who follow.

From the Medevac helicopter pilot, who goes into a landing zone under heavy enemy fire, to the most basic medical unit, the combat medic, 15th

Medical Battalion personnel were proving themselves under fire time and again.

On the night of February 16, 1967, Private First Class James H. Monroe, serving as a medic with the first platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry, distinguished himself in action through the supreme sacrifice.

While in an ambush position, his

unit came under heavy enemy fire. While treating several men, PFC Monroe saw a grenade land near his position and immediately jumped on it, absorbing the explosion with his body. He was awarded the Medal of Honor, posthumously, in 1968.

Just one month later, Specialist Four Charles C. Hagemester, serving as a medic with Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, distinguished himself in action and received the Medal of Honor. SP4 Hagemester repeatedly gave treatment and words of encouragement to the wounded members of his platoon during heavy fighting in Binh Dinh Province. Killing four enemy soldiers and silencing a machinegun during the battle, he raced through a fusillade of enemy fire to secure help from a nearby platoon. His actions, at the risk of his own life, saved the lives of many of his

comrades, and helped inspire them to repel the enemy attack.

The personal bravery of these two men was in the highest traditions of the medical corps, men who are ready and willing to go when the hurt cry out for help.

These incidents of personal bravery are not exceptions. The night of June 6, 1967, the battalion's Company B distinguished itself when its base came under a heavy mortar attack. Enemy mortars landed in the ammunition storage area, which contained 1,250 tons of explosives. The medical personnel repeatedly evacuated patients and personnel from the area, resulting in no loss of life. The company was awarded the

Valorous Unit Citation for its actions. A major part of the 15th Medical Battalion's efforts has been spent working in civic action programs. Thus, the MEDCAP (Medical Civic Action Program) was initiated. Medical personnel visit villages and hamlets, treating the local nationals for everything from a toothache to starvation.

The medical personnel created a hospital in An Khe for the treatment of the 70,000 people of the An Tuc District in Binh Dinh Province. Thousands of patients were treated at the hospital, and hundreds of babies were delivered. The medical personnel soon received the trust and gratitude of the Vietnamese people. Their job has been described as "one



A combat medic (above), one of the most revered men in the history and tradition of the infantry, moves out after off-loading from a combat assault. He is loaded down with his field gear and has an extra medical kit bag hanging from his left shoulder. This particular medic is not carrying a weapon, an option afforded only to field medics and chaplains. In almost every field company the medics are also known by their hallmark—unfailing courage in the face of fire. When a buddy is wounded every man will pitch in to help, because he knows that others would do the same for him. A radio telephone operator (RTO) and three other men (right) race across a paddie in February 1968, to get a wounded man to an incoming Medevac chopper (right bottom). The wounded man was under expert medical care at a forward field hospital 11 minutes after he tripped a Viet Cong booby trap in the field.



part medicine, two parts compassion."

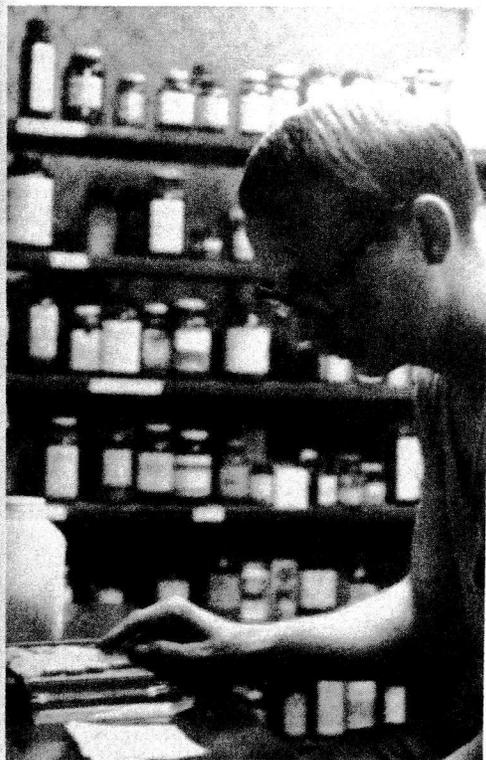
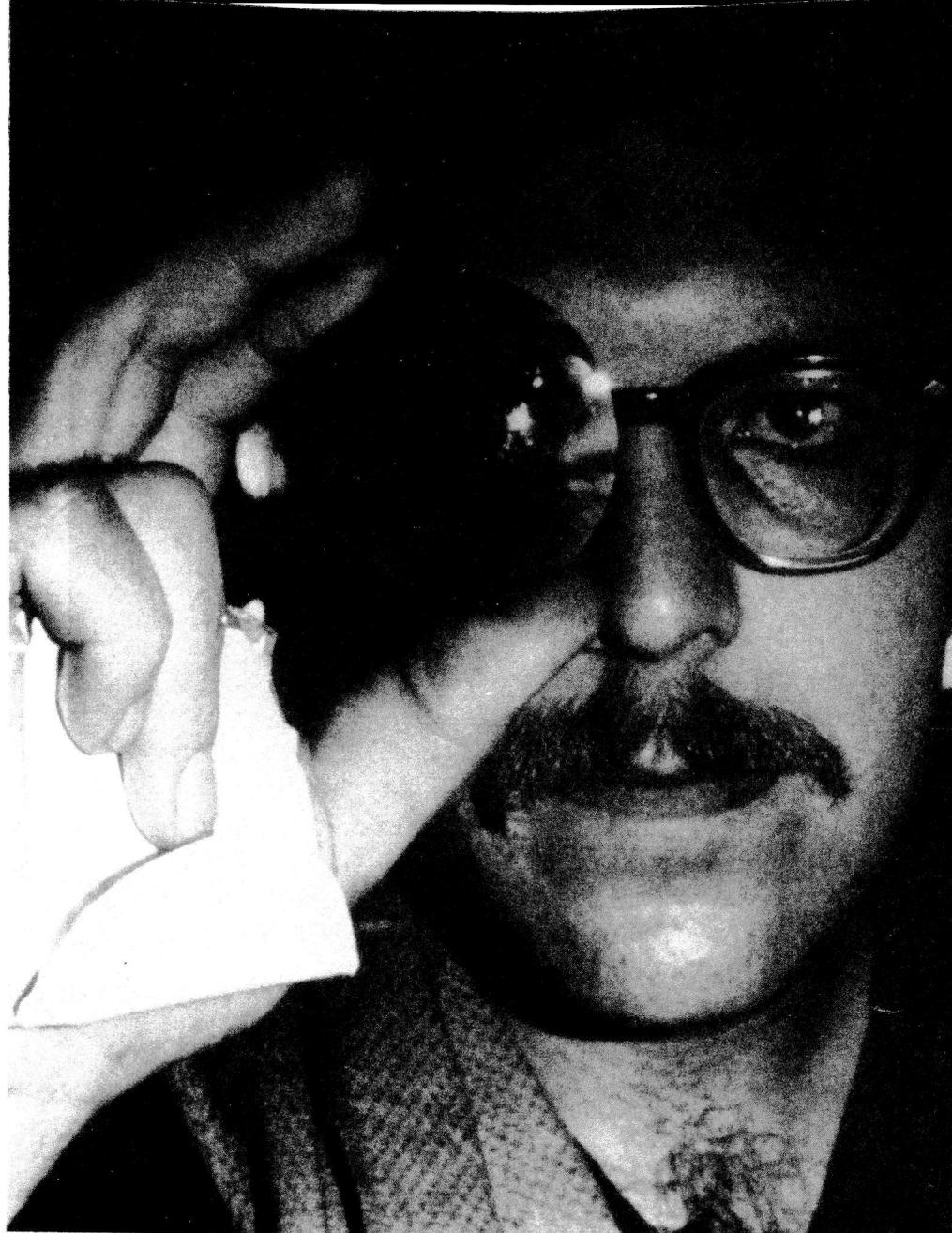
The move south to III Corps in 1968 brought about many changes in methods of operation for many Skytroopers, but not for the medical battalion personnel. Their job remained the same; help those in need. Help they did.

The Headquarters Service Company, located in Phuoc Vinh, conducts daily sick call, runs a dental clinic and administers to local nationals.

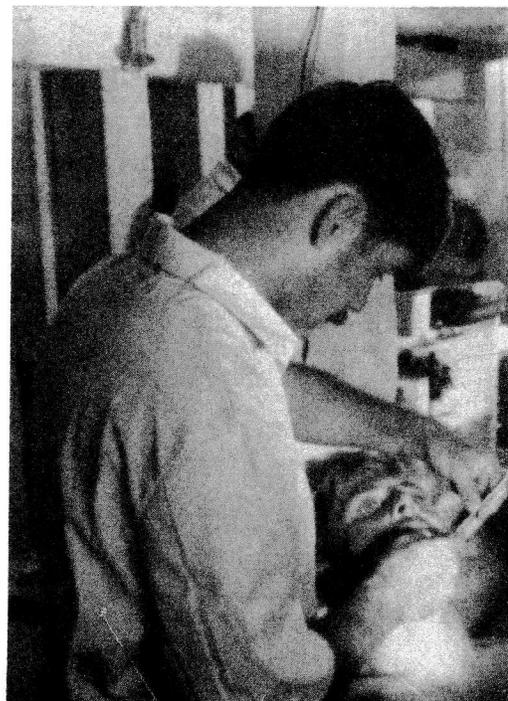
The battalion's companies are located at the division's three brigade headquarters, as well, where they can administer aid to the men stationed in those forward areas.

Yet the men of the battalion are dedicated to their foremost task. When the word goes out for help, Medevac ship crews scramble, for theirs is also a mission of mercy and compassion. The injured in the field receives medical attention within a matter of minutes.

Since its arrival in the Republic of Vietnam in 1965, the 15th Medical Battalion has rendered top-notch medical support to the FIRST TEAM: New chapters have been written in the unit's history: Happy Valley, Ia Drang Valley, Bong Son, Plei Mei and War Zone C. Wherever the tide of battle takes the 1st Air Cavalry Division, the 15th Med will be there... conserving the fighting strength.



Behind the pilots and crews of Medevac, the combat medics in the field and the doctors at forward field hospitals, there stands a thorough and efficient medical organization in the 15th Medical Battalion. The battalion offers a full range of medical care, even beyond that needed for combat wounds. A medical specialist inspects a lens (top right) to be ground for use in spectacles for 1st Cav troopers. Specialist Four Jerry W. Heger fills a patient's prescription (left) at the 15th Med pharmacy at Phuoc Vinh, and Dr. Daniel Kozlowski gives dental work to a Skytrooper (right) in a bunkered dental clinic, located on a firebase.



medevac +

they will be remembered
as long as men fly
and the hurt cry out
for help

There is a mystique about Medevac. So much has been written of the courage, the dedication and esprit de corps of the men in Medevac that today they live with legend.

"It's why I joined the Army," said Medvac pilot Warrant Officer Richard Leonard. "There's something about saving a life—and the way Medevac does it, defying the odds—that makes it appealing."

"I've never seen a mission aborted," said Specialist Four Dick Gamester, who monitors Medevac Control at Phuoc Vinh. "I've seen missions delayed by weather and suppressive fire, but never called off. There are nights when the only birds in the sky are Medevac."

The esprit de corps touches everyone. You can't get into the program unless you volunteer, and even then the competition is tough.

Specialist Four Mike Vineyard, a helicopter mechanic at 15th Med, worked in a maintenance shop before he got a shot at a crew chief position in Medevac. "I frequently flew doorgunner when we'd go after a downed bird," he said.

"You just do it," he said. "When a bird goes down, everyone heads for the pad. It's like a brotherhood."

That startling routine response to a call that seems beyond that of duty is

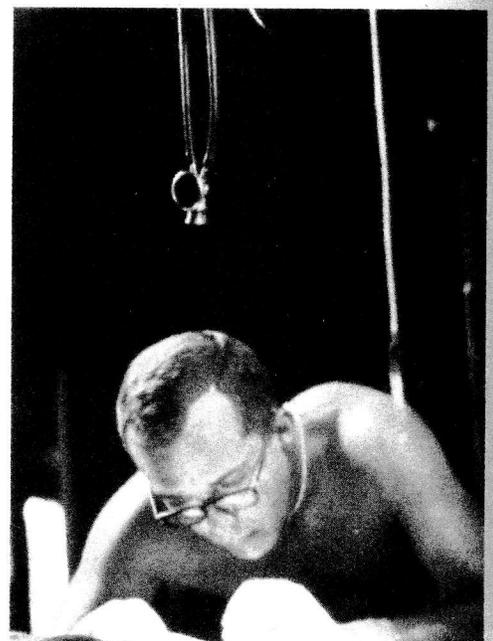
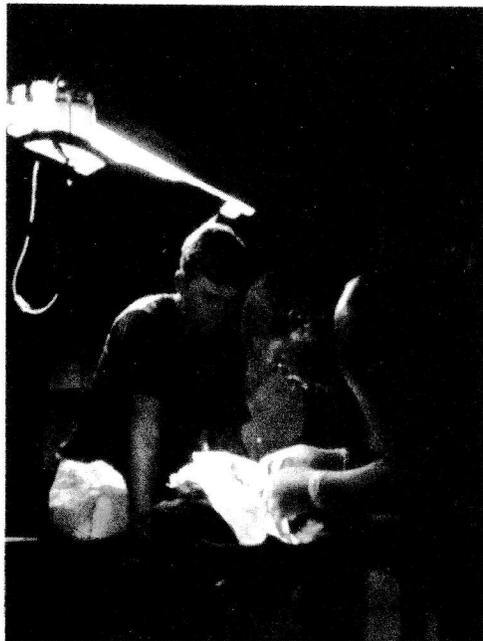


part of the mystique of Medevac. Yet there is another side.

"It gets to be a little hairy at times," said Medevac pilot Captain Ernest Bayford. "But I wouldn't say there's excessive strain on anyone."

He's right, of course. Medevac teams lead a very comfortable life when the going is slow. Half their time is free. Even at the brigade field hospitals, where the teams are on call 24 hours a day, they have no duties until suddenly, though routinely, they are called to scramble.

"Downed aircraft, let's go!" CPT Bayford shouted from the doorway of the crew quarters. It was 2:21 p.m. and the scramble was on. The crew reached the chopper at full stride; in minutes it was airborne, hitting 100 knots at treetop level. The bird climbed to 2,000 feet; then nine minutes after the call and 10 miles northeast of Quan Loi, the descent



began.

They circled once at 300 feet as a Cobra gunship pulled in behind. The downed aircraft was somewhere in the thick green foliage below. A light observation helicopter (LOH), flying as low as it could, finally spotted the wreckage and marked it with purple smoke.

Aircraft commander Bayford banked the ship to the left and hovered over the now visible downed helicopter, its slender tail protruding through the bamboo.

It was 2:33 when Specialist Five William Meeks attached the yellow, torpedo-like jungle penetrator to the cable hoist and lowered it to the bamboo below.

On the ground a man grasped at it and, shielding his face from the entangling bush, rode the cable skyward. He looked straight up at the chopper with a strained smile, drawing closer, closer until he could touch the skid, grab the medic's hand and pull himself aboard.

"We've got to get the pilot out! We've got to, got to!" he said again and again, breathing hard as he lay against the cabin wall.

The whine of the hoist started up again, bringing the rescued doorgunner to the side of the ship and inside. He clutched

at the medic-crew chief. It was 2:35.

"He's trapped. I couldn't budge him. He waved me away," the man blurted out. "We've got to get him out, we've got to," said the doorgunner.

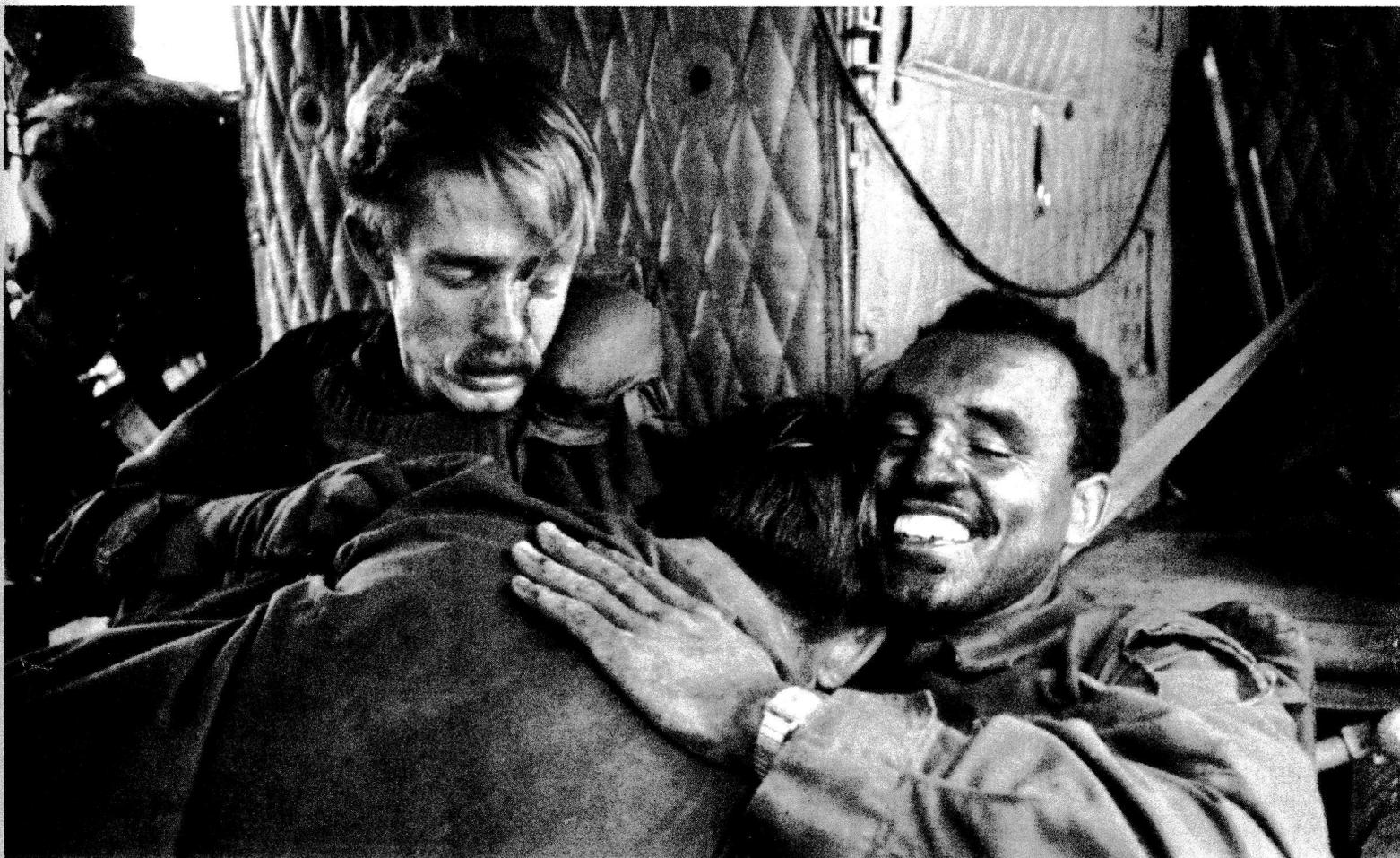
"They will. They will," answered the medic.

The ship gained altitude slowly, banked to the left and circled again at 300 feet. It was up to the Blues now—the crack

infantry element of the 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, already airlifted into the area an maneuvering toward the downed aircraft and its pinned pilot.

The Medevac chopper circled above. SP5 Meeks turned at once to his patients, wrapping and taping the crushed toes of the doorgunner.

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Medevac

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As the chopper passed over the crash site for the fourth time, a thick cloud of white smoke erupted from the bamboo below, and there was a bright red flash from to ground.

"Hey, man, our ship just blew up!" the wounded doorgunner shouted. He turned to the medic with his eyes wide and fearful. The medic talked into his radio mouthpiece, listened, and then looked up at his patient.

"He's all right. The Blues got him out. He's okay."

The helicopter circled down to land in a yellow meadow close to the crashed and burning chopper. The rescued doorgunner looked past the medic. A big smile shot across his face as he flashed the "V" sign at the freed pilot, now sprinting toward the ship.

"You're the greatest. You're the greatest," the rescued pilot cried to the Medevac crew as he climbed aboard. Then he turned and lunged at his own two crew members who caught him in a wild embrace.



