

# **Team Thin Man Patrol Debrief**

## **2ndLt. David Skibbe, MIA**

**Book II, American Heroes: Grunts, Pilots & "Docs"**

**By Michael Dan Kellum**

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The following Team Thin Man Patrol Debrief relates how 2ndLt. David Skibbe, 23 of Des Plaines, Illinois ended up missing-in-action, MIA, on his first patrol with 1st Recon Battalion March 2, 1970. Sgt. Larry K. Gifford, 20 of Seattle, Washington was also seriously injured on this same patrol when they came in contact with enemy troops in the Que Son Mountains.

Skibbe had been in-country for 5 months with Fox Co., 2nd Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment as a platoon commander under Lt.Col. Bill Drumright, 2/26 commanding officer. When 2/26 rotated stateside, Skibbe secured a transfer to 1st Recon Battalion to again serve under Lt.Col. Drumright who had been reassigned as CO of 1st Reconnaissance Battalion.

1st Recon was sending out 7-man saturation patrols in February and March 1970 to locate an enemy build-up of troops in the Que Son Mountains in lieu of an attack on Da Nang. This patrol debrief provides the particulars as to how 2ndLt. Skibbe was left behind in the gathering darkness in the mountains.

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OPERATION ORDER: 0230-70  
PATROL: THIN MAN, CO. "C"  
DEBRIEFER: CAPT R. COOK  
MAPS: VIETNAM 1:50,000 AMS L7014  
SHEETS 6540 I, 6540 II

1ST. RECONNAISSANCE BN.  
DA NANG, RVN  
022030H MARCH 1970

PATROL REPORT

1. SIZE, COMPOSITION AND EQUIPMENT:
  - A. COMPOSITION: 1 OFF, 5 ENL, 1 USN
  - B. SPECIAL ATTACHMENTS: N/A
  - C. COMM AND OBSERVATION EQUIP: 2 PRC-25'S, 1 7X50, 1 PRC-93
  - D. SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: 1 M-79, 3 CLAYMORES
2. MISSION: CONDUCT RECONNAISSANCE AND SURVEILLANCE OPERATIONS WITHIN THEIR ASSIGNED HAVEN TO DETECT POSSIBLE VC/NVA TROOP MOVEMENT OR ARMS INFILTRATION AND BE PREPARED TO CALL AND ADJUST AIR/ARTILLERY ON ALL TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY.
3. TIME OF DEPARTURE AND RETURN: 020930H/022000H
4. ROUTE: SEE ATTACHED OVERLAY

SYNOPSIS: THIS PATROL COVERED A PERIOD OF 10.5 HOURS WITH 1 SIGHTING OF 2 VC. TEAM MADE TWO CONTACTS RESULTING IN TWO USMC WIA'S. THE ASSISTANT PATROL LEADER (WIA) WAS HOISTED UP BY THE JUNGLE PENETRATOR AND THEN IT WAS LOWERED FOR THE PATROL LEADER (LT. SKIDDE). THE TEAM HOOKED THE PATROL LEADER UP WITH SAFTY STRAPS AND THE LT HAD PENETRATED THE CANOPY AND WAS APPROXIMATELY 100' OFF THE GROUND WHEN THE TEAM STARTED TO GET READY TO BE EXTRACTED BY LADDER. TEAM WAS THEN EXTRACTED BY LADDER. THE TEAM UTILIZED 2 A0'S AND 1 FLIGHT OF FIXED WING WITH EXCELLENT COVERAGE OF TARGET.

5. OBSERVATION OF ENEMY AND TERRAIN:

A. ENEMY:  
021330H VIC. ZC021134 TEAM HEARD 3 RIFLE SHOTS (AK-47). ROUNDS WERE FIRED APPROXIMATELY 1,000 METERS WEST OF TEAMS POSITION. TEAM TOOK NEGATIVE ACTION DUE TO NOT BEING ABLE TO PIN POINT EXACT LOCATION.

021630H VIC. ZC031136 TEAM WAS MOVING SOUTH SOUTHEAST ON HIGH SPEED TRAIL ON RIDGELINE WHEN POINTMAN SPOTTED 2 VC WEARING BLACK PJ TOPS AND LIGHT COLORED SHIRTS (KHAKI) CARRYING RIFLES AT SLING ARMS. ENEMY SPOTTED THE TEAM AT APPROXIMATELY THE SAME TIME. ENEMY OPENED FIRE WITH AUTOMATIC SMALL ARMS FIRE AND TEAM RETURNED FIRE AND ENEMY JUMPED OFF TO SIDE OF TRAIL. ENEMY CONTINUED TO FIRE RESULTING IN 1 USMC WIA (KNEE, THUMB AND SCAP WOUND). ENEMY THEN BROKE CONTACT.

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ENCLOSURE (3)

DOWNGRADE TO UNCLASS AFTER 6 MONTHS  
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LT. SKIDDE  
THIN MAN, CO. "C"  
PATROL LEADER

021635H VIC. ZC311436 THE PATROL LEADER WAS ADMINISTERING FIRST AID TO THE ASSISTANT PATROL LEADER WHEN THE ENEMY (ESTIMATED) 5 ENEMY INITIATED CONTACT WITH AUTOMATIC SMALL ARMS FIRE FROM APPROXIMATELY 20-30 METERS SOUTH-EAST OF TEAMS POSITION RESULTING IN 1 USMC KIA. TEAM RETURNED AUTOMATIC SMALL ARMS FIRE WITH UNKNOWN RESULTS. ENEMY CONTINUED TO FIRE FOR APPROXIMATELY 3 MINUTES AND THEN BROKE CONTACT. TEAM REQUESTED AO.

021645H VIC. ZC311436 AO'S (HOSTAGE SIX, AND SCARFACE) ARRIVED ON STATION AND CONTINUED TO WORK OVER THE AREA WITH EXCELLENT COVERAGE OF TARGET. AO UTILIZED 1 FLIGHT OF FIXED WING WITH OUTSTANDING COVERAGE OF TARGET AREA.

021850H VIC. ZC031136 CH-46'S AND GUNSHIPS ARRIVED ON STATION AND HELICOPTER LOWERED THE JUNGLE PENETRATOR TO HOIST OUT THE WOUNDED. THE ASSISTANT PATROL LEADER WAS HOISTED OUT WITHOUT INCIDENT AND THE PENETRATOR WAS LOWERED TO EXTRACT THE PATROL LEADER. TEAM HOOKED UP THE LT. (LT. SKIDDE) WITH USED SAFETY STRAPS TO INSURE THAT THE LT. WOULD NOT FALL OFF. ON THE FIRST TRY THE CABLE GOT CAUGHT IN THE CANOPY AND THE TEAM BROKE THE CABLE LOOSE FROM THE CANOPY AND TEAM OBSERVED THE LT. PENETRATE THE CANOPY AND WAS APPROXIMATELY 100 FEET OFF THE GROUND WHEN TEAM STARTED TO PUT ON THEIR GEAR AND AFTER THE TEAM GOT THEIR GEAR ON THEY OBSERVED THE HELICOPTER. THE LADDER WAS LOWERED AND THE TEAM WAS THEN EXTRACTED. TEAM STATES THAT THEY THOUGHT THE LT. WAS ABOARD THE HELICOPTER AND DIDN'T KNOW ANY DIFFERENT UNTIL TEAM WAS SET DOWN AT AN HOA AND THE COMPANY COMMANDER APPROACHED THEM AND WANTED TO KNOW WHERE THE LT. WAS. PATROL STATES THEY DID NOT HEAR ANYTHING FALL OR HIT THE GROUND.

6. TERRAIN: AREA WAS GENERALLY ROLLING WITH 25-40' CANOPY AND VERY THIN (TEAM COULD OBSERVE THE SKY LINE) WITH SECONDARY GROWTH OF 2-4' CONSISTING OF TANGLE VINES, SMALL SHRUBS, 1-2' ELEPHANT GRASS AND THORN/BIAR BUSHES. MOVEMENT WAS MODERATE TO EASY AND TEAM TRAVELED 250-300 METERS PER HOUR FOR A RECON PATROL. WATER WAS IN THE LOW GROUNDS AND IT WAS NOT SEASONAL. ANIMAL LIFE CONSISTED OF BIRDS, INSECTS, FLIES, ANTS, AND SPIDERS. STREAMBEDS CONSISTED MOSTLY OF ROCKS.

7. OTHER INFORMATION: INSERT LZ VIC. ZC030440 CONSISTING OF REAR WHEEL ZONE MEASURING 35x40' ON A STEEP SLOPE WITH A 35 DEGREE SLANT. ZONE WAS CONSIDERED VERY POOR DUE TO THE HELICOPTER HAVING TO BACK INTO ZONE FROM THE EAST. EXTRACT LZ VIC. ZC031136 POOR LADDER ZONE DUE TO CANOPY IN THE AREA. TEAM WAS EXTRACTED BY LADDER. TRAILS: TRAIL VIC. ZC022439 RUNNING EAST TO WEST, TEAM COULD ONLY OBSERVE APPROXIMATELY 4-5' OF TRAIL AND IT APPEARED TO BE HEAVILY USED AT PRESENT TIME. TRAIL VIC. ZC030440 RUNNING SOUTH-EAST TO NORTHEAST 8'-3' WIDE AND PRESENTLY BEING USED (TEAM MADE CONTACT ON TRAIL). OP'S: OP VIC. ZC031136 GOOD OBSERVATION IN A 360 DEGREES WITH LIMITED VISUAL SIGHTINGS TO THE SOUTHEAST DUE TO VEGETATION. COMM: COMM WAS GOOD WITH POOR DISTANCE.

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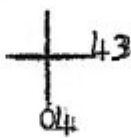
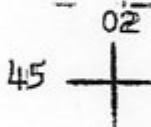
LT. SKIDDE  
THIN MAN. CO. "C"  
PATROL LEADER

- 8. RESULTS OF ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ENEMY: UNKNOWN
- 9. CONDITION OF THE PATROL: FAIR WITH 2 WIA (USMC) 1 WIA STATUS PRESENTLY UNKNOWN DUE TO BEING DROPPED APPROXIMATELY 100' AND STILL OUT IN THE FIELD, AND NDC (BRUISED KNEES).
- 10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: NONE
- 11. EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORTING ARMS: OUTSTANDING WITH AO'S AND FIXED WING.
- 12. COMMENTS BY THE DEBRIEFER: NONE

13. PATROL MEMBERS:

LT.	SKIDDE	0109636	LCPL	MORENO	2511280
CPL	GIFFORD	2161050	LCPL	PIERE	2503524
LCPL	PLUNKETT	2449426	HM3	MOLYNE	B302213
LCPL	JONES	2509404			

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