



A New Way To Wage War

Prologue To “ Wings of Gold over the Ho CHI Minh Trail “ The Story Of VO-67

Nygen was very tired. He had been driving nonstop for seven and a half hours. The truck's speedometer indicated he had traveled 145 kilometers (about 90 miles) since they started at dusk. They had made good time despite the rain storms and mud. It would be daylight soon and they must stop. The truck park couldn't be too far away.

Nygen considered himself very lucky to be a driver every time he passed his less fortunate comrades trudging through the mud and rain. When he had been taken into the North Vietnamese Army and they found out he could drive he was sent to truck drivers school. As a new driver, he was assigned an older truck. This was his first trip down the Ho Chi Minh Trail; it was early December, 1967. His convoy had left the ammunition depot six days ago. They had crossed the border from North Vietnam into Laos two nights ago.

He was eighteen years old and had grown up in Hanoi. The jungle scared him. The older drivers in his convoy told stories of hearing about huge tigers and snakes 10 meters long. Nygen hadn't strayed far from his truck since they entered the jungle. He slept in the cab during the day even though it was hot and uncomfortable.

He was very proud of what he was doing despite the hardships. His duty to Father Ho and the party had been drummed into him since early childhood. They told him his truck was carrying enough mortar shells and small arms ammunition to kill 1,000 South Vietnamese Army troops and 1,000 American devils. He knew his job was important, but to pass the long hours of driving, he fantasized about killing the enemy devils himself and becoming a people's hero.

They had entered the dense, triple-decked jungle the night before. The experienced drivers told him they would be safe under its thick cover. They had passed through the sparser jungle, even some areas with only camouflage nets to hide them, without incident. He had yet to see or hear an enemy airplane.

His was the last truck in the convoy. He got all the exhaust fumes from the other trucks on the trail as he tried to avoid the deepest ruts in the mud left by them. He kept as far from the truck

ahead of him as possible, but still able to keep it in sight as instructed. Most of the time he could only see the two small red tail lights. His headlights had been covered so they emitted only two small horizontal slits of light on the ground. The truck ahead finally turned off to the left. They traveled a short distance from the road into the truck park. He got down from the high truck and almost fell over; his legs were numb from sitting so long. He relieved himself and joined the other drivers. One was telling a story about seeing big yellow eyes gleaming off the side of the trail a couple of kilometers back. He knew it had to be a huge tiger. The others were laughing and asked how he could get that much rice wine into his mouth with the truck bouncing so violently on the rutted road.

One driver brought out a small charcoal stove and began heating water for tea to have with their dry rations. The sun was rising, but little light could get through the triple-canopy jungle. Beyond the truck park clearing the jungle was still dark and foreboding. The drivers all squatted around a small stove heating the water. Not for warmth, even at dawn it was hot and humid, but more for the touch of civilization it brought them and the need for companionship in this wild jungle.

Nygen was weary, but knew he faced the long tedious task of filling his diesel tanks from the fifty gallon barrels stacked in the clearing before he could sleep. The ground was damp. Water drops from the last rain shower were working their way through the thick foliage. It would get worse, the monsoon season was approaching. The smell of the rotting vegetation filled their nostrils. One of the drivers started talking about catching himself a peasant girl when they reached their destination in South Vietnam and what he was going to do when they heard the drone of a small engine above them. The speaker fell silent and they all listened. One of the older drivers said that it was one of the little spotter aircraft that shot the smoke they had been briefed about. He bragged that he had actually seen one of them shoot the smoke into the jungle. He went on to say there was nothing to worry about. They couldn't be detected under the layered heavy jungle over them. The little spotter aircraft's engine increased in volume as it went into a dive above them.

If Nygen's NVA truck convoy had made better time and they had arrived at the truck park the day before, they would have heard a far different sound. They would have heard the loud frightening roar of two reciprocating engines and the high pitched whine of two jet engines. The former Navy patrol plane, a P-2 Neptune, now painted jungle green and heavily modified, had passed over the area just 500 feet above the ground where they squatted.

They heard a small bang, a swishing sound, and they saw white smoke rising above them into the canopy overhead a hundred or so meters away. They were all startled and jumped up staring at the smoke. Nygen asked in a very frightened voice, "What is that?" No one answered. Then the silence was broken by the roar of jet aircraft diving. There was an explosion, they felt the blast of pressure and the smell cordite for a split second. They never heard the second in the series of blasts, or their trucks exploding as the bomb fragments ignited the cargoes. As the last of the A-4s pulled off their targets, the FAC pilot was already reporting the numerous secondary explosions to the command center confirming the direct hit on the NVA truck park.

Unknown to the NVA drivers, in the top jungle canopy over them, a metal cylinder about four feet high and eight inches in diameter hung from a green nylon parachute snagged in the tree tops. Its sensitive microphone picked up the sound of their truck engines as they entered the park and every word they had said since they arrived. These sounds were monitored by an Air Force C-121 aircraft orbiting over 20,000 feet above them and relayed to a control center across the Mekong River in Thailand. The duty officer in the control center had been following the progress of the truck convoy on a string of listening devices in the tree tops as they approached the truck park. He passed the coordinates of the truck park to the FAC aircraft assigned to the area via the Airborne Battlefield Command Control Center (ABCCC) aboard an airborne C-130 aircraft and ordered the

strike. The FAC had contacted the ABCCC for a bomber flight and had been assigned four A-4 attack aircraft from the Navy carrier battle group stationed off the coast of Vietnam. The A-4's had delivered their loads of 500 pound bombs right on the FAC's white phosphorous smoke rocket. Despite pulling out of their dive bombing runs only a couple thousand feet or so above the jungle top, all they saw were tree tops and the smoke of the FAC's spotting rocket. After they joined up in formation to return to their carrier, the A-4 flight leader spotted the secondary explosions in the target area. A new way to wage war had begun!