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From: John Horsley

I only knew your brother for one week. Phil was my superior officer and platoon commander of 2nd Plt. Golf Co. 2nd Regiment, 26th Marines. We were a Battalion Landing Team. Ron, you probably know more about what we were doing as a unit, in general, than I do. We were not told much about the objective of what we were doing, but I do remember what happened that day. I was the first day of the operation. It has been a long time, but I think the operation was Taylor Common I or II. Events leading up to that day are a little fuzzy now.

Our platoon had been aboard a ship in the South China Sea when Phil assumed command of the platoon. We debarked via helicopter early in the morning of Jan 28th, 69. We flew for about three hours before we approached the landing zone. Minutes prior to landing we were told that the LZ was "hot", which meant the in front of us had received enemy fire. As we approached, we received word that the first chopper had been hit so the pilot aborted our first attempt at landing. We flew around for a while and then we received the order to go. We approached this time from a tree top level full out and as soon as the chopper adjusted for the landing we started receiving ground fire from a tree line.

Once we were on the ground, we entered the tree line. Once we were in the tree line we started to move forward in single file. We were ambushed and lost a couple of men right away. We were pinned down and couldn't get a good position on the shooters. We were getting chewed up. We were originally ambushed by a force of maybe ten men, which had gun positions all over the area we were in. The type gun positions they had consisted of small openings in the ground with tunnels leading from all of them. Once they struck the ambush, the main body of troops left via the tunnels. They were well camouflaged with natural vines, earth etc. They could crawl through them and poke a weapon out for a shot. They left a force of three men positioned that kept us in a crossfire. Whenever we tried to maneuver within the ambush zone, the remaining NVA would crawl through a tunnel and fire upon us, keeping us from getting out of the strike zone.

Your brother who could have stayed out of harms way maneuvered through heavy automatic weapons fire to gain position on the NVA gun position that had us pinned down. He pointed the position out and started firing upon the position suppressing the enemy fire which enabled us to remove ourselves and wounded from the immediate strike zone and rally our retaliation.

Moments later as Phil was keeping the one position pinned down, another NVA soldier crawled through a tunnel and shot your brother. The NVA soldier gave up his position when he shot and was killed moments later. The NVA soldier that your brother kept pinned down while myself and others got out of the ambush was killed a few minutes later.

Your brother was the bravest man I have ever known. He saved my life and the lives of many other Marines that day. He gave his life for me and a bunch of guys he didn't even know. Whenever I hear the word bravery, or valor, and hero, I automatically think of Phil. I have been able to live a very productive life because of your brother's bravery.

Ron, I don't know if this will help any, I hope it does. I'm sure nothing can make up for the loss, but perhaps this will bring some more understanding of what happened.

I am still in awe of what Phil did that day.

Sincerely,
John Horsley