



LZ Bingo

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Reviewed by George Crone

LZ Bingo sees the world through the eyes of Army enlistee Bill Boe and follows his journey from arrival at basic training through the completion of his one-year tour in Vietnam. Assigned to the 4th Infantry Division's Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment, the day-to-day details follow Boe and his fellow 2nd Platoon Soldiers from their arrival in Vietnam in the summer of 1967 through his actual DEROS (date of estimated return from overseas) in the summer of 1968. This window of time included the February 1968 Tet Offensive by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). The Army formed Delta Company at Duc Pho, and the author traces Boe's progression in rank from new recruit through sergeant and his ascension within the platoon from an M60 machine-gun ammo bearer up to platoon sergeant. The author successfully describes the multiple separate and distinct operations conducted by the platoon and does so by also providing an adequate historical context for both those familiar and not so familiar with the Army and the Vietnam War. This is a must read for anyone who wants to better understand the highs and lows of a one-year tour in Vietnam. Also, it is for those curious about or who only have hazy recollections of what American Soldiers did in Vietnam.

Upon arrival in Vietnam, the platoon formed at Duc Pho to conduct initial in-country training and began completing tasks such as zeroing weapons and conducting platoon patrols. Departure from Duc Pho to Chu Lai brought additional training and introduction to patrolling in hostile territory where the primary threat consisted of "Viet Cong" (VC) small ambushes and sniper and harassing fires. VC essentially blended with other Vietnamese citizens and were able to keep their identities private by threatening violence and by hurting and killing those who informed against them. Over time the nature of the platoon's threat changed from VC to NVA soldiers who were part of a more top-down structured organization and distinguishable by the uniforms they wore. Both the VC and the NVA presented dangerous enemies to defeat; however, actions taken against the NVA proved more fatal to Delta Company. Delta's most intense fighting in 1967-68 occurred on landing zones (LZs) Hardcore, Mile High, Brillo Pad, and Bingo where many of the 34 Soldiers Delta lost from 1967 to 1970 were killed in action.

Throughout the year, the platoon's missions varied from several days long search-and-destroy missions with constant exposure to potential ambushes and harassing fire, to protecting and patrolling around several LZs with constant exposure to enemy attack and mortar fire, in addition to potential ambushes and harassing fire. In contrast, the platoon also conducted relatively much safer missions such as bridge protection and overwatch to guard the inlet surrounding the island supply and cargo base at Sa Huynh (Sah Winn). Sometimes Soldiers needed to dig their fighting positions, while at other times the Soldiers occupied existing fighting positions. Consider this description of LZ Mile High: "LZ Mile High was a nasty, desolate, grim hill. The bunkers were low and smelled of

mildew, with no ventilation. They were only about 100 feet from the perimeter's wire, right along the edge of where the mountain dropped off directly into the thick jungle below... No one felt secure. They knew they were in the guts of NVA territory."

My combat experience includes no small unit fighting such as that described in *LZ Bingo*; nevertheless, many elements described in the book ring true to what I know as a retiree who spent 23 years in the Army. The most important thing to a Soldier in distress is the knowledge that he can trust his buddies — and they can trust him. Boe experienced both, and the details provided describing his closest buddies bring the reader to a better understanding of that trust. Letters from home served as morale boosters whether the recipient knew the people or not. The sisters of Alpha Omicron Pi Sorority at Florida State University (FSU) adopted Boe and others in his platoon as pen pals. Letters they received were highly anticipated and, at least in Boe's case, responded to with regularity. People caring and observing traditions can make a huge difference in the day-to-day lives for deployed Soldiers. Boe's Thanksgiving and Christmas experiences in Vietnam included not only a memorable meal but also contact with a chaplain, who consistently worked his way to wherever Delta happened to be. Finally, as a Ranger School student who attended some 15 years later, it is easy to see where many of the actions taught and trained at Ranger School had been implemented in a much less forgiving environment — and why.

The author explains that he has known Boe for a long time, and the book grew from multiple discussions about Boe's Vietnam experience. The narrative is complemented with multiple photographs of Soldiers and places that Boe was able to capture (and keep) with his Kodak Instamatic camera. For me, the book was extremely effective at tying together actions in Vietnam that I had been exposed to through books such as *Street Without Joy* by Bernard Fall, *One Very Hot Day* by David Halberstam, and even college texts concerning the war. Bill Boe and those like him who went to war are the real heroes of the 1960s. While many were drafted, Boe left the University of Georgia and enlisted. Similarly, the decision to support Soldiers in Vietnam by the sisters of the AOPi sorority at FSU merits special attention. The conventional wisdom at the time was for students to condemn the war effort. These young women provided time and effort to support a group of Soldiers who were doing the nation's military work. This is a quick read of a well-written story that covers a lot of ground concerning Vietnam, just like like SGT Boe and his 2nd Platoon Soldiers did in 1967-68.