

William Fred Carter telephone interview by Richard Killblane, 20 September 2013  
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18-year old Fred Carter was drafted in July 1969. He came from a family that had served in the military since the Revolutionary War. His father and uncles had served in WWII and one cousin had even earned seven Bronze Star Medals in the Army Air Corps during WWII. His grandfather had tried to enlist during WWI but was deemed unqualified due to poor eyesight. So Fred would have volunteered for military service if he had not been married with a child. When drafted he was an apprentice Lineman for Houston Lighting and Power Co. in Houston, Texas.

He attended Basic Training at Fort Bliss, Texas, but did not attend Advanced Individual Training (AIT). When drafted he was asked what he did before the Army and he said, among other jobs, he had been a tank truck driver for Texaco Inc. in Houston, so he was assigned to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Battalion at Fort Benning, Georgia where he learned through on the job training to become a heavy equipment operator. He was a dump truck and 10-ton tractor driver but also learned to operate other heavy equipment like bulldozers and heavy front loaders.

In August 1970, he was given 30 days leave before being sent to Vietnam and then arrived at Cam Ranh Bay on 2 September. He was told there were no slots for engineers and was asked if he wanted to walk to battle or ride. He said, "ride," and was assigned to the 597th Transportation Company but that company had a surplus of drivers, so after ten days, he was reassigned to the 359<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company as a 5-ton tractor driver.

He had been in several contacts prior to February 1971, but they were mostly sniper fire. He had been a truck driver in the ambush that killed Callison in November 1970. His truck was ahead of the kill zone so he kept driving. He was hauling diesel fuel that day.

Tim Sewell took the photos of that kill zone. Behind Brutus was a blackened crater which looked like it was made by a mortar, and remains of a battery and battery box cover in the road, so Fred believed it was a mortar not an RPG that hit Brutus and killed Callison. And because of the blast damage to the left front side of Brutus as well as the under carriage and floor pan of the truck.

Fred drove tractors for five to six months, and in January 1971 was put up for best truck of the month and came in second place. SSG Brown, the platoon sergeant and NCOIC on the gun jeep Little Brutus, was ETSing so Fred took his place. Little Brutus' call sign was "Little Bear One." The crew consisted of [Edward] Ed Bonner as the driver, but the guys of the 359 called him, "Boston Bonner." As the NCOIC, Fred was also the gunner. When he got on Little Brutus, it only had one pedestal mounted M60 and not long after that he changed it to twin M60s. M60s had problems of jamming so if one jammed, the other would continue firing. He carried ten M60 cans, a LAW rocket, and several smoke and frag grenades. The driver was armed with his M16 and M79 grenade launcher, and had a .50 cal ammo can filled with 40mm rounds. The gun jeep had two headsets so Fred could listen to the radio as well as the convoy commander. He did not trust green lieutenants.

On 23 February 1971, LT Porter was the convoy commander and liked to ride near the rear of the convoy behind either Brutus or The Untouchable. The 359<sup>th</sup> was the second convoy out that morning. SP4 Richard Bond was the NCOIC of Brutus but had the day off to go before the E-5 promotion board. The reason Fred knew that, he had stood before the very same promotion board in Phu Tai the week prior. So Fred was a SP5 during that convoy. The crew of the Brutus consisted of SSG Hector Diaz as the NCOIC, Charles L. Huser and Larry G. Dahl as gunners and Ronald Mallory as the driver.

The lead convoy departed right after the road opened which was just after daylight. Fred's convoy left around 0800 hours and drove at 25 mph. The convoy was a mile from the base of An Khe Pass when he heard over the radio, "Contact, contact, contact! Need help. Gun truck is down. Need help." The convoy commander instructed whoever was in front of the convoy to stop and pop red smoke to stop the convoy. Little Brutus drove up the road getting the tankers off to the side of the road. Fred thinks they may have also gotten them to turn around.

Fred thinks it may have been Erik Freeman [NCOIC of the Untouchable] who asked over the radio if they could go up and give some help. Porter thought about it for a while. He got out and talked with the NCOICs of the gun trucks and told them to go. Brutus, The Untouchable, Little Brutus, and Misfits headed up the Pass in that order. Fred thought they might have left one security vehicle behind with the convoy. Tim Sewell took photos of Brutus passing the check point and columns of smoke from the kill zone up on the Pass.

As they entered the kill zone they passed a burning tanker. After a short period of intense gunfire was exchanged with the enemy, the ambush subsided. Ahead of Little Brutus was a maintenance wrecker truck, another 5-ton and tanker, and a gun truck a little further up the pass. 100 to 120 yards further up the pass was Brutus beside the burning tanker.

Shortly before the enemy rushed again, they had received an "all clear." They were ready to let their guard down and Brutus had begun to turn around in the narrow road and was backing up when three to five VC came over the hill and fired at Brutus. Fred heard a .50 fire, but the mini-gun had jammed and then he heard a boom. He then saw Brutus make a hard left hand turn, back up again and may have pushed the tanker out of the way, then head back down the pass to the check point at the bottom of the pass. There was a check point ahead of them, but Ron Mallory did not want to risk going through more possible kill zone with wounded on board. Freeman and Little Brutus moved forward and saw three dead VC around the area where Brutus had been hit.

Fred took the photo of SGT McQuellan (in the white T-shirt and flak jacket) talking with "Filthy Fred" Freeman standing next to the lieutenant from the lead convoy, and an unidentified driver. He was not certain which APC gun truck [Sir Charles] was in the background, but Brutus was the gun truck next to the burning tanker. This photo was taken moments before the enemy attacked Brutus as it was backing up to turn around. The photo was taken from behind Brutus

looking west up the pass, but Fred does not remember driving ahead of that gun trucks position until Brutus had left the kill zone.

The lesson of this ambush was not to EVER drop your guard at any time. Always expect the unexpected, and when in convoy, always be in the defensive mode of operation.

After the ambush, the gun trucks regrouped while recovery cleared the road. The gun trucks returned to their convoy and when the road was clear as well as the pass by ARVN rangers, they continued straight to Plei Ku arriving just before dark so they had to rest over night there. The ambush held them up a couple hours.

Fred remained on the gun jeep up until his last 15 days in country. Only two major ambushes occurred after the one that killed Larry Dahl that Carter can remember. One happened in the Tuy Hoa Pass in April or May of '71, and another in the An Khe Pass in June of '71, but Fred was in neither. Since he had been an apprentice Lineman, the company put him to work stringing commo wire, replacing perimeter lights, and climbing poles his last 15 days in country. The 359<sup>th</sup> had only recently moved to Cha Rang Valley and was still settling in.

Fred left Cha Rang Valley on 12 July '71, flew out of Qui Nhon to Cam Ranh Bay where he left for Fort Lewis, Washington on 14 July '71. He was discharged from the Army on 15 July '71. He was still nervous when he came home so he took a month off to readjust to home life. His wife had a job with Walmart so he did not have to go to work right away; but with a wife and child, he had to get back to work soon to pay bills. Because of the Soldiers and Sailors Relief Act, he went back to his old position with Houston Lighting and Power Co. and retired from The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Union after 39 years of service.

Fred had mixed feelings about his service. He went over to Vietnam to fight for people who could not fight for themselves. He did not like the political restrictions placed on them, and the lack of a clear Military objective like WWII. Before the war, he was considered a happy, likeable and caring guy, but came back different. He was angry trying to be the kid who went off to war everyone remembered. That person did not exist anymore. He did not blame the government for his problems. The reunions of the 359<sup>th</sup> TC, and other combat vets helped out greatly. Only other combat vets understand another combat vet.