



CAP Echo 4

Submitted by: Mike "Tiny" Readinger
Foxtrot 2/Echo 2 and Echo CACO

The following first person account of the siege of Echo 4, and the subsequent loss of the reaction force sent to their aid, was provided by Mike "Tiny" Readinger. Mike, at the time, was the radioman for CAG HQs, having previously spent 10 months with CAP Echo 2.

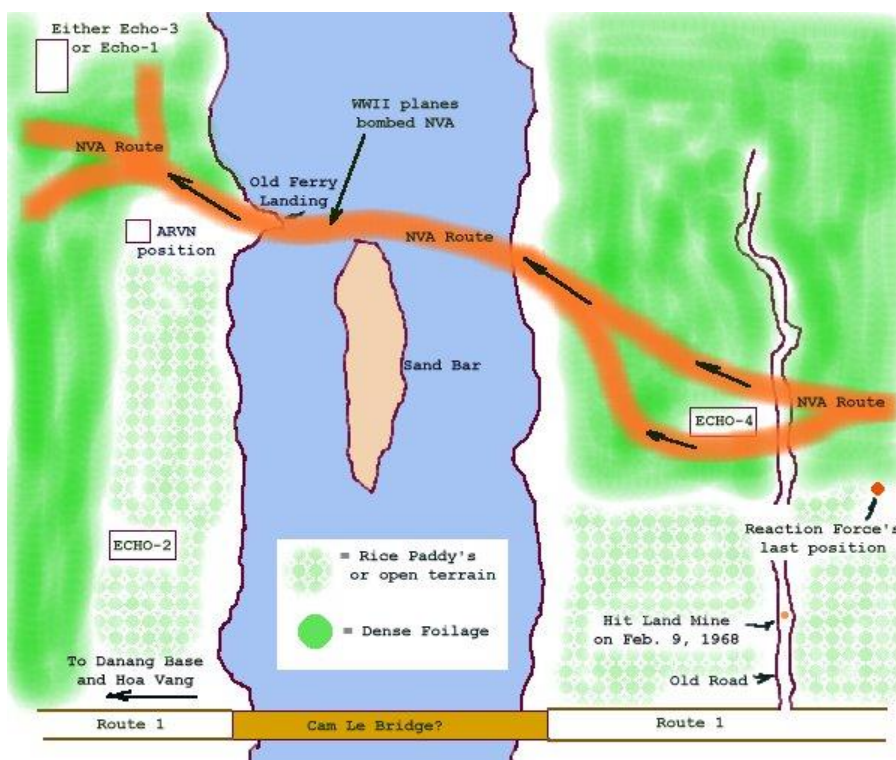
All of this story has been written from memory, and Mike readily admits to the potential for erroneous information.

I hope to explain to the best of my memory and ability the history of the ECHO CAP's from early 1967 to February, 1968. I may very well miss the exact chronological order of events, but I'll do my best.

Mike "Tiny" Readinger

Echo 4

Although I do not remember the exact number of Echo units, or the exact number of each unit by location, I do know Echo 2 and Echo 4 is correct. Echo 2 is where I served up to right before TET, 1968, when I was called into HoaVang as a radioman and truck driver. Not realizing it then, this move was to eventually save my life, but left me with many haunting memories.



I believe there were 6 Echo units. They were strung out approx. 2-4 miles outside the perimeter of Da Nang Airbase. Echo-2 and Echo-4 to the south; Echo-1 to the west (close to Monkey Mountain); Echo-3 to the east, and Echo-4 & 5 to the north. Of course, to CAP'ers, being this close to Da Nang was considered gravy duty, which for the most part it was.....until February 8, 1968.

One would think that being this close to Da Nang, one would have the best air and fire support in country. This was not to be the case, as we shall see. For some silly reason, the only way we could get support from Da Nang was through MP battalion, no direct contacts allowed.

On the morning of February 8th, 1968, we monitored radio traffic between a "bird-dog" and Da Nang/MP battalion. This is the context of the radio log as I remember it. *(Not remembering the call signs, I shall use*

"Da Nang" and "Bird-Dog")

Bird-dog : **"Da Nang, I've got approximately 400-600 unknowns on the ground, at approximately (gave coords) 15 miles south of your position!"**

Da Nang : **"We have some units working in that area, but nothing close to that size. Can you identify?"**

Bird-dog: **"Negative, Da Nang...they have moved under canopy..."**

Da Nang: **"Advise, stay on station for as long as possible and we will work it on this end"**

(End of this log....no other transmissions were ever heard.)

Author's Notes

What no one knew at this time was that the NVA and some locals had massed for an attack on Da Nang on the 7th, hopefully under the cover of darkness, but due to delays did not get into position until after daylight on the 8th. At this point we believe their strategy was to wait until darkness of the evening of the 8th. However, after being spotted by the Bird-dog, their plans changed rapidly.

([Please See Map](#))

Under concealment of the dense foliage, they made their way to the perimeter of ECHO-4, realizing that we probably wouldn't fire on our own unit as long as they didn't over-run it. Once again they hoped they could hold this position until nightfall. At this point, ECHO-4 came under intense fire, and with 11 Marines and a handful of PF's held off the hordes for several hours.

No Marines or PF's at Echo-4 were lost, although a few received serious wounds.

Now this part, for some reason I cannot pinpoint exactly when it happened. Perhaps later events have taken their toll on my memory. I only know that it happened prior to the loss of the reaction force, because Sgt. Ramos was on that reaction force.

At some point of time on the 8th, prior to the loss of the reaction force, Sgt Ramos and I drove from HoaVang to Echo-2. We had just arrived when 200-300 NVA made the river crossing towards Da Nang ([Please See Map](#)). I remember trying to get MP battalion to react to the situation, but could not get them to understand our location. They seemed to not be able to comprehend the fact that the enemy was that close, and were more interested in my radio procedure than the help that I was trying to obtain. For whatever reason, no help was obtained from MP battalion.

To this day, I have no idea why or how, but two small WWII aircraft piloted by South Vietnamese, arrived and made immediate hits on the NVA crossing the river ([Please See Map](#)). My only opinion is that our Vietnamese troops at HoaVang were monitoring our radio, heard how far our MP battalion had their head up their ass, and made a call for their own air support. But for what ever the reason, it probably saved Echo-3 as the surviving NVA could do nothing but disperse as rapidly as possible once in the area of Echo-3 (or Echo-1).

For the record, I believe this is where the "288" NVA (as previously quoted) were killed. Certainly the 288 is a very inflated number. Perhaps 100-150, but certainly not 288. The sad part is, many of these were South Vietnamese that the NVA forced across the river as cover. Unfortunately, 500 pound bombs and 20mm shells couldn't tell the difference.

My last comment on this event is as follows. It is not intended to degrade the ARVN's, but to place credit where credit is due. ([Please See Map](#))

Approximately a month prior to the river crossing, the ARVN's set up an 8-10 man position as shown on map. Everyday they would practice fire their 50mm. When the fatal day came, we watched them boogie...except for one lonely Chu-Hoi who we found later lying beside the .50mm which he had destroyed...probably as his last action.

At some point in the early afternoon on the 8th, Echo-4 transmitted a request for ammo, stating they were on their last radio battery. Now, probably due to the fact that most of Vietnam was being hit at the same moment, there were no aircraft available at Da Nang for re-supply. Even if there had been, between the small size of ECHO-4's compound, and the heavy weapons of the enemy in the area, it would have made this feat almost impossible.

Due to the critical nature of ECHO-4's plight, a call went out to Echos 1, 2, and 3 for volunteers to form a reaction force to re-supply and reinforce ECHO-4's position. At this time no one had any idea of the size of the enemy force. A truck was dispatched to bring the volunteers to HoaVang.

Now...here's where the tough part begins.

When the truck pulled up in front of my radio hootch, the first person that I noticed was Dennis Hammond, my best and closest friend. We had served almost 10 months together at Echo-2, both loving to hunt and fish....we were naturals. Dennis had two tours, saving all his money for a Corvette and some land in Canada. He and his brother were going to start a hunting and fishing camp there. At the time, Dennis had less than three weeks left in his tour, and an immediate discharge upon arriving home. Here is the conversation that took place:

Me: **"Ham-bone, what in the fuck are you doing! Your too fucking short for this kinda shit!"**

Dennis: **"Hey buds, I been here for two fucking years, and can't see where I've accomplished shit. This will be my last chance!"**

And it was.

The truck pulled away as I acknowledged several other members of Echos 1, 2, and 3. I was denied going by my C.O., as I was to be the only source of radio contact.

The truck proceeded to just south of Cam Le bridge ([Please See Map](#)), to where the reaction force started their assault. They proceeded east across the open terrain for approximately 500 yards. Then they came to a deep irrigation ditch which they used for cover until they were within a few yards of the canopy that surrounded ECHO 4.

At this point the fifteen man reaction force walked head long into a 200-300 man ambush.

Here is the radio log as I remember it. It's pretty accurate. It should be. I get to hear it almost every night. Only the part where first contact was made, is included.

I'd also like to note the calmness of Capt. Joselane's voice, right to the end. He was fine Marine Officer.

Capt. Joselane = Echo Actual.

Myself = Echo Mama.

Actual: **"Mama, we've just started taking heavy fire. I'll give you some numbers in a minute."**

(30-40 seconds later)

Actual: **"Mama, we're gettin chewed up. See if you can get Echo 4 to come in from the north and help."**

(Few seconds later)

Actual: **"We ain't gonna get out...there are too many...they're all over us....no way out. Don't send anyone else in here.....tell my wife I love her....."**

(End of log)

Author's Note: Echo 4 could not have helped, they were still under seige.

From beginning to end, this action could not have lasted more than 3 minutes.

My memory also fails me here. I can't remember exactly when they did an "Air-Extract" of Echo-4, but it was accomplished.

Evening of February 8th:

Due to failing light, an exact location of the reaction force, shortage of manpower, etc., 2nd CAG made the call that we would re-group and wait for the morning of the 9th. This was not a very popular choice with the remaining folks at HoaVang, and it almost prompted a mutiny. A tank company, I don't remember which, was contacted for support, since we knew we couldn't get anything out of MP battalion. We had perhaps 10-12 troops assembled at HoaVang when the tank's C.O. informed us that his equipment was too heavy for the Cam Le bridge.

At that point it was aborted, and we were forced to wait until the morning of the 9th.

It seems as if this night lasted for weeks. For one Marine lying wounded, I'm sure it lasted for eternity.

I don't remember his first name as he was a newbie at either Echo-1 or Echo-3, but "Greeno" may have been the luckiest man in the world on that night. In trying to keep a chronological order to the events, I will tell his story in a moment.

Morning of the 9th:

At first light another reaction force was assembled at HoaVang. We proceeded south of the Cam Le bridge and departed the truck there (junction of Highway 1 and old road [[Please See Map](#)]). From there we walked towards the area that we believed the reaction force would be found. The following description of what we found, I only include for the sake of the heroism that had left a painted picture.

As we walked east across the open terrain, we came upon a very deep irrigation ditch which we immediately used for cover, not realizing at that time that the reaction force had done the same thing. As we moved farther east, we began seeing pieces of shrapnel and other signs of an intense battle. Our Aussie point then came upon the first casualty.

I'm not going to go into any great detail here. I will only comment on certain things for historical purposes.

Greeno was where he had layed all night with seven wounds. He had applied his own tourniquets. He told this story, which he told me again a few days later in a hospital in Japan.

Greeno: "They let us get right to the tree line before they hit us. We thought because of the ditch we had excellent cover, but that wasn't true. There were so many of them, they had good coverage of that part of the ditch and just kept blooping rocket grenades."

"They captured Hammond, Zawtocky, and Talbot. We saw them being led away."

"We tried to attack into the ambush, but it was too late. They had too good a position just inside the tree line. And there were too many."

"Gifford was a hero. Everytime I saw him he was moving to a new position to treat someone else. He moved as if the the heavy fire was the least of his concerns."

Author's Note: When we found Greg "bac-si" Gifford, we observed the following:

He had used almost all of his medical pack. We found several Marines that he had treated. Although showing multiple wounds, he had not treated himself. He was found at the side of Pete Cruz with his last roll of gauze still clutched in his hand. An empty clip for his .45 was found beneath him. The rest he had tried to bury beside him, probably not noticeable by the NVA in the darkness that soon followed.

Greg performed far beyond the highest tradition of the Combat Corpsman. His dignified manners when at Echo-2 were way beyond his young years. If anyone ever deserved the Congressional Medal of Honor, he did. He and his family were cheated.

Continuing with Greeno:

Greeno: "I was eventually knocked out. When I came to, it was dark and the NVA were walking all over the area. Anytime they came close to me, I played dead. They searched and kicked me several times that night. At one point, early this morning, I thought they had left. I raised my head to look. There was a lone NVA radioman not more than ten feet away, looking directly at me. He motioned with his hand for me to lay back down.

I'll never forget that. Soon after that, he and the others left the area."

Go To:

[NVA Radioman: Why He Let Greeno Live](#)

That afternoon, while trying to get a truck into the area to evacuate the KIA, I found a land mine with a deuce-and-a-half. I spent some time at a hospital in Japan. Then, for some unexplainable reason, chose to go back for my last 30 days. I spent those 30 days at HoaVang, with almost daily visits to the Echos. But it was never to be the same. The only happy reminders were our local South Vietnamese villagers, who never forgot our friendship or sacrifices.

Ti ti, I pray that you made it.

CAP Echo 4 Story Update

On May 12, 2002, I received an e-mail from Wayne Johnson, the historian for the Army's 1st Battalion 6th Infantry . Wayne had read Mike Readinger's story about the Echo 4 attack, and he wanted the opportunity to communicate with Mike to complete his history from the perspective of the CAP Marines involved. Wayne's account of the battle from Army records, with Mike Readinger's assistance, is at:

- [Task Force Miracle](#)

The Reaction Force:

Here is a list of the reaction force KIA. There were three survivors listed below

- Sgt. Palmer, who somehow managed to walk out of the ambush.
- Don Talbot, who was captured with Hammond and Zawtocky, but managed to escape in the following days.
- Greeno (see story above).

I can account for all except Dennis Hammond, whose remains are yet to be returned. After many, many years of research, I shall make this statement:

Although search teams have, on several occasions, been to the approximate site and have failed, evidently no one is willing to filter through the facts that are available. Government documents alone have the area of burial location pinpointed down to less than 1/8 of an acre.

Robert Garwood's book, for whatever he was or wasn't, provides excellent information. Garwood could probably walk right to the spot. The credibility of his facts about Hammond are also substantiated by the book "Seven Survivors", a book co-authored by the survivors of the same POW camp where Hammond died.

The last information that I have, because of the rough terrain and/or weather conditions, lack of access, and lack of manpower and heavy equipment, they are at almost a standstill. To that, I shall make this final comment.

To whom it may concern: USMC? US Government? Bill Clinton?

It sure seems ironic that when we have a need to send men and women into combat anywhere in the world, there is never a shortage of manpower, heavy equipment or a will to commit. How much effort would it take to find one lost soul in 1/8 of an acre? Please don't reference me to the search teams. That's where I got the information of the manpower and equipment shortage.

Time is growing short, and I find each day that "Semper Fi" may very well be intended as a one-way street. I was a Marine, I will always be a Marine, and I will continue to count on the USMC to lead the way in bringing Dennis home.....soon. How can we continue the tradition if we don't?

Here is the list of the reaction force KIAs. I have pictures of several from previous occasions that I will publish soon.

- Last Name: Basso
First Name: Michele
ID. NO: 2104289
Service: USMC
Rank: Sgt.
Grade: E5
MOS: 0311
Age: 21
Home: North White Plains
State: N.Y.
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1946-10-15
Religion: Roman Catholic
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 020

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- Last Name: Cruz
First Name: Peter Frank
IDNO: 2328004
Service: USMC
Rank: Cpl.
Grade: E4
MOS: 0353
Age: 21
Home: Chualar
State: CA
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1946-09-21
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 024
-

- Last Name: Jackson
First Name: Johnnie Bruce
IDNO: 2307345
Service: USMC
Rank: LCpl
Grade: E3
MOS: 3531
Age: 20
Home: Fort Worth
State: TX
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1947-08-14
Marital Status: Married
Panel: 38E
Line: 030
-

- Last Name: Joselane
First Name: Howard Leo
IDNO: 080626
Service: USMC
Rank: Cpt.
Grade: O-3
MOS: 0302
Age: 29
Home: Chicago
State: IL
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1938-02-18
Marital Status: Married
Panel: 38E
Line: 031
-

- Last Name: Kinney
First Name: Lee Charles
IDNO: 2259949
Service: USMC
Rank: Cpl.
Grade: E4
MOS: 3041
Age: 21
Home: Welch
State: MN
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1947-01-09
Marital Status: Single Panel: 38E
Line: 031
-

- Last Name: Lamorte
First Name: Arthur William
IDNO: 2332430
Service: USMC
Rank: LCpl.
Grade: E3
MOS: 3516
Age: 19

Home: Baltimore
State: MD
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1948-04-06
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 031

- Last Name: Metcalf
First Name: Jimmy Allen
IDNO: 2329760
Service: USMC
Rank: LCpl.
Grade: E3
MOS: 0811
Age: 21
Home: Dallas
State: TX
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1946-03-28
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 033
-

- Last Name: Murphy
First Name: John Robert
IDNO: 2320111
Service: USMC
Rank: LCpl.
Grade: E3
MOS: 1341
Age: 19
Home: Yorktown Heights
State: NY
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1948-11-08
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 034
-

- Last Name: Ramos
First Name: Frank Jr.
IDNO: 1302158
Service: USMC
Rank: SSgt.
Grade: E6
MOS: 0369
Age: 33
Home: Youngstown
State: OH
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1934-08-25
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 037

-
- Last Name: Sirianni
First Name: Daniel Edward
IDNO: 2289227
Service: USMC
Rank: LCpl
Grade: E3
MOS: 2143
Age: 20
Home: Bufflao
State: NY
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1948-01-08
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 039

-
- Last Name: Hammond
First Nave: Dennis Wayne
IDNO: 375506720
Service: USMC
Rank: Sgt
Grade: E5
MOS: 3111
Age: 23
Home: Detroit
State: MI
Casualty Date: 1970-03-07
Birthdate: 1946-04-26
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 029

-
- Last Name: Zawtock
First Name: Joseph Stanley, Jr.
IDNO: 115362341
Service: USMC
Rank: Sgt
Grade: E5
MOS: 2511
Age: 39
Home: Utica
State: NY
Casualty Date: 1969-12-24
Birthdate: 1946-05-16
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 042

Corpsman:

- Last Name: Gifford
First Name: Gregory Allen

IDNO: 6963920
Service: USN
Rank: HM3
Grade: E4
MOS: HM3
Age: 19
Home: Billings
State: MT
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1948-03-11
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 028

- Last Name: Johnson
First Name: Charles Eugene
IDNO: 5960991
Service: USN
Rank: HN
Grade: E3
MOS: HN
Age: 23
Home: Toledo
State: OR
Casualty Date: 1968-02-08
Birthdate: 1944-10-21
Marital Status: Single
Panel: 38E
Line: 030
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A Shadow on the Wall

It was 2:00 a.m in the morning, when he came upon the wall...
a dark black "V" of granite, it stands not very tall.

The timing was premeditated, he had to be alone...
for it's very hard to hear, a voice that's etched in stone.

He paced those wings of black, looking for a friend...
and to reflect upon a moment in time, to a place where they'd once been.

The the panel suddenly appeared, and the voice was once again heard...
a long lost friend had been found, among the whisper of his word.

In the silence of the night, it echoed from the wall...
"You can let it go now, and thanks for coming to call"

And then he moved away, the silhouetted wall began to fade...
but looking back he noticed.....his shadow....*it had stayed.*

.....for those who cannot...

C.M. Readinger / "Twist" / "Tiny"
III MAF, 2nd CAG
Echo-2 and HoaVang