

“I was looking out front and I could see some of the grass going down, like somebody was crawling in it. I hollered: ‘Who’s out there?’ Nobody answered so I hollered again. No answer. I turned to Coleman: ‘Burn his ass.’ Coleman said: ‘My rifle’s jammed!’ I looked at him and him at me. Then I looked back to the front and they were growing out of the weeds. I just remember getting on that machine gun and from there on I guess the training takes over and you put your mind somewhere else, because I really don’t remember what specifically I did. I was totally unaware of the time, the conditions.”

On that M-60 machine gun, according to extracts from his Silver Star citation, Specialist Parish delivered lethal fire on wave after wave of the enemy until he ran out of ammunition. Then, standing up under fire with a .45 pistol in each hand, Parish fired clip after clip into the enemy, who were twenty yards out; he stopped their attack. Says Parish: “I feel like I didn’t do any more than anybody else did up there. I remember a lot of noise, a lot of yelling, and then all at once it was quiet.” The silence out in front of Willard Parish was that of the cemetery: More than a hundred dead North Vietnamese were later found where they had fallen in a semicircle around his foxhole.

Specialist 4 Vincent Cantu had been drafted into the Army the day before President John Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. He had one week left in service and he had been praying that he would live to make it home to Refugio, Texas, where he had been the lead guitarist and singer for a local band called The Rockin’ Dominoes. Says Cantu, “The fighting never let up for long. The artillery fired all around us continually. The jets bombarded the hell out of that mountain. I got word that a friend of mine from Houston, Hilario De La Paz, had gotten killed. He had only four days left in the Army. He had two young daughters back in Houston.” Hilario De La Paz, Jr., was killed that morning in the attack on Delta Company. He was just eighteen days past his twenty-sixth birthday.

During that fierce attack on the Delta and Charlie Company lines, Cantu recalls, “I was hugging the ground better than a snake when I saw what appeared to be a soldier in camouflage with 2 or 3 cameras dangling around his neck. He came from behind a tree and took 2 or 3 snapshots, then ducked back behind a big old anthill. I thought to myself: ‘Man, he wants pictures for his scrapbook real bad.’ I lay there for a moment and I started to think: ‘This guy reminds me of someone.’ I crawled to the tree because next time this guy appears I wanted a better look—but I also wanted protection. I didn’t have to wait long; there was no mistake. It was hot, his face was red; it was my old friend,

Joe Galloway. I felt joy at seeing someone from Refugio, but at the same time sadness because I didn’t want anyone from home being killed, and he was going about it the right way.”

Galloway and Cantu were classmates; in 1959 they graduated from Refugio High School together with fifty-five others. Cantu braved the hail of fire, sprinted across the corner of the open landing zone, and dived under a bush, where Galloway was kneeling. “Joe. Joe Galloway. Don’t you know me, man? It’s Vince Cantu from Refugio.” The two men embraced, agreed that this was “some kind of bad shit,” and for a few brief minutes stolen from the battle raging around them, talked of home, family, and friends. Cantu told the reporter: “If I live, I will be home for Christmas.” Vince Cantu survived and made it back to Refugio, Texas, population 4,944, just in time for the holidays.

IA DRANG—THE BATTLE THAT
CHANGED THE WAR IN VIETNAM

■ WE WERE ■
SOLDIERS ONCE...
■ AND YOUNG ■

"A GREAT BOOK..."

A gut-wrenching
account of what war is
really all about."

—GEN. H. NORMAN
SCHWARZKOPF

LT. GEN. HAROLD G. MOORE (Ret.)
■ and JOSEPH L. GALLOWAY ■