

A military helicopter is shown in a dense jungle, with two powerful searchlights illuminating the scene. The helicopter is positioned in the lower-left corner, and the searchlights create bright beams of light that cut through the dark foliage. The overall atmosphere is one of a high-stakes operation in a remote, forested area.

# FLEETING SHADOWS

Bk. 1 Jungle Stalkers

Harold T. Bolieu

# **Fleeting Shadows**

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JUNGLE STALKERS

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# Chapter 1



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he advanced unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, had been notified by Division Headquarters their entire unit was to be airlifted by Huey helicopters, from the sunny, sandy beaches near Tuy Hoa, South Vietnam, to the Central Highlands, a mountainous area near Pleiku, South Vietnam.

An advance group of three light weapons platoons and all 12, 3-man LRRP teams, were quickly assembled and sent to secure the area chosen for the site. They were also given instructions to begin building sand bagged defense bunkers around the perimeter of what initially was called Fire Base Delta, later known as Camp Holloway.

The orders of the LRRP teams were to set up and maintain a first alert perimeter 200 meters outside the Fire Base, then scout the area forward of their position to gain firsthand knowledge of the surrounding area.

If any booby traps were found, they were to be disarmed. The teams were also instructed to report all movement or sightings of anything in question to Major Anthony Collins, who was the officer in charge of the advance unit.

Upon arriving, the advance group met with no resistance. When on the ground, the LRRP teams immediately headed away from the main group, to dig themselves in before nightfall. After each team found a vantage point that would allow them to see the team on either side of their position and still have a clear field of fire to their front, they dug in and placed claymore mines at 30 and 60 feet to the front of their position. Each team member carried a 200 foot roll of heavy-duty kite string, which they stretched out from their foxhole to the foxhole on either side. If anything moved in front of or on either side of them after dark, they could simply tug on the string and alert the others that something was heard or spotted. That way, no one had to speak and give away their location.

When the teams were in place, they each, in their turn, began to patrol forward of their site to have a mind print of the terrain. The first and second teams returned with nothing to report, but the third team reported finding an area about 100 meters forward of their site that looked as if 50 or 60 people had made camp the night before then left early that morning, heading northeast. After a short discussion, John Gresham, the team leader for the third team was sent back to report what they'd found and to inform Major Anthony Collins that the LRRP teams were dug in and ready. Word was passed to each team. Within an hour, John was back.

“What did the Major say?” inquired Little Fox, as John passed his position.

“I think we might've made him mad. He said he didn't think what we found was anything to worry about. He also said he had received an intelligence report that said

nothing had been spotted in this area for the past three days. He figures, more than likely, what we found was nothing more than villagers moving to another location, because they didn't like the idea of us setting up our Fire Base so close to their village. The Major also wanted me to tell you 'BOYS,'" John emphasized sarcastically, "'too take it easy and not get spooked and start shootin' up everything that moves.'"

"Well, go ahead and tell your team we'll be proceeding according to our plan, just in case the Major happens to be wrong," Little Fox commented dryly.

Little Fox couldn't help but smile to himself after John had walked away, as he remembered the day Major Collins had come out to the firing range back at Fort Lewis. *He reminded everyone of a high school coach the way he stood there with his feet spread apart and his hands on his hips with that ever present unlit cigar in his mouth, as if he dared someone to come and try to take it. Sergeant Rock had always referred to the major as "The Bull Dog". When asked why he called him "The Bull Dog", Rock said it was because of the way the major's nose always looked as if it were being pressed against a window. Then he asked, "You know why a bull dog's nose is pushed back, right? That way they can bite and breathe at the same time."*

The day progressed with each team patrolling their designated area. Although nothing else was spotted by the other teams, they still proceeded an hour after sundown with their plan of moving 10 meters back and shifting 20 meters to the right of their original position.

Major Collins had been angrily pacing outside the command tent since the first shot had been heard from the northeast outpost, shortly after midnight; he had instructed the radio operator to contact them.

"Well, have you been able to get hold of 'em yet?" barked Major Collins, as he rushed back inside.

"No, Sir. They must have their radio turned off," replied the on duty operator.

"Damn it. I knew it. I knew it." growled the major, as he pounded his right fist into his left hand. "I'll have those boys' asses hangin' from tree come daylight. And they're supposed to be the Elite Outpost. Elite, my ass," he added sarcastically, as he walked back to the entrance to the tent.

"We'll be lucky if we find any of 'em alive in the morning. They just may kill each other tonight."

"Their line may have gotten probed by N.V.A. or VC, Sir," injected Captain Harding, who had been in the command tent, checking the area maps.

"Hell no, there is not a damned thing out there but the wind blowin' through the trees and a bunch of scared little boys who think the boogie man is about to get 'em," bellowed the major.

"You know, Sir, Chu Pong really isn't that far from here. Last November, units from the 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary got their clocks cleaned at L.Z. X-ray because they refused to check out the area. Instead, they believed the intelligence reports and walked right into an ambush," the captain reminded him.

“Oh hell, that’s old history, captain,” said the major, as they heard another claymore explode somewhere in the darkness, out toward the northeast.

“Damn their hides. I am goin’ to my tent and try to get some sleep. Wake me at first light and have a platoon ready to move, captain. I’m goin’ out there and rip them boys a new ass,” he growled, as he stormed out of the command tent.

“Yes, Sir, I’ll take care of it,” assured Capt. Harding. “Well, sergeant, I guess I’d better drop these maps off at artillery and turn in myself. Send someone to wake the major and myself at 0530 hrs.,” instructed the captain.

“Yes, Sir, I’ll pass it on, Sir.”

After dropping off the maps and speaking with Sergeant Andrews, Capt. Harding went to his tent and stretched out on his cot. But try as he may, sleep was the farthest thing from him. He could still hear an occasional shot fired. Nowhere in the far reaches of his mind did he believe those boys were spooked. After all the training they had been put through the past year, they knew exactly what was expected of them. Somewhere during his thoughts, he drifted into a troubled sleep.

# Chapter 2



T

he morning sun was clearing the hills to the east as the second platoon headed out of the Fire Base. Checking his map, Lieutenant Jacobs directed the point man to where the northwest outpost should have been. But upon arriving, no one could be found. This irritated Maj. Collins even more.

“Now, just where in the hell do you suppose they are?” he questioned, speaking to no one in particular. “Do you think they got so damned scared they just ran off into the jungle during the night?” he continued to speak to no one in particular.

“Lt. Jacobs,” yelled the major.

“Sir?”

“Have your men spread out and see if anybody can be found,” he instructed.

“Looks like someone standing over there by those trees, Sir,” said Capt. Harding, pointing to a small grove of trees about 50 meters to their right.

Turning, the major instructed Lt. Jacobs to gather his men and head to the trees.

“Little Fox, I think you’d better wake up, we have company comin’,” Carl called over his shoulder, when he spotted the platoon heading their way.

“Just who the hell is in charge here?” demanded the major, as he rushed ahead of the column. “And, just what the hell are you doin’ way over here? You’re supposed to be back over there,” he pointed behind him. “Can’t any of you boys even do a simple thing like read a damned map?”

“And just what in the hell was goin’ on out here last night?” he yelled, without giving either of them a chance to answer.

“Well, Sir,” began Little Fox, as he sat up and threw the cover off his legs. “I guess I’m in charge of this particular team, although being in charge doesn’t mean much out here in the bush. As to why we’re here instead of back there, you see, Sir, that was our day site.” Little Fox tried to explain, as he started to get to his feet.

“Damn it, boy,” yelled the major, as he bent down and grabbed Little Fox by the collar, popping a couple of buttons from his shirt as he jerked him up. “Get on your damned feet, boy, and stand at attention when you speak to me, you little punk. You better show some damned respect. Do you hear me talkin’, boy?” he screamed, as he shook Little Fox back and forth.

“Yes, Sir. I hear you, Sir,” answered Little Fox, clenching his fist. “If you’d calm down, I’m sure I could answer all your questions, Sir.”

“Who in the hell do you think you are talkin’ to, boy?” yelled the major. “You’re nobody, boy. I will have your ass brought up on charges. You just don’t know how much trouble you and this pack of misfits are in. Damn, you people wasted enough ammunition and explosives out here last night, shootin’ at ghosts, to have had a small war.”

“But Sir,” started Little Fox, “if you would just give me a chance to explain.”

“Explain, hell,” yelled the major as he struck Little Fox across the mouth with the back of his hand, sending him sprawling on the ground.

“Sir,” Carl spoke quickly to Capt. Harding. “You’d better get the major away from here or he’ll be dead in a few seconds. Little Fox is fixing to blow a hole through him.”

Reacting quickly, Capt. Harding stepped between the major and Little Fox, not seeing the ‘45’ already out of its holster and coming up ready to fire. But, as Little Fox came off the ground, there it was.

Carl dove past the captain and grabbed the weapon, pushing it up and away from the major’s head. Carl’s weight knocked Little Fox off balance.

“Little Fox,” yelled Carl, as they tumbled to the ground. “Let it go. It doesn’t mean anything at all. It doesn’t mean anything,” he repeated.

“Step back, major,” shouted Capt. Harding. “Step back,” he repeated, as he pushed Maj. Collins out of harm’s way.

“Settle down, both of you,” he ordered. “You are both out of control. Major, you walk back down the trail, sit down and get hold of yourself. Go on now, walk it off, sir. This young man has done nothing to cause you to be so upset.”

Turning, the major slowly walked away, feeling as though his legs were about to buckle beneath him, at any second. “*Why did I do such a stupid thing?*” he wondered. As his mind cleared, he realized how close to death he’d come. His thoughts drifted back to the night in that dark alley, three years ago in New York, when that boy had robbed him and his wife. She had resisted and the boy had shot and killed her. This boy had that same look in his eyes. Finding a log, he sat down, his legs unable to support him any longer.

“OK, Carl. OK,” said Little Fox. “Of course, you’re right. It doesn’t mean anything. It would have been a waste of a perfectly good bullet to blow his brains out.”

“I’m not making excuses but, remember, it’s his first time in combat. He’ll get better,” commented Capt. Harding. Reaching down, he helped both boys to their feet.

“Now please, from the beginning, tell me about last night,” requested the captain.

“Go ahead Carl, check on Reuben. See if he needs any help with our guest,” said Little Fox, as he holstered his weapon. “Capt. Harding and I will be there in a bit.”

“Guest?” asked the captain.

“I’ll get to that in a moment, Sir. Let me start at about 1300 hrs. yesterday afternoon. You see, Sir, after the patrol reported finding that camp site, all the team leaders had a meeting. We decided if, in fact, it had been N.V.A. or VC who’d camped there, it was common sense they’d come back to probe our lines during the night. Of course, we had no idea how many would come. So, we planned to stay where we were until dark, just in case

they were watching. Then, after dark, we'd change our location to throw 'em off. We had to maintain radio silence so they wouldn't hear the radio squelch and give our new position away, in case someone at the Fire Base keyed up their radio."

"At about 0130 this morning," he paused to check the ground then continued, "20 VC approached our outpost. I was right about here," he pointed to the ground. "I had Carl set up 20 meters out and 15 meters to my left. Reuben was the same distance to the right of me. As the VC came in they stopped about 30 meters in front of me and began setting up 2 mortar tubes. Each of them had one mortar shell in a sling strap, slung across his back, which they laid on the ground beside the tubes. Two men stayed with each tube, while the rest spread out. That's when we opened fire on 'em."

Little Fox started walking as he spoke. "During a brief fire fight, nine were killed, six were wounded and we captured four. One slipped away, but we recaptured him about 10 minutes later. When he was brought in, we put him with the others and Reuben overheard one of the prisoners refer to him as captain."

"We've also learned that 2 weeks ago these men were in Hanoi. Their commander had received word of a planned American buildup in this area. So, 200 North Vietnamese army regulars were sent to check out that report. They traveled down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and arrived here night before last. They spent last night in the area our team had reported finding. Yesterday morning, their unit split up into smaller groups. This group stayed behind to check us out, while the rest headed into the hills to join other groups already scattered around the area. I'm sorry, but that's all we've been able to find out, so far."

"So, that's all you've found out so far, is it?" asked Capt. Harding.

"Yes, Sir. Here are the prisoners, the wounded, the dead and all the weapons we recovered over there." he pointed, as they approached where Carl and a couple of the other boys were guarding the prisoners. "Also Sir, I'd like to have Reuben checked by the medics. He was grazed by one of their rounds last night."

"Well, I must say, you boys did one helluva' good job out here last night and I'm going to be sure everyone knows it," assured the captain.

When the dead and wounded had been moved, Capt. Harding instructed Little Fox to pass the word for all the LRRP teams to gather at the command tent at 1200 hrs. Little Fox was told an infantry platoon would be sent out to take their places.

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