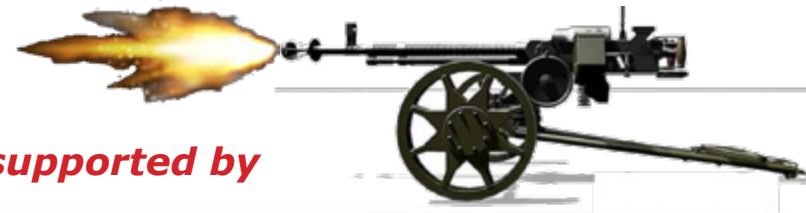


***First Person Account***

# A Christmas Tale of a Chi-Com 50



### **What Echo Faced**

The Soviet made 12.7 mm DShK Heavy Machine Gun, was what we called the Chi-Com 50. It penetrates 15mm armor at 500 meters and is fed by a 50-round belt stowed in magazines.

**Hidden in the ville's treeline, a Viet Cong platoon supported by one, maybe two heavy machine guns**



**Cpl Terry Dunne**  
Machine Gun Squad Leader  
1st Platoon  
Echo 2/1

It was late Fall, near Christmas, and the Echo Raiders were pinned down behind a rice paddy dike by a Viet Cong heavy machine gun.

We'd been walking up this dark spooky trail, a bamboo-tunnel

kind of trail when — kapow — a big booby trap, maybe a mortar round or a 105 artillery shell, took the life of a young Echo PFC. As we medevaced his body, random bullets aimed at us tore through the left side of the bamboo tunnel.

The radio crackled...**"Shift Left."** We turned left and poked out of the bamboo tunnel single file to the open rice paddies. Zing-zing-zing...more bullets, a lot more. We ducked low, running our way to cover behind a good-sized rice paddy dike.

*We all saw it. We were deeply moved but, much more, we understood. Capt. Pratt was going for the jugular.*

The Viet Cong had deployed a Chinese communist .50 caliber machine gun, what we called a **Chi-Com 50**, and it was talking big time. I looked down the line at Echo Company laying low behind the paddy dike, the Chi-Com 50's fearsome bullets tearing the dike apart. It was sickening. Stick your head up and you were dead, simple as that.

Suddenly things changed. You could feel it down the line. The radio crackled, **"Guns up"** and six **M-60** machine guns nosed over the dike, opening up on the **Chi-Com .50**. The M-60's red tracers quickly pinpointed the big gun's



location. Behind the M-60s, an Echo mortar team smashed a **60mm mortar** baseplate to the ground, attached the mortar tube, connected the bipod and sight, and fired off a high explosive round in all of about 30 seconds. Soon, all three Echo mortar teams were blasting the far tree line to rubble.

In the middle of it all, in the middle of the Echo line, Captain Thomas M. Pratt III and his radioman stood up. The Captain—hand on his hip, radio mike

to his ear, a touch of swagger—ordered his rifle company into action. His radioman bobbed and weaved frantically, ducking the enemy bullets aimed at the Captain.

We all saw it. We were deeply moved but, much more, we understood. Capt. Pratt was going for the jugular.

The radio crackled...**"Up"** and 80-or-so U.S. Marines rose up each side of Capt. Pratt. The radio crackled once more, **"Charge."**

We went over the dike. An enemy bullet

hit the Marine next to me. He was carrying two machine gun belts Pancho Villa-style and the enemy bullet harmlessly detonated one of the rounds close to his neck. He kept it as a close-call souvenir.

Echo's middle platoon formed a fighting wedge, the remaining platoons on each side in frontal assault mode, staying abreast laterally to avoid shooting each other. We charged over the rice paddies, an entire rifle company of crack-shot Marines firing from the hip. As we closed on the tree line, the enemy fire ceased, the **Viet Cong** shooters long gone along with the **Chi-Com 50**. We couldn't help but notice more than one dead or dying innocent civilian who'd been caught up in the fusillade aimed at the VC. But that was the way the VC operated. Attack from a well-populated village then use the dead

and wounded civilians for anti-American propaganda.

A few weeks later, on **Christmas Eve**, it was raining buckets and Echo Co was turning up a drink or two, safe inside 2/1's battalion perimeter. Some 30 or 40 Raiders

decided to go Christmas caroling and gathered in the rainy dark outside Capt. Pratt's hooch.

It began to rain even harder as the Skipper came out smiling, joining in the caroling.



The words were:

*"On the 1st day of Christmas the VC gave to me, a sniper on the Echo CP (see sidebar for more verses).*

It went on and on and then a soaking-wet tipsy Marine held his beer up high

and yelled: **"Here's to Capt. Pratt!"**

And out of the steaming gushing river of rain came a roar:

**"To Capt. Pratt! Merry Christmas!"**



**Bamboo Tunnel**

### **Echo's 12 Days of Christmas**

*On the 1st day of Christmas, The VC gave to me, A SNIPER ON THE ECHO CP*

*On the 2nd day of Christmas, The VC gave to me, Two Bouncing Bettys, AND A SNIPER ON THE ECHO CP*

*On the 3rd day of Christmas, The VC gave to me, Three Claymore Mines, AND A SNIPER ON THE ECHO CP*

*On the 4th day of Christmas, The VC gave to me, Four 6-foot Mantraps, AND A SNIPER ON THE ECHO CP*

*On the 5th day of Christmas, The VC gave to me, Five Punji Sticks, AND A SNIPER ON THE ECHO CP*

*On the 6th day of Christmas, The VC gave to me, Six Bamboo Whip Traps, AND A SNIPER ON THE ECHO CP*

*...and the rest was lost in the drenching rain.*