

# Shine Bright LLCE Cycle Terminal

## Pages BAC Arts et débats d'idées

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### **Landing in Vietnam**

Carlyle Smith "Smitty" Harris

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In one split second, I passed from the known to the unknown—from a comfortable, safe and ordered life into a hostile environment filled with danger and trauma.

When I ejected from my crippled airplane, I had no thoughts of what lay ahead. I was too busy trying to survive the crash. It was a spontaneous act of desperation, conditioned by years of emergency training, that would give me some chance for survival.

I had trained for this. I knew exactly what to do and what would happen. My seat would fly off with great velocity and force, just after the glass canopy of the plane flew hundreds of feet up in the air. My mind and my emotions went on autopilot as I went through the motions.

In my frantic efforts to keep my F-105<sup>1</sup> flying, I had waited until the last moment to radio my squadron mates that I was ejecting. As a result, my left hand was still on the mike button when I pulled the trigger that would catapult me from my burning and lifeless craft. As my parachute snapped open, I felt a sharp, searing pain in my left shoulder. I had not placed my arm in the armrest that would prevent it from flailing in the wind blast when my body was hurled into space. For a moment I thought I was blinded, but I reached up to my face and found that my oxygen mask had slopped up over my eyes. Pulling it down, I saw my F-105 as it struck the ground and burst into a huge ball of fire.

Looking up, my parachute was beautiful. There was absolute silence and serenity as I floated noiselessly earthward. What a contrast from the screaming, frantic scene moments before.

Suddenly, my mind raced to my predicament. I must have been briefly mesmerized or possibly in shock. A Vietnamese village was directly below me, and I could see people running around. It finally sank in—I was in enemy country and would probably be there a long time.

There were no trees or other cover in the area—just open rice paddies and the village. My chances for evasion were nil. I reached up and grabbed my parachute risers with my right hand and was successful in slipping my chute sideways so I would float away from the village. I landed less than 100 yards from the thatched-roof huts and immediately tried to open my survival kit to get my emergency radio so I could alert my friends that I was safely on the ground. My left arm was limp and useless, which made it very difficult to open the emergency kit. Before I could get to the radio, loud, angry voices were yelling at me.

Villagers had already surrounded me and were closing in. I saw a few rifles, but most had sticks and hoes. Many of the men seemed almost as frightened of me as I was of them. As I looked around, the men in my line of sight would duck down behind a small levee or clump of grass as if I could harm them with my stare. However, the circle of men tightened, and a few brave ones finally rushed me and knocked me to the ground. I was armed with a snub-nosed .38 revolver strapped to my chest, but it had not even occurred to me to try to fight my way out of these impossible odds, so the gun was still in its holster.

Carlyle S. Harris, Sara W. Berry, *Tap Code: The Epic Survival Tale of a Vietnam POW and the Secret Code That Changed Everything*, 2019

1. American supersonic fighter-bomber

## **Remembering Woodstock: Why the 1969 Festival Still Resonates**

Woodstock was more than a concert — it was a social, political, musical event that changed our culture.

The legacy of the Woodstock Festival — which took place in Bethel, New York, from Friday, August 15th, 1969, through the morning of Monday, August 18th — rests on the fact that a half-million hippies turned a muddy, gridlocked area into a site that symbolized peace and love. The event also confirmed that rock & roll had entered the mainstream.

The event has shaped culture to this day. Rolling Stone caught up with Woodstock '69 vets Country Joe McDonald, David Fricke, and Greil Marcus to ask why the inadvertently free music event continues to resonate in popular culture.

“I always say that Woodstock was like a family picnic; it was fun,” says songwriter McDonald, who played with his psychedelic rock band Country Joe and the Fish. They performed a solo set that closed with the iconic tandem of “The ‘Fish’ Cheer” and the darkly comic Vietnam War protest song “I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to- Die Rag.” “You shouldn’t underestimate that you were having fun.”

Whether it’s the legendary performance of Jimi Hendrix’s “Star-Spangled Banner” or the fabled dove-and-guitar logo that flew over the trampled fields of Yasgur’s Farm, people continue to be fascinated by this cultural milestone.

“Yes it was a concert — that was the principle reason everybody showed up — but the reason we remember it is because of the way people reacted to the circumstances the conditions and the obligations that they presented,” Fricke, who had just turned 17 when he attended, explains. “The music was the thing that inspired us to keep doing that.”

“For three days, everybody had a good time together and changed the world,” Marcus, a Rolling Stone contributing editor, says. “It was a protest and it was an act of resistance. When the students gathered in Tiananmen Square in 1989<sup>1</sup>, they said, ‘This is our Woodstock.’ They didn’t mean Santana, and the Who, and Hendrix; they

meant coming together, taking a stand regardless of how young we might be. So in that sense this vacation turned into something else.”

Watch “Remembering Woodstock” to hear more about why this event continues to inspire generations.

*rollingstone.com*, August 1st, 2019

**1.** student-led demonstrations held in Beijing, China