

# The Great Mutiny

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[For my inaugural paper I present a virtual history - history not as it did happen, but history as it might have happened. All units, people and events below the brigade level are fictitious.]

On May 12, 1971 Captain Bill Hampton got off the plane at Tan Son Nhut Airbase outside of Saigon for his second tour of duty in Viet Nam. The massive airbase was living proof of the scale of American operations in the country. It had passed Chicago's O'Hare field as the world's busiest airport. The bus trip to the Long Binh base where replacements were processed confirmed the enormous commitment America had made to keeping this distant country out of the Communist sphere. The bus passed huge logistic stockpiles and the busyness and activity to move troops and materiel from the flight-line out to the rest of the country. Helicopters landed and took off like swarms of bees, Air Force fighters took off to deliver air support to some beleaguered American troops out to the west, while the non-descript planes of the CIA's Air America sat waiting for their shadowy missions. What he couldn't see from the bus was that behind all this activity stood an army on the brink of collapse.

He had used the long flight from Travis Air Force Base to inventory his career progress thus far and found ample reason for optimism. He thought back to his first tour of duty in Viet Nam as a young infantry platoon leader with the First Air Cavalry Division and remembered the heavy fighting in the Ia Drang valley. He had acquitted himself well and came away from the tour with a strong reputation. Occasionally he felt a bit ill-used by his commander's failure to award him any of the medals for valor. His CO did give him a glowing evaluation. Hampton had decided then that his career would lie with the Army - he would become a "lifer." He made this commitment to himself and the Army even though he recognized that an ROTC commissioned officer would be at a disadvantage to the West Pointers if he got near the highest ranks. He believed that industry and diligence, high personal standards and a little luck would carry him at least to colonel. Flag grade would be tougher without the West Point class ring, but that was still far off in any case.

Following that first Viet Nam tour, he was assigned to an elite planning staff with NATO headquarters in Europe. There he created the operational plans for the use of the Army's tactical nuclear weapons in the case of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. This work exposed him to top-secret operational plans. The plans for the defense of Western Europe were almost scarier than the fighting in Ia Drang. The overwhelming numerical advantage the Soviets held in troops and armor left the US forces along the German border as a thin trip wire to assure the US' immediate and wholehearted defense of Europe. If Soviet armor poured through the Fulda

Gap, the US Army would need its tactical nukes within a few days to have any hope of stopping the invasion. Hampton approached his assignment with a sober sense of mission. He prepared the plans and orders to be sent out if the worst happened and regularly visited the stockpiles of ammunition to ensure that readiness and security remained high even in the absence of unusual activity in the east.

After another glowing review, he went to Fort Benning Georgia for the six month infantry officers' advanced course. This course marked the Army's recognition that a young captain had a career as a soldier. Captain Hampton approached the training as a true opportunity to improve his professional skills - an approach not universally taken by his classmates. The courses were well conceived and well conducted, but some other aspects of Fort Benning troubled him.

His European assignment brought him into contact with some of the most elite and intelligent NCOs and troops in the Army. Thus it came as a rude awakening when he first attended a movie on post at Fort Benning. A long tradition in the Army, and one honored to this day, is to play the Star Spangled Banner before the feature. The troops were of course expected to stand for the national anthem. Instead when the music began, half the troops slouched and slumped in their seats. A few raised clenched fists. Majors and first sergeants appeared in the aisles to personally order surly and recalcitrant troops to stand up. Hampton jumped up to help, grabbing a few of these troops by the scruff of the neck to get them on their feet. He walked away furious that the Army proved so dissolute as to require senior officers and NCOs to enforce so basic a standard. One of the majors explained afterwards that the troops would not respond to more junior leaders' orders to stand.

He ran into two captains who had served with him on his earlier tour in Viet Nam. They now had assignments as company commanders for the 197th Infantry Brigade. The 197th provided troop support to the Infantry School - bringing meals out to field exercises or playing the part of Viet Cong "aggressors" in mock battles. Most of its soldiers had finished their one year tour in Viet Nam and were serving out the remaining months of their obligation.

Over beers at Infantry Bar, his friends confided just how bad things were. Discipline was appalling: as the soldiers said, "so throw me out of the Army" or quoted that much used catch phrase from the 'Nam, "it don't mean nothin'." At this time, racial unrest in major US cities had reached such proportions that plans were in place to reinforce National Guard troops with Federal units if the Guard couldn't contain a riot. The 197th was one of these back-up federal units. His buddies told him how each company commander kept a list locked in his safe that showed for each soldier whether he would be deployed on a civil mission or be left behind at Fort Benning. One buddy said, "We just can't trust how some of these guys would behave on such a mission, or even whose side they would be on if push came to shove." As Hampton

considered his time at the Infantry School, he had the sudden unpleasant realization that on this tour in the 'Nam, his troops would look more like the 197th than his planning staff and ammo experts in NATO. His dismay was tempered only by his own experience of combat - when someone is shooting at you, you don't really wait for orders to shoot back, and protecting yourself and your buddies comes very naturally.

Another matter arose while he was at Fort Benning: the trial of Lt. William Calley for the My Lai massacre. Calley's court martial took place on that post and brought national attention. The My Lai massacre confirmed the worst views of U.S. involvement in Viet Nam among the anti-war crowd and shook the confidence of the Army in itself. While the post commander's order that no one talk to the media was largely respected, his discouragement of any discussion was doomed to failure. The trial became a regular topic of conversation. The young officers waiting for a Viet Nam tour frequently saw Calley as simply a scapegoat for anti-war sentiment. This view was reinforced by the surrounding community in Columbus Georgia. NCOs with a couple of tours behind them talked of "the fog of war" and how tough it was to tell the good guys from the bad guys, not that most of them really believed there were any Vietnamese good guys. Captain Hampton took a far sterner view: an officer must manage his troops at all times. The stresses of combat cannot excuse commanders who fail to provide that leadership which distinguishes war, ugly as it is, from outright anarchy.

As Hampton considered his future on that long flight, he knew that he had to punch his ticket by an assignment as company commander for a rifle company in the field. With political and diplomatic efforts to end the war now underway, he had to use this tour to put that all important command on his resume. He finally closed his notepad and grabbed some sleep before the refueling stop in Japan satisfied that things were on track. When the plane landed at Tan Son Nhut, his plan was ready.

The first day in country Hampton had the chance to sell his plan to the personnel officer who deployed the new arrivals to specific units. He had a face-to-face conversation with a major of the Adjutant General Corps, who listened carefully to his interest in field command time. Captain Hampton also indicated his desire to return to the First Air Cav. The First Cav had become synonymous with Viet Nam combat, even though it was only one of many divisions deployed in that war. Meetings like this, as well as other chance meetings on those first days in country, kept many senior officers and NCOs out of harm's way in staff jobs. Lieutenants and the junior enlisted troops did not even see a human being for their assignments. They only filled out a "dream sheet" indicating which division they wished to join. The reality was that the previous week's casualty figures played a far larger role in assignments than their desires.

Several days later Captain Hampton found himself in Chu Lai, the division base of the 23rd Infantry Division, the Americal Division. He was not given the line command he coveted; rather

he was assigned as S-1 staff officer for the 2nd Battalion, 48th Infantry. This assignment wasn't his idea of a proper use of his talents. The Americal division had produced My Lai and Lt. Calley. Occasionally the dark GI humor dubbed it "the Americalley" division. The most recent claim to fame of the 2nd of the 48th came from its loss of Firebase MaryJane three months earlier to a VC sapper attack, despite good intelligence that an attack was imminent. Worst of all, he had now joined the ranks of REMFs - the "Rear Echelon Mother Fuckers" treated with a mix of resentment, condescension and envy by anyone out in the boonies. REMFs never got quite the respect awarded to those who dealt with the enemy without the benefit of a bunker line and barbed wire between them. Hampton hardly welcomed this prospect.

Of course, he chuckled at the whole concept of rear area. In a counter-insurgency with no "front," one might ask, "if there's no front, how then can you have a rear?" Not surprisingly, it always constituted a relative term: to those out doing the patrols, search and destroy missions and night ambushes, everyone looked like a REMF. To those on a forward fire support base, division bases looked like the rear. To division bases, the major logistics hubs like Cam Ran Bay and Da Nang looked like the rear. Saigon looked like the rear to everyone. With each step from night ambush to Saigon, the scale of the place increased, creature comforts increased, your personal safety increased markedly, and the prevalence of "sex, drugs and rock and roll" grew nicely. Another measure also varied along this dimension. Out in the woods, the ever present danger provided at least some measure of discipline, even among the bitter draftees that formed the bulk of the troops. At the other extreme, once you were in Saigon, the army bureaucracy and chain of command flourished in full vigor. Between those two end points, the level of discipline could not be predicted and varied greatly depending on the local officers and NCOs.

As in most other battalions, the commanding officer stayed out on the fire support base in the battalion's area of operations. The rifle company commanders were out in the field with their companies. The executive officers, the XOs, of the units ran the battalion and company rears on the sprawling Chu Lai division base. The executive officer of the battalion, Major Rockwell, became Hampton's de facto boss. As S-1 officer in charge of personnel and administration, Hampton would also stay in the rear along with the battalion supply officer. The S-1 kept track of arriving and departing troops, handled the records for troops, issued after-the-fact orders assigning wounded to the hospital unit, and put through the routine orders for promotions. This did not strike Hampton as very interesting, much less career enhancing, but he reminded himself that if this was his assignment, he would make the very most of it. With routine rotations of officers and unforeseen casualties, that line command job might still be within reach.

After a week of meeting the unit's clerks and NCOs, Hampton decided to learn first-hand just what he could do to support the battalion's objectives. He hopped on the Huey helicopter that was flying resupply for the battalion that day. The platoons in the field got their resupply flights every three days so by working with the pilot he visited six platoons in one day. What he found surprised him. In two cases the company commander also had to act as a platoon leader because infantry lieutenants were in such short supply. Two other platoons were commanded by a sergeant for the same reason. An Army platoon was officially sized at almost forty troops, but he found around twenty in the platoons he visited, and one platoon with only fourteen troops.

The platoon sergeants, who should have been sergeants first class with perhaps twelve years in the Army, were conspicuous only by their absence. Most of the platoon sergeants were "shake and bake" graduates of a quick NCO training course after their initial Army training. One was a kid with nine months in the Army and no NCO training at all who came forward and said, "Like, check it out, Dai Wi, we ain't go no platoon sergeant, so, like I kinda been fillin' in." His use of Dai Wi, the Vietnamese equivalent of captain, formed a small breach of military etiquette that annoyed Hampton. He was willing to overlook it only in the interest of getting the full facts. The fact that this kid's hat was festooned with hippie beads and the pop tops from beer cans did not serve to build the captain's confidence.

To a career officer, the lieutenants he met inspired little more confidence. They had been in the Army for perhaps a year or eighteen months. Their view of the military paralleled the views of the draftees more closely than his professionalism: put in their two years, stay in one piece and get the hell out. At least their officer training at Fort Benning stuck. When he queried them, they could explain how they navigated in dense jungle, how they placed and defended their positions at night, how they planned their defensive artillery targets. Most showed a modicum of leadership, if not the full-fledged support of their troops. Basic training left the troops with at least some instinctual response to officers' orders. Hampton also noticed that differences in class and education between the lieutenants and their troops provided some helpful separation that reinforced the Army rank.

He came away from his visits most unhappy with the situation in the field units, but also somewhat puzzled. He already knew that the battalion was very short of assigned officers and NCOs, but troops should have been in better shape. The very next day he went into the battalion records and began to analyze the troop strength he had on paper. The data showed that these platoons should have all had at least a half dozen more troops than they actually took to the field. He put together a quick summary of the situation to present to the XO. Just then the sergeant major called him and said, "Major Rockwell wants to see you immediately if not sooner, sir. I don't know what the problem is, but the major's on the warpath."

Captain Hampton headed over to the major's lair. At once he got a new and troubling piece of data for it was unmistakable - the major had had his usual lunch consisting solely of Jack Daniels. The moment Hampton entered, the XO exploded. "What in the hell do you think you're up to? Going out on the resupply chopper visiting a bunch of platoons out in the middle of nowhere? Goddammit! I put you in the rear and next thing I know you're out there trying to be some kind of hero!" Hampton was stunned - he had always succeeded by checking the situation first hand. He had regularly gone out to check the security of his nukes in Europe, observed training and drills for their deployment, and always found deficiencies to correct. He started to explain the purpose of his data gathering trip, when the major cut him off. "While you were traveling up here from Saigon, the CO got a classified order to keep you in the rear no matter what. I don't know what in the hell it is you know, but we were told that under no circumstances were you to be in even the remotest danger of capture. And then you go charging off to a bunch of little units out in VC infested areas!"

So that was it - his Europe assignment condemned him to life as a REMF; the coveted line command was denied to him for his entire tour. Advancing his career from an S-1 slot would require some creativity and drama if he wasn't to fall behind his less talented but more expendable competitors who were out with the companies where battles were fought and medals were won. And he held the answer in his hand - if he could only get a fix on the missing troops and get them out where they belonged, he would create the equivalent of an extra company's strength. It would be tough for the brass to ignore this and it could be done entirely from the rear. He let Major Rockwell's tirade wash over him and went back to his office.

The very next day he summoned a meeting of the five company executive officers in the battalion. These were lieutenants who had survived six months in the field and now got their coveted rear job to finish out their twelve month tours. This meant that each had less than six months left in-country. They handled their companies' rear areas. This group would be his means to fix a huge problem few people recognized. He would show what a good officer could do in any assignment.

After the XOs filed into his office, he asked them to report on their companies' troop strength. Each pulled out the morning report accounting for all assigned troops. This was the bureaucratic accounting of the troops officially assigned to their unit. Captain Hampton listened to this impatiently but then demanded, "Yeah, OK. But where in the hell are they? They aren't where they're supposed to be!" He laid out his findings from the field. The XOs offered various plausible explanations. "I know I have a couple back in the rear somewhere for a medical appointment that didn't assign them to the hospital. They'll go back out once they are done with the doc," offered one. Another added, "But we always have someone on his seven day R&R in Thailand or wherever." The Bravo Company XO suggested, "I know I've got

some guys out on the firebase. I put them on the Huey heading out there, but then they have to wait until the day their platoon gets resupplied, so they have to hang around the firebase until then. Don't worry, the Sergeant Major keeps an eye on them out there." "Yeah," chuckled one of the others, "that's if he 's standing on the helipad when they got off the bird. Top keeps a card in his pocket to try to keep track, but he can't always be there, so I suspect a the guys manage to squeeze out a few extra days on the firebase. If I remember, I send him a message when one of mine goes out, but I don't always have time to do it."

Hampton could hardly believe what he was hearing! These officers did not know where the troops were and a bunch of them were hanging out somewhere with no real supervision or accountability. His fury rose at this laxness. "Where do these guys eat? Where do they sleep? Don't you know where they are? Don't you look for them?" The XO from Alpha company piped up with "Well, they no doubt eat in some mess hall. As long as they sign the book to account for the meal for the mess sergeant, nobody cares. And sleep? They probably just crash with some buddies in one of the hootches here in Chu Lai. It's not like we're out there doing bed checks at night."

Suddenly a light bulb went on for Captain Hampton. "Well then, tonight we are going to check every hootch in the battalion area and find out just what in the hell is going on and who is hiding where!" The XOs looked at each other with what could only be called trepidation. Finally, the XO from Charlie company said, "Captain, are you really sure you want to do that? I guarantee you that you will find way more than you're bargaining for. Some of those hootches have not seen an officer in them for months. You prepared to deal with finding plenty of guys smoking joints? You ready to go find 'em snorting heroin? What are you going to do when you find a hootch-maid or two that didn't go home and is busy peddlin' ass? You're taking on an awfully big bite. We should maybe take some time and go slow. Let us start finding the troops and getting them back out over the next couple of weeks if that's what you want." "Tonight be at my place at 22:30 hours with your first sergeants and be ready to go check every building in our area," Hampton ordered. As the XOs filed out, he heard one say under his breath, "I'm taking my .45!" As Hampton sat there fuming while he planned the night's operations, he muttered to himself, "There's not a shred of real leadership in this sorry outfit." He was wrong.

Charles Weatherby, Jr. had entered a prestigious Ivy League school as a legacy admission in the fall of 1968. He had chosen to major in political science, driven by a mix of passion following the anti-war riots at the Chicago Democratic Convention that summer and perhaps by a vague interest in following his father's footsteps into a career in law. His father was a product of this university and now held a partnership with a large corporate law firm in Cleveland. He devoutly hoped that Junior would follow him into the law firm. These parental plans were defeated by Charles Junior's excessive zeal on campus for anti-war activism and for cannabis. At the end of

his sophomore year, he flunked out. His father was livid. Three months later, without a student deferment, his draft notice arrived. This could have been easily remedied: several well-placed calls from his father could have encouraged the draft board to look elsewhere for bodies. At worst, a few calls, perhaps supplemented by some equally well-placed cash, would have assured his son a place in the National Guard. His father was on a different plan though, convinced that military discipline would restore his son's ability to assume a responsible place in society, and ultimately the firm.

Charles was left with little alternative. He reported for Basic Training to Fort Leonard Wood. Here his native intelligence and bonhomie made him popular with many of the other draftees as he outwitted the predictable schemes of drill instructors to make a soldier of him. Despite his fairly privileged upbringing, he forged relationships with draftees whether from big city ghettos or the rural South. His high placement test scores got him into training as a clerk. While he flirted with trying his luck as a conscientious objector, he decided that with no family support for such an assertion of belief, and assured a clerk's position, it wasn't worth the effort. Besides, he could continue his anti-war activism from within the Army, and maybe even amuse himself doing it.

In early 1971 he was shipped to Viet Nam and found himself a clerk in Chu Lai at battalion headquarters of the 2nd of the 48th. He quickly discovered that drugs were readily accessible here even by Ivy League standards. It wasn't too difficult for him to insert himself in the distribution system between the supplying Vietnamese soldiers, papa-sans and hootch maids and the consuming US soldiers. It proved lucrative. The unit of account was Military Pay Certificates, the "funny money" used by US troops. This effort to keep US dollars off the Vietnamese economy failed and MPC became the de facto Vietnamese currency. These bureaucratic limitations formed no barrier to a successful business - he simply smoked his profit. Over time, he built a network of contacts across the entire division rear area. His buddies began to call him "The Head." He was never sure whether it was because of his superior education and verbal skills or his legendary consumption of weed. He took either rationale as a compliment.

He made himself as indispensable to Major Rockwell as to his customers. Each soldier was issued a ration card to purchase liquor at the base store. In a marvelous symmetry, the major needed far more rations than the card provided, and due to a different preference in vice, Private Weatherby had liquor rations to spare, which he generously gave to his superior. He also gladly took on the task of driving the major to the Officers Club around supper time and then picking him up and helping him home when the club closed at midnight. This left him with the jeep and an entire evening to devote to his other pursuits and contacts. His visits to various hootches and bunkers across Chu Lai in the evening not only helped his business, but also gave



him a chance to refine his messages on the unfairness of the draft, the foolishness of the entire Viet Nam effort, and the groundswell of anti-war sentiment at home. While he lacked his father's discipline, he clearly had his father's skills at persuasion and advocacy.

He shaped his message to each group, playing to the sharp divide between career soldiers and the short-term soldiers, to racial unrest among blacks and Hispanics, or to the contempt for the Vietnamese among everyone. With peace talks already underway and units slowly beginning to stand down and deploy back to US bases, the statement that resonated across the entire range of troops was "who wants to be the last to die?" Of course, his more tangible contributions to the evenings helped assure a rapt audience at each stop.

Had Captain Hampton chosen to disclose his plan for the fateful evening of June 14 to Major Rockwell, history might have unfolded very differently. He knew that the major would have no stomach for finding problems within the battalion, and would probably not even agree to the low-key approach of the company XO's. After all, Hampton thought, this is my show - I found a problem, I have a solution, and when the results are in, I get the recognition. Had the major known the plan, Private Weatherby would also have known. That alone would have ensured that during their surprise visits, Hampton and his XO's would have found to their consternation or relief that everyone in the hootches belonged there, that the strongest stimulant on hand was a can of Budweiser, and that while not in good order, things were in minimally acceptable order.

As it was, their raid found an ugly reality. Marijuana was everywhere across the battalion area. While these troops didn't quite qualify as incapacitated by their recreation, they were clearly on the wrong side of military regulations. One hootch occupied by a bunch of spacey soldiers had empty capsules littering the floor. They had been snorting heroin - the preferred means of use on the false but widespread belief that this couldn't produce addiction. Several troops on night guard along the bunker line had bottles of the "diet medicine" produced in abundance by a French pharmaceutical company in Saigon. Its label with the drawing of a fat Vietnamese woman was too ludicrous to credit, but the methamphetamine or "speed" the bottle contained was real enough. As the captain had surmised, troops that would have been listed as AWOL in any unit with decent accountability sat around enjoying their unauthorized respite from the dangers of the field. He and the XO's took names and details. He called some MPs to the heroin users gathering and eight arrests were made. He also had his XO's and first sergeants pull those troops who belonged in the field into the orderly rooms for disposition the next day. In total over forty guys were caught in his net - not all from 2nd of the 48th, as other battalions were also well represented in this catch.

As he and the company XO's dealt with the night's results the next day, Captain Hampton urged very stern disciplinary measures. Time passed though. The Army's non-judicial punishments

and fines required the approval of company commanders who were out in the field. Alibis for being in the rear had to be verified, or not. Soldiers from other battalions had to be returned to their units for disposition. All this took time and Captain Hampton wasn't about to let these guys disappear again. He isolated the pool of miscreants and put them under 24-7 supervision by the few senior NCOs he had. For the first three days, he brushed off questions from Major Rockwell, who had begun hearing stories. Hampton was in charge of personnel and he wasn't about to let this weak officer interfere until he could present a *fait accompli*. The major, sensing there might be real difficulties, was in no mood to inquire too closely. Those in custody of the MP battalion were tested and put into confinement pending judicial action against them. Most of the officers involved wanted to take a low-key approach. They didn't want too many inquiries from the chain of command that might have revealed still more unit irregularities and laxness. One person did not take a low-key approach.

Immediately, Private Weatherby had swung into action fanning the fires of discontent. He inflated the severity of the punishment these soldiers faced. He highlighted the disparity of minorities in trouble or in custody as a result of what he called "these racist raids." He painted a picture of Army lifers suddenly realizing the vanity of the entire war and using repressive measures to force soldiers who already knew the cause was lost to continue to die while the lifers worried only about careers.

Over the course of the next several nights, he whipped up the chronic discontent to feverish proportions. His most effective message came with his litany of stand-downs. "Where is the First Infantry Division? Gone home. Where is the Fourth Infantry? Gone home. Where is the Ninth Infantry and the Twenty Fifth Infantry? Gone home. And where are we? Still here dying! We lost thirty three GIs out on Firebase MaryJane trying to turn that hellhole over to a VC infiltrated Vietnamese Army!" Then he urged the solution: a general mutiny. "They can grab eight of us, but they won't be able to grab hundreds of us!" He used historical examples such as the French units in World War I that had mutinied. His romanticized version of this event neglected to mention that almost three thousand French soldiers were convicted afterwards and forty three were executed. History wasn't a strong suit of the average draftee, so the effectiveness and daring romance of a mutiny stuck with his uncritical listeners. He told of the multiple mutinies in World War II, many of which arose directly from racial discrimination either on the part of the US Army or our British allies.

By the fourth day, hundreds of troops on Chu Lai declared themselves part of the general mutiny, although in many cases it was difficult to say how their mutinous behavior differed from the slack indifference they showed before the mutiny was declared. In a tactical misjudgment, officers had sent those who belonged in the field back out to the forward fire bases, where they spread the contagion. Several entire companies refused to get on the

helicopters to go out to the field as scheduled. This built up mutinous troops on the fire bases and made it more difficult to manage than if they were out in small units in the boonies. As night shift radio operators conducted their customary unofficial chats, word spread and other divisions began to experience similar problems. A casual set of rules took hold under the slogan: "We won't get our guys hurt, but we won't wage Nixon's war." The mutiny began with disillusioned infantry troops, but the infection spread. The ethos the slogan embodied meant some units actively opposed the mutiny. Medical, aviation, MP and some specialized staff units operated largely unaffected. Some artillery units would respond instantly to an infantry request for fire support when units were making enemy contact, but refuse to fire the lengthy interdiction fire missions at night aimed at no one in particular. Neighboring Marine regiments were untouched by what they saw as cowardice plain and simple.

For months the VC had regularly popped a few mortar shells or rockets onto Chu Lai at night. This ineffectual fire had little consequence other than to disturb a sound sleep. But suddenly no rounds fell on Chu Lai. The Vietnamese civilians that came on base as coolie labor began to tell GIs, "VC say no more shoot Chu Lai if you no shoot." This word spread quickly, reinforcing the success of the mutiny. And no more rounds dropped at night. Meanwhile Army signal intelligence units in Thailand and Japan picked up some most unusual radio traffic. VC units were ordered not to fire on Chu Lai and several other major US bases. They passed this puzzling traffic on to intelligence staff in Saigon, where analysts held many meetings trying to understand what it meant, and asking that the accuracy of reception and translation be checked and rechecked. None of these intelligence officers wanted to confuse line units with this obviously bogus intelligence. Thus no one called Chu Lai or the other bases involved. Saigon might have learned the depth of the mutiny several days sooner if someone had contacted the areas involved directly or had known what the locals were saying.

As it was, each unit involved had every reason to minimize any reporting of the reality up the chain. Every local commander felt that such goings-on would reflect badly on his leadership. Each had gathered his officers and laid plans to quell the mutiny. Each believed his plans would work over a few days, but none produced more than marginal success. Rumors began to reach Saigon, but not through command channels. A couple of CIA agents had stopped at Chu Lai and one of the other division bases in the normal course of their work and had seen that combat operations were not really proceeding. They reported what they saw to the station in Saigon, but communications between the Agency and the Army were cautious and limited at best. The big defense contractors Philco Ford and Pacific Architects and Engineers had personnel everywhere in Viet Nam maintaining infrastructure. Their employees resembled a US version of the French Foreign Legion and generally took the view, "As long as I am getting well paid and avoiding that outstanding warrant in the US, what the hell do I care what these sorry-ass troops are doing." Nonetheless, the information began to filter back to Saigon. Eventually Gen.

Abrams, the commander of the US Army Viet Nam, realized that something was going seriously wrong among his infantry divisions. He ordered an immediate full scale investigation and headed out to the field commands. He moved with dispatch to get the situation under control.

Reporters from US media had proven more interested in the rumors and far less reticent in their reports. They picked up the rumors in the Saigon bars and began their own investigation. The commanders of military units involved in the mutiny refused to bring reporters to their areas, arguing that "operational considerations preclude it at this time." Words like this inflamed reporters' curiosity. Finally, one of the television networks at home reported on nightly news that a serious mutiny was spreading across several of the US infantry divisions in Viet Nam. Once this news hit, the anti-war movement gained a huge burst of energy and began to demand "free the Chu Lai Eight" and "amnesty for all." Congress began to demand answers from the administration and the Pentagon. The entire political dynamic that Nixon's calculated and calibrated withdrawals had produced fell apart. His strategy of buying time for Vietnamization to work was unraveling. The final blow came when one of the leading newsweeklies blazed the headline "The Great Mutiny" on its cover. Nixon, always the realist, knew that time had just run out on his strategy.

Meanwhile, Gen. Abrams' vigorous response was beginning to take hold, and the mutiny was wobbling. Once he had realized the severity of the situation he faced, he had ordered that no officer or senior NCO would leave the country, whether because his unit was standing down or because his personal twelve month tour was up. Up and down the chain Abrams relieved many commanders of their commands. He asked for carte blanche from the Secretary of Defense to bring in new generals and hand-picked the half dozen best leaders he knew. Each of them in turn could bring along ten majors or colonels that he personally trusted as embodying strong leadership. New leadership began to flood into the mutinous units. Abrams gave these leaders very wide latitude to deal with units and individuals as they felt best. Using carrots and sticks they began to restore order, but two months of precious time slid by, and at best they restored order, but not the operations pace needed to make the South Vietnamese Army an effective force. Vietnamese officers were keenly aware of what was happening and were busily reassessing their personal loyalties and options.

In the 2nd of the 48th, a new battalion commander was appointed. He immediately interviewed every officer. Major Rockwell was interviewed at two in the afternoon and was relieved of command ten minutes into the interview. Captain Hampton's interview lasted three hours as he reported the situation as he found it, described his actions and critiqued the effects. His candor impressed the new CO and Hampton was promptly appointed Battalion Executive Officer to replace Major Rockwell. Private Weatherby privately concluded "mission

accomplished," lowered his profile, and went home when the battalion stood down and returned to the US in December.

President Nixon directed his negotiators at the Paris Peace talks to try to ensure that the US could continue to resupply the South Vietnamese forces even after withdrawal, but ultimately just to get the best deal they could. He was acutely aware that he no longer had the time to build an effective South Viet Nam and hoped negotiations could produce a period of time before South Viet Nam collapsed completely. The Communist side, now realizing their patience had paid off, suddenly offered an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire if the Americans agreed to have all troops removed by December 31. With the anti-war movement now operating in full vigor and with most of Congress convinced we could no longer field a credible force, the pressure overwhelmed even Nixon's visceral revulsion at so obviously losing a major war. The still parlous status of many of the remaining American units made the withdrawal timetable difficult. The previous strategy of maximizing the materiel left to South Vietnamese forces gave way to the realization that collapse would happen sooner rather than later. The South China Sea became the recipient of millions of tons of US equipment and materiel. By May, South Viet Nam had fallen to Communist forces.

All this time Nixon worried mightily that the Russians would move in Europe while American forces were in such disarray. They did not, but only because the Brezhnev regime was itself in disarray. The Soviet generals however did successfully convince the Politburo to let them reposition Soviet armor divisions in the most threatening possible way. The message wasn't lost and West German politicians started to openly discuss neutrality and an intention to withdraw from NATO. No Soviet armor ever crossed the border, nor needed to. President Nixon followed his predecessor's path, announcing he would not seek another term as President.

As the US troops returned home in obvious defeat, Private Weatherby immediately gave a series of interviews to some of the fringe media emphasizing his role in The Great Mutiny. The major media outlets picked up the story. Digging through the debris of the mutiny was by now a media obsession. Their wide-ranging interviews and analyses of The Great Mutiny began to confirm the role Weatherby had played in its origin. The anti-war organizations lionized him as an American hero. His subsequent political career is too well known to require further rehearsal here.

In the summer of 1972, now Major Hampton was driving home after a long day at the Pentagon reviewing and summarizing documents. He had been appointed as one of the bright young officers serving as military staff to the recently created Presidential Commission to Investigate Recent Battlefield Refusals. The ultimate irony of his personal history struck him full force. The tactical nukes he had so diligently managed in Europe might have been useful against Soviet

armor, but they were impotent when faced with four broken US infantry divisions and an Army that had lost its integrity.