'Blue Ghosts' on daily reconnaissance

By PFC Fred Abatemarco

QUANG TRI (23rd Inf. Div. IO) – Warrant Officer Mark Christian languidly adjusted his armor vest and made secondary checks of his controls before he eased his "Slick" (UH-1H helicopter) off the helipad and headed northwest towards Route 9.

Christian would be flying the first leg of F Troop, 8th Cavalry's daily visual reconnaissance, which provides convoy support for all "friendlies" traveling on the dusty road that links Khe Sanh, Fire Support Base Shepherd, Landing Zone Vandergrift and Dong Ha in the northwest corner of South Vietnam.

The Light Observation Helicopter (LOH), commonly referred to by the aviators as "little bird", had already taken off, and the two Cobra gunships that would complete the "Heavy Team" would be following closely behind Christian.

In the past, "Pink Teams"—One LOH, one Cobra and one Slick–had been used, but the versatility of the daily mission has been increased with the addition of another Cobra.

The sun had not even begun to approach the ferocity that it would reach on this day, when the team came on station. Visual and radio contact was quickly established between Christian and the "little bird" while the Cobras settled into their circular pattern, conspicuously avoiding the paths of the high flying "Slick" and the tree-top cruising LOH.

The day's work had begun.

The drone of Christian's chopper, interrupted occasionally by the sharp crackle of the "fox-mike" (FM) radio prevented dialogue on board and so the attention of the two door gunners, the Aerial Artillery Observer (AO) and the two members of the "Blues" (aero-rifle platoon) focused on the still light traffic traveling along Route 9.

Christian and his pilot, Captain Clyde Wilbur concentrated on the air traffic which was becoming thick with all types of aircraft.

Christian's first priority involved keeping the "little bird" in sight at all times as it searched out the six mile stretch of road for any signs of possible enemy activity. That is no easy task, as The low darting LOH readily camouflages itself against the thick jungle foliage when viewed from above.

In addition, the "slick" had to be prepared to act as a recovery ship, a dust – off, and an all-purpose standby.

Christian was aware that enemy activity in the area had been increasing. Ambushes had occurred daily along Route 9, producing American casualties and hindering the pull-out operations from Khe Sanh. The LOH was hunting out these ambushes in the hills and ridgelines adjacent to the road, and the sleek Cobras were poised to destroy them as quickly as possible. Christian and his crew could not count on such a neat schedule of activities, however.

Beads of perspiration appeared around the edges of Christian's helmet as the sun kept air temperature at 85 degrees, even at 3,000 feet.

The LOH did spot a number of enemy bunkers and fighting positions hidden in the canopied hills, however, and First Lieutenant Christopher Marasco, the AO, marked the positions as the LOH expended CS (Tear Gas) and white phospherous grenades on them.

The destroyed positions might have been as much as two years old, but the intelligence would nonetheless be fed through the normal channels for the reference of ground and artillery units working in the area.

Towards mid-afternoon, Christian brought his chopper back to Quang Tri. The uneventful morning had been a pleasant change from the months of heavy contact that the "Blue Ghosts" experienced throughout Lam Son 719.

'Ready Rifles' engage NVA

By Sgt Louis W. Miller

LZ STINSON (198th Inf. Bde. IO) – Infantrymen from the 23rd Infantry Division's 198th Infantry Brigade encountered three careless NVA soldiers on two separate occasions while moving from one day laager position to another. In the brief meetings three enemy were killed and a rifle, four Chicom (Chinese Communist) hand grenades and one pack were captured.

A platoon from Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 52nd Infantry, was moving from its laager site to a new position on a hill top. During the move the "Ready Rifles" stopped for a break on the side of a heavily vegetated hill overlooking a gorge.

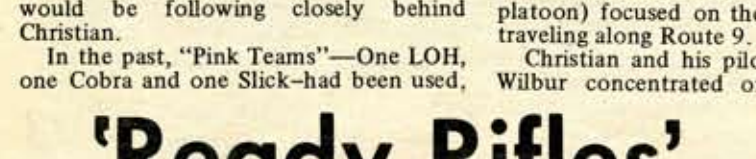
"We had just stopped when we heard voices coming from the base of the hill," said Second Lieutenant Martin Reyna (Olympia, Wash.), the platoon leader. "The gorge carried the voices up to our location. It sounded like there were an awful lot of voices so I organized a patrol and we descended the hill to investigate."

Upon moving, the patrol came across a dried up stream bed. The "Ready Rifles" stopped before reaching the bed and listened for voices. Soon, two NVA soldiers came walking down the stream bed, laughing and talking. The patrol was waiting for the enemy to move directly in front of them, when suddenly the two NVA stopped and looked towards the "Ready Rifles."

"The enemy soldiers must have heard us or just sensed that something was wrong," recalled Reyna. "They turned and attempted to evade back up the stream bed but we fired at them, killing both. We swept the area and captured four hand grenades and a pack."

Later in the day the "Ready Rifles" were moving up a trail when the point man, Sergeant Aaron C. Carney (Nashville, Tenn.), a squad leader, spotted a lone NVA soldier sitting off to the side of a trail. After carefully observing the enemy, Carney noticed that he was sleeping. A group of infantrymen began to move forward when the NVA awoke, looked at the advancing "Ready Rifles", he then made a quick lunge for his rifle which was lying against a tree. Just as the NVA soldier reached for his rifle Carney fired a short burst from his M-16 rifle and killed him.

"As it turned out, the lone soldier was left on the trail as a guard for a group of enemy soldiers that were further up the trail," said Reyna "Only he made the mistake of falling asleep." An AK-50 was captured in the action.



PROJECT HELP, Question of the Week

QUESTION: What does it take to get a 212 from the Army? My commanding officer is already putting me in for one. I have had one article 15 so far. Answer: First, you must be notified in writing that you are up for a 212. Then, you will be required to take a physical and psychiatric examination. Your paperwork will go from your CO to Bn to Bde and then to Personnel Actions. After PA has gone over it, it will be sent to the Division Commander for approval. You will then be sent to the States for your discharge if approved.

Crime doesn't pay

On the evening of 2 March 1971, PFC Kenneth W. Chaky, Company A, 5th Battalion, 46th Infantry, threw a fragmentation grenade at another soldier. The intended victim of the "frag" heard the spoon fly and immediately fell to the ground, thus avoiding injury when the grenade exploded. On 15 April 1971, Chaky was convicted by general court-martial for his crime in violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. He was sentenced to a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of $60.00 per month for four years, reduction to Private E-l and confinement at hard labor for four years. Chaky will be transferred to the United States Disciplinary Barracks, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to serve the period of confinement.

SOUTHERN CROSS
AMERICAL DIVISION

Vol. 4. No. 19 Chu Lai, Vietnam May 14, 1971

Combat-hardened wrecking crews, like the one pictured here, played an an important role in the operations of the "A Cav." of the 23rd Inf. Div. lst Squadron, lst Cavalry, near the Loation border. (U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. Matt Gryta)

Too close for comfort

By Sgt. Louis Miller

LZ STINSON (198th Inf. Bde. I0) – A lot people tell war stories and for the most part they are only exaggerated a bit. But two infantrymen from the 23rd Infantry Division's 198th Infantry Brigade will have quite a time convincing people their close calls were really that close.

The first story comes from a platoon leader, First Lieutenant Byron Korte (Pleasantville, N.J.), of Delta Company, lst Battalion, 52nd Infantry. Korte's platoon was moving up a steep hill in a thickly vegetated area southwest of Chu Lai when the platoon approached an open area.

"The first thing I did was to move the people off the trail," Korte said. "Just as everyone had finished moving into the jungle, enemy soldiers opened fire on us from the other side of the open area. A RPG (rocket propelled grenade) landed ten meters from us."

Korte velled for everyone to get down, then ran for cover himself. As he dived for cover behind a tree Korte felt something hit his hip.

"When I got behind my cover the first thing I did was look at my hip," recalled Korte. "I saw a hole in my pants and felt my hip burning. After the fire fight ended our platoon medic came running over because someone had told him that I had been hit."

A close inspection of Korte's hip revealed the enemy round had come so close that it went through the lieutenant's pants, finally stopping in his wallet. The burning he felt was a black and blue mark that the bullet made when it passed his hip.

"At first I thought I hit a branch or a stump when I ran for cover," said Korte. "The round missed me by a fraction of an inch."

On the same operation, Private First Class Jerry Goldtooth (Window Rock, Ariz.), a radio telephone operator, had his close call. Goldtooth was walking at the end of his element when the enemy opened fire. After an RPG round exploded, the enemy opened up on the "Ready Rifles" with automatic rifle fire.

"The rounds were flying everywhere, then suddenly five or six rounds hit the ground directly in front of me," recalled Goldtooth. "By this time I was already lying on the ground returning fire when one of the rounds almost ended everything."

The round went zinging past Goldtooth's head, coming so close that it ripped the band he was wearing around his head.

"All I heard was a loud crack and felt something pushing my head back," Goldtooth said. "That round must have come real close because the band was made out of an old T-shirt and was very thin. I wasn't hurt in any way except for a headache. And I got a good war story."

'Chieu Hoi!' GI

By Sp/4 Thomas R. Mano

LZ HAWK HILL (196th Inf. Bde. I0) – While working with the 196th Infantry Brigade, it is not unusual for an infantryman to see the sky filled with leaflets from a helicopter telling the enemy to Chieu Hoi. But imagine a GI picking up a leaflet that asks him to Chieu Hoi.

This happened to a platoon from 2nd Battalion, lst Infantry while they were detatched from the 196th Inf. Bde. and working near the DMZ (demilitarized zone).

"Most of the men thought they were pretty funny," mused Captain John J. Clark Jr. (Atlanta, Ga.) commander of Alpha Company.

First Platoon found the leaflets when they returned to a bunker complex to blow it up. Thousands of the papers were scattered in the sand.

There were two varieties of propaganda. Both illustrated pictures of protest meetings in the United States.

The leaflets employed smooth English, not like many of their prodecessors which read like a first-grade texbook. The men were amazed at how well-done they were.

"This wasn't done by a back-woods Vietnamese," said Clark. "They were made by some pretty sharp characters."

The literary content of the leaflets used phrases like "Yankee, go home," and "Sit on the fence" urging a feeling of apathy. The push was towards internal dissent and surrender.

"They wanted GIs to lay down their arms in the middle of a firefight," said First Lieutenant Gary L. Bartee (Lufkin, Tex.), platoon leader for the lst Platoon. "Their reward was to be good treatment."

Another plea in the leaflets was for American soldiers to seek asylum in countries such as The Soviet Union, Sweden, Canada and North Vietnam. Help in getting to another country "when possible" was promised to soldiers who deserted to North Vietam.

"The general attitude of the soldiers was, "What the hell does North Vietnam have to offer me?" concluded Bartee. "Here we are from the greatest industrial nation in the world, and they're asking us to come to them."

It's a tight fit, but this UHIH (Huey) helicopter with the 23rd Infantry Division manages to set down in a small clearing northwest of Chu Lai. (U.S. Army Photo)

By Sp/4 Tom Mano

LZ HAWK HILL (196th Inf. Bde. I0) – Recently a pointman for the 196th Infantry Brigade proved that his nose was just as effective as his ears and eyes for detecting enemy.

After six days of sniper fire the men of Charlie Company, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry were nervous. Nobody had been hit, but the thought never left their minds.

Private First Class Joseph Cleveland (Alexandria, La.), pointman for 2nd Squad, lst Platoon, was leading the company on the seventh day. While crossing a rice paddy dike, he suddenly sensed there were enemy in the area.

"I've been over here for nine months and I can smell the enemy," said Cleveland. "They have a very weird smell."

After a few more steps Cleveland spotted two males, two females and three children in a deserted Buddhist temple. He turned to his slackman, Sergeant Arcadio Medina (New York, N.Y) and said, "NVA."

"Cleveland was pretty sure that the enemy wouldn't hear him," said Medina "because they tend to lose their hearing form all the artillery that is pounded near them."

After motioning Medina to the front of the temple, the pointman advanced yelling, "Dung-Lai, La-day (Stop, come here)."

The initial action of the women was to shield the men who were carrying SKS rifles. One of the men stayed still, but the other grabbed for his weapon.

"I was about 25 meters from the guy, but didn't dare shoot for fear of hitting a female or one of the children," said Cleveland.

The pointman whirled around the temple to escape fire. By this time Medina had reached the front of the building within firing position of the enemy. He opened up and killed the one firing.

During the confusion the remaining adversaries crawled throught a hole in the side of the decrepit building and escaped into a ridgeline. Due to the heavy amount of sniperfire they had received, the 23rd Infantry Division soldiers didn't pursue them.

The men confiscated the SKS rifle and nine rounds of ammo. Medina thought they had caught the "minnow" but lost the "whale."

"I really think the dead man was a bodyguard for the other one," related Medina. "That guy was probably a head honcho, because he was clean-shaven, well-dressed and looked like officer-material."

It is not known yet what the two enemy were plotting in the temple, but it's for sure they will never plot again thanks to Cleveland's nose.

Re-ups for $10,000

By Sp/4 Ron Cryderman

CHU LAI (23rd Inf. Div. I0) – Ten thousand dollar Variable Re-Enlistment Bonus requirements are not often met by personnel wishing to re-up. Specialist Five John H. Madden (Cohokie, Ill.) is one of the lucky ones.

The lucky MOS (Military Occupational Speciality) that earned Madden his $10,000 is 67N20, Senior Helicopter Mechanic. Now assigned to the 71st Aviation Company, he has also worked in almost every phase of aviation from door-gunner to his present mechanic status.

When asked for the reason of his re-enlisting Madden very calmly and coolly said, "I just decided I wasn't ready to get out yet, and with the money as another attraction I just decided to stay in for a while."

Madden has no immediate plans for his bonus. "I don't have anything to spend it on right now, so I guess I'll just put it in the bank and let it draw interest, I'm greedy that way."

The 19-year-old graduate of Beaument High School in St. Louis, Missouri, attended basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. and went to Helicopter Maintenance school at Fort Rucker, Ala.

Captain Joseph Petrovich, El Paso, Tex., 23rd Infantry Division Re-Enlistment Officer, right, presents Specialist Five John H. Madden, Cohokie, Ill., with his discharge papers. The procedure was necessary prior to Madden's re-elisting for another six years and a $10,000 Variable Re-Enlistment Bonus.

Legionnaires kill 2

By Sp4 Tom R. Mano

LZ HAWK HILL (196th Inf. Bde. I0) – Being in the DMZ (demilitarized zone) during the day can be frightening, but at night it could mean death. Recently, a squad on operational control from the 196th Infantry Brigade proved this to two enemy soldiers.

"We were about 500 meters inside the DMZ when the incident happened," said First Lieutenant James F. Boggess (Huntington, W. Va.), platoon leader for 2nd Platoon, Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry.

While setting up their night defensive position, the men saw three NVA coming out of a brushline less than five meters away. The only problem was the enemy saw the Americans at the same time.

"It was a complete surprise to us and a complete suprise to them," said Boggess.

The "legionnaires" immediately opened up with their M-16's and M-203's (combination rifle and grenade launcher). Simultaneously the enemy shot three RPG's (rocket propelled grenades) into their position.

"I couldn't believe how fast they got off those RPG's," commented Boggess. "They must've had them loaded and off safe while they were walking."

The 23rd Infantry Division soldiers knew they had hit somebody, but didn't advance to check the results of their night's work because it was too dangerous.

The next day the men explored the enemy's position. Large blood trails indicated at least two of the enemy had been hit.

"We found where two bodies had been stripped and dragged away," said Boggess. "One of the shirts had a huge hole in the back."

Ex-cook prefers to fly

By Cpt. John J. Hollingsworth

FSB BRONCO (11th Inf. Bde. I0) – It is a long way from the kitchen where he started but Specialist four Samuel L. Goodlow (Stockton, Calif.) finally landed the job he wanted.

Goodlow is now a crew chief for Primo Aviation, the 11th Infantry Brigade's organic aviation unit. When Goodlow first came to Vietnam he was a cook and was assigned to the 4th Battalion, 3rd Infantry mess hall. Because of a crew chief shortage and his previous aircraft maintenance experience, he was given the job by Staff Sergeant James Holloway (Barnesville, Ga.), senior technical inspector for the Primo section.

"As a crew chief I pull daily inspections on our bird and if it needs any maintenance we check it out or send it back for higher eschelon maintenance," Goodlow said.

"Sometimes I work a lot harder now than I would if I were cooking, but the mess hall can get pretty hot during the summer time. "I like this better even if it is harder—I like it," he enthusiastically added.

SOUTHERN CROSS
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"Humping" through elephant grass can cause aching, tired feet for an infantryman. Here, a "Grunt" with Charlie Co., 4th Bn., 31st Inf., uses his helmet to soak his feet in iodine solution to relieve the pain. (U.S. Army Photo by Sp/4 Thomas Mano)

Rattler receives Silver Star

By PFC Fred Abatemarco

QUANG TRI (23rd Inf. Div. IO) -- Along with the outstanding job done by the entire 71st Aviation Company, 23rd Infantry Division there were some tremendous personal efforts by individual "Rattlers" throughout Lam Son 719.

WO1 Gary Arne (Farebault, Minn.) received the Silver Star for his actions during one particularly trying incident. On March 3rd, Arme was piloting a "slick" into Landing Zone (LZ) Lolo, approximately 15 miles inside Laos.

"I was coming in low-level on a combat assault with the 1st Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN Division)" he explained. "As we set down on LZ Lolo, we began to take heavy enemy fire from 30 caliber and 51 caliber machine guns."

Arne's chopper lost its tail rotor and hydraulics as it tried to lift off and went into a spin at about 200 feet. He managed to set the bird down some 300 meters outside the LZ, where his crew was subsequently pinned down by enemy fire.

"We stayed low during 45 minutes of intense fire," said Arne. "But things weren't getting any better and my crew chief had taken a 30 caliber round in his foot.

So on Arne's decision the crew began to crawl what seemed like miles to the ARVN position. It was uphill all the way and Arne was dragging his wounded crew chief. When they finally succeeded in reaching the LZ, Arne directed U.S. airstrikes on the enemy positions for another six hours before he and his crew were "dusted-off" to safety.

In a related incident at LZ Lolo during the insertion of ARVN troops, WO1 Kent Garrett, (Kersey, Colo.) also found himself in a rather trying situation.

"As soon as we set down on the pad, we took fire from all sides. It was so intense," said Garrett, "that we couldn't hear the rounds being fired. All we could hear was the rounds impacting on the chopper."

Although wounded by a 30 caliber round in the leg, Garrett managed to lift off quickly enough to save his crew and the wounded ARVN, who was receiving first-aid from the crew chief, Randy Newcomb, (Honolulu, Hawaii).

The 71st Aviation Company has redeployed to Chu Lai after completing their mission. Better than returning, however, is the fact that every "Rattler" pilot has returned to tell about it. And they have a lot to tell.

AFVN--Quang Tri

By PFC Fred Abatemarco

QUANG TRI (23rd Inf. Div. IO) – Since December 1968, AFVN's Detachment has been providing information and entertainment to American Forces in the northern part of Military Region One with little more than "eleven men, two cameras, and microphone."

Those are the words of First Lieutenant Stephen L. Wiltsie, officer-in-charge of the radio and television station which probably has the largest audience in the Republic of Vietnam outside of Saigon.

Detachment 5 broadcasts 68 hours of television weekly, including two live newscasts daily. Radio broadcasting is presently completely robot–brought in on land lines from Saigon 24 hours-a-day. But there are plans to resume live broadcasting on AM radio soon.

"Although we are short on production and engineering personnel we would like to serve our audience in a more personalized manner with live radio broadcasting as we did during Operation Lam Son 719," explained Wiltsie.

During that recent operation Detachment 5 aired daily reports of local war news geared for northern Military Region One.

Despite the fact that Detachment 5 is the northernmost station in the AFVN network, Wiltsie modestly denies the existence of any unique problems as a result of being "up-country" (AFVN slang for anywhere outside of Saigon).

"But we do have to be a bit more enterprising than usual," he admits.

Specialist Four Joby Stallings a broadcast specialist at Detachment 5 readily supports this claim. "Not only are we last on the list to receive any film, but there are times, like during the monsoons, when we don't receive any supplies of films at all."

Stallings formerly worked at the now defunct Detachment 7 in Chu Lai and is on temporary duty from the 23rd Infantry Division Information Office.

Whatever the future may hold for Detachment 5, it is certain that the handful of men that have served so well there will always have at least one distinct memory.

"After all," says Stallings, "how many broadcasting stations can claim that the North Vietnamese can receive their broadcasts?"

Guard eulogy Honors fallen

FSB BRONCO (11th Inf. Div. IO) – In a formation as sharp as a crack drill team, but with boots still sooted with the red dust of Route 9 near Khe Sanh, and uniforms that you could tell had been packed and repacked, the entire 11th Brigade's 4th Battalion, 3rd Infantry paid memorial tribute at FSB Bronco recently to fellow soldiers who gave their lives in support of Operation Lam Son 719.

The solemnity was broken only occassionally by the whip of a helicopter rotor as the men stood in silent prayer before dress-right-dress rifles symbolically studded on bayonets which were stuck in the ground.

The Chaplain who had been with them throughout the northern operation said few words as faces and eyes told the story; the battalion commander spoke in broken tones and commended all for their courage and paid tribute to those who had fallen.

Next came the reading of the names. Each company commander stepped forward to announce them. No notes were needed, for each commander knew his men and their families well. Comrades placed the steel helmet on the rifle for rifle company members; a bush hat for those of the reconnaissance element.

America's music of tradition and honor war played by the 23rd Infantry Division's band while soldiers, never flinching, saluted solemnly after a firing party shot the traditional three volleys.

It was the end of a memorial service and the conclusion of the operation which began on a chilly night in January when soldiers assembled at the Duc Pho airport to await C-130's which would carry them somewhere. Somewhere was Khe Sanh, LZ Ice Break, the Rockpile, QL 9, and fire support bases Scotch and Shepherd.

The Old Guard troopers, use to the mountainous terrain around FSB San Juan Hill, adjusted rapidly to the rugged rockpile and beat the best soldiers the NVA could muster.

Their record is impressive. They are credited with 122 enemy killed, and approximatley 200-300 enemy casualties. During the last 23 days of the operation, they were hit sporadically with mortar, rocket and artillery rounds, and they twice successfully repelled perimeter probes at Khe Sanh.

After the ceremony and several days of rest and retraining they combat assaulted into their regular AO. Behind them was the satisfaction of playing an important combat role in disrupting and destroying enemy supply lines and providing security for roads and forward base areas from which South Vietnamese troops launched their drive into Laos.

GI's rucksack stops bullet

By SP4 Thomas F. Boehler

LZ STINSON (198th Inf. Bde. IO) – It is said that a miss is as good as a mile, but an infantryman from the 198th Brigade knows that a miss can sometimes be a little close for comfort. While walking point on a recent mission, a burst of automatic fire zipped within inches of his body and tore into the equipment he was wearing.

An element of Company A, 1st Battalion, 52nd Infantry was moving from one laager site to another in a heavily vegetated mountainous area southwest of Chu Lai. Because of the thickness of the area, the point-man, Specialist Four Daniel Woodward of Bedford, Ind., was cutting their way through the jungle with a machete.

The "Ready Rifles" had just crossed a small stream and started back up hill when they began receiving small arms fire from a group of enemy soldiers hidden in the thick brush, a short distance away.

"All of a sudden I heard shooting and my machete went flying out of my hand," said Woodward. "I felt something sting my leg so I got down as quickly as I could. I crawled backwards to find some cover and noticed that my leg felt wet."

By this time the rest of the element were returning fire in the direction of the still unseen enemy. The infantrymen quickly gained fire superiority and the enemy evaded into the jungle.

"When the shooting was over, I checked myself out for injuries," said Woodward. "I found that I was unscratched, but I did find a piece of a bullet in the handle of the knife I was carrying in my belt, and a neat hole through one of the canteens on my rucksack. The water from the canteen was what made my leg wet."

The "Ready Rifles" returned to the hill they started from the reassess the situation and check out their equipment. Woodward looked into his rucksack and found another round that barely missed hitting him.

"I reached into my ruck for a soda and I noticed a bullet imbedded in the anti-personnel mine that I was carrying," he recalled. "It must have missed hitting me by only a fraction of an inch."

The other members of the element didn't realize how close the rounds had come until later.

"The enemy were only about 25 meters away from Woodward," said Specialist Four Kenneth Chrobak, Chicago, Ill., the radio-telephone operator. "God must have been with him."

Using a map and compass, First Lieutenant Richard Anchus (Minneapolis, Minn.), platoon leader with Delta Co., 2nd Bn., 1st Inf., pinpoints his platoon's location during a recent operation southeast of Tien Phuoc. (U.S. Army Photo by Sp/4 John Cushman)

'Dust Offs' and the road to recovery

A "dust-off" helicopter brings in a wounded soldier where he will be treated for injuries he received from a booby trap in the field.

This trooper is rushed to the emergency
received in a fire fight in the 23rd Infantry

Story &
b
Sp4 Guy

A nurse and doctor query a 23rd Infantry Division soldier of his medical background and other vital information to be used while treating his light wounds.

CHU LAI (23rd Inf. Div. IO) – The voice of a "dustoff" helicopter pilot comes over the radio. Medics and doctors in the emergency room at the 91st Evacuation Hospital in Chu Lai scurry to their respective positions as corpsmen with stretchers rush out to the chopper landing at the helipad.

Less than 30 minutes after a 23rd Infantry Division soldier stepped on a booby trap in the mountains west of Chu Lai, he is now in the skilled hands of medical professionals experienced in saving lives.

After the patient is rushed to the emergency room, his wounds are stabilized and tourniquets applied to stop bleeding as intravenous injections are given to replace lost blood and body fluids. Working rapidly to keep the patient alive, doctors, nurses and corpsmen in the emergency room determine the condition of the wound and the required data to be used by surgeons in the operating room.

A few minutes later, doors to the X-ray room are swung open and the patient is wheeled in where technicians X-ray the injured part of the body to determine what procedures should be taken while mending the wound.

After X-ray the patient is taken to Pre-Op where he is prepared for the operating room. His body is shaved and scrubbed down to decrease the possibility of infection while the wound is being treated.

The operation and necessary patchwork are performed. The patient is then taken to recovery ward or the intensive care ward, depending on his condition.

The procedure is swift and precise with the utmost care given to every patient regardless of whether he is an enemy or Allied soldier.

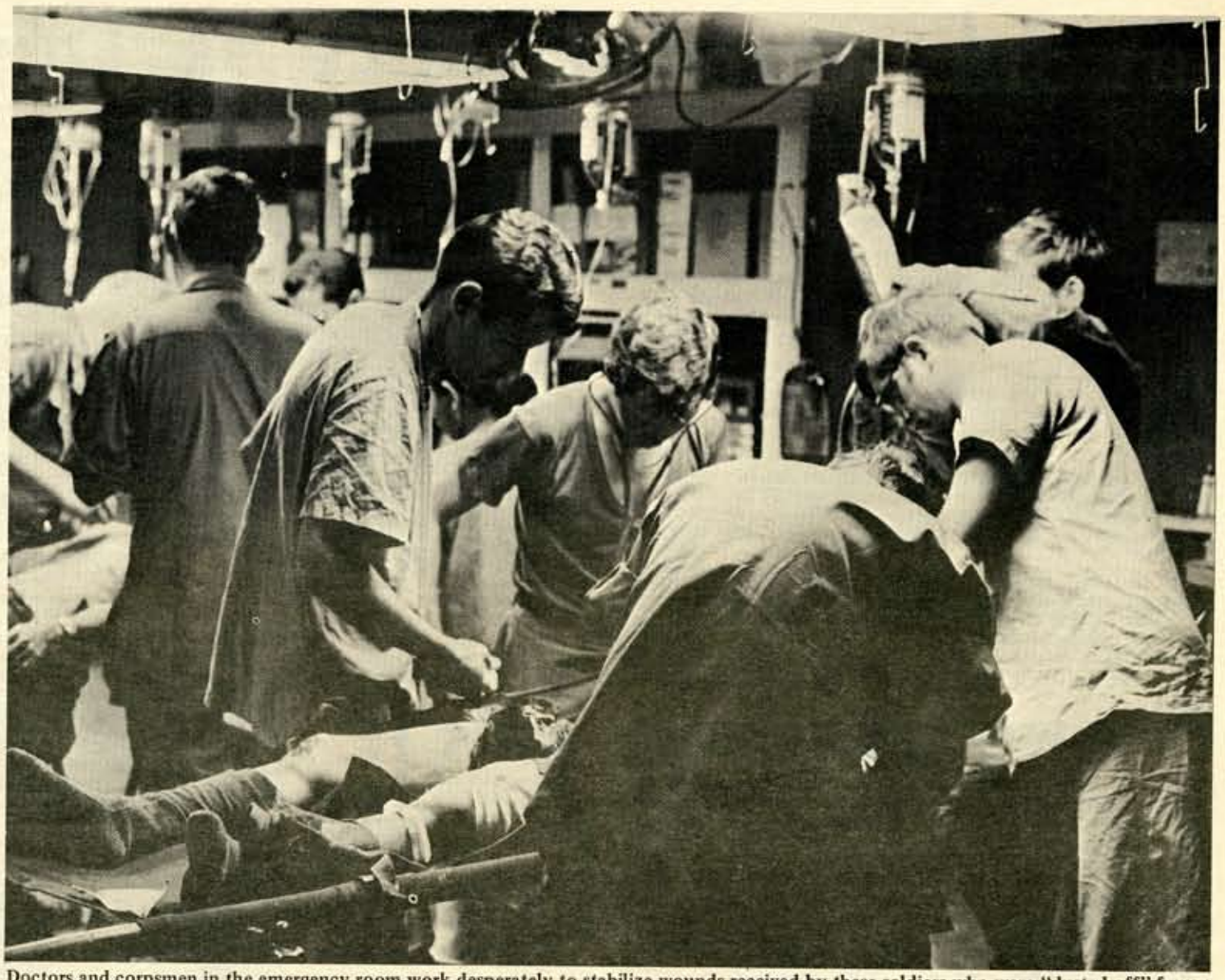
Staffed with 113 medical officers and 225 enlisted personnel, the 91st EVAC is "the most active hospital in Vietnam with the greatest turnover of patients," says Colonel Kenwyn G. Nelson, commanding officer of the 91st.

The hospital treats an average of 800 patients per month which includes about 35 percent enemy prisoners, Vietnamese civilians and Vietnamese military personnel.

"We have all surgical specialties here to treat acute injuries including brain surgery as well as heart and eye surgery," says Nelson.

Children can be seen in the hospital wards

oom where he will be treated for injuries he Division's area of operation.



Doctors and corpsmen in the emergency room work desperately to stabilize wounds received by these soldiers who were "dusted off" from a fire fight.

Photos
y
Winkler

recovering from accidents which so often can happen in a war zone.

Specialist Four Dennis Stebbins (South Beloit, Ill.), a corpsman in the emergency room says, "you can't let your feelings bother you when you see a kid come in here. If you allow it to, you couldn't do your job. Sure, it can be pretty bad to see anyone get dusted off, but you're too busy to become personally involved. It's just a job that has to be done."

The hospital traces its lineage back 51 years to the organization of Mobile Hospital Number 6 on 4 September 1918 in Paris, France. The hospital was reorganized and remaned on several occasions. As the 6th Surgical Hospital it participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1941.

The unit crest was adopted by the 6th Surgical Hospital. Superimposed on a barber pole with six alternate white and maroon stripes extending diagonally right to left, signifying the numerical designation of the unit, is a gold fleur-de-lis, denoting participation in France during World War I; with a scroll bearing the motto: "Aid to the wounded", originally in French, "Secourier Blesse."

The unit was redesignated the 91st Evacuation Hospital on 1 September 1942, crossed the North Atlantic and landed at Casablanca, French Morocco on Christmas Eve of 1942, thereby entering World War II.

It moved with the Allied advance across North Africa, then supported the invasion of Sicily and was located at Palermo for six months. In December 1943, the unit moved to England for the D-Day buildup. It landed on Utah Beach on D+4 and moved from France to Holland. f the conclusion of the war, the unit was in Central Germany.

After the war, the 91st was deactivated on 24 November 1945, and later reactivated in March 1963 at Fort Polk, Louisiana. It was designated as a STRAC unit until alerted for an overseas movement in March 1966. The unit departed Fort Polk on 22 November 1966, embarking on the USNA GEN JOHN POPE at Oakland, California and arrived at Vung Po Bay on 14 December 1966.

On 15 July 1969, the 91st Evacuation Hospital was relocated at Chu Lai taking over the facilities previously occupied by the 312th Evacuation Hospital.

On the road to recovery, this soldier will agree that a warm smile and a friendly chat with an attractive social worker can brighten up anyone's day.

Visual reconnaissance as 'Dust Off'

By PFC Fred Abatemarco

QUANG TRI (23rd Inf. Div. IO) – At 1300 hours Warrant Officer Randy Palmer strapped into the aircraft commander's seat, ready to finish the day's mission. F Troop, 8th Cavalry had been responsible for daily reconnaissance missions ever since they had come under the operational control of the 11th Infantry Brigade for Lam Son 719.

Palmer, a quick-moving, restless young aviator, was eager to get high in the air, away from the relentless heat and gritty red laterite dust on the ground. A quick stop to refuel, and he was on staion with "Little Bird" (a light observation helicopter or LOH) in sight within 15 minutes.

Before long, Palmer startled the lolling crew by announcing that it was time to play "State Trooper." Flip as his words may have been, serious attention was given to Palmer's inference–a back-up of vehicles for about a mile on a winding stretch of Route 9.

The LOH pilot was able to establish the trouble as a disabled truck that would have to be pushed off the road. Meanwhile, F Troop's team tried to provide as much security as possible for this very vulnerable situation.

The two Cobra gunships on the mission adjusted their flying pattern so that they would alternately cover the maximum number of possible enemy positions for the maximum amount of time.

"Little Bird" started an intensive search of the area in close proximity to the road. But Palmer's UH-1H crew could only sit and wait, not knowing what they might be called upon to do. They had to be ready for anything.

The suspenseful moments before the convoy began moving freely were filled with the sound of Palmer's voice in constant communication with those involved in the brief crisis.

To some he might seem ineffectual, but that is based on appearance only. Palmer was in control of every phase of his team's activities on this afternoon and his terse, decisive leadership would be tested later in the day.

Once the road was cleared and the traffic began rolling the helicopters settled into their routine patterns. But they were not destined to remain that way very long.

The radio barked a call for assistance for an element of the 11th Infantry Brigade which had run into an undetermined size force of enemy soldiers a few hundred meters off of Route 9. Tightening his flight pattern and holding his altitude, Palmer moved his "Slick" directly over the ridgeline where the contact had been made.

From there, he was able to observe "Little Bird" moving out of range, making room for the more lethal Cobra gunship to descend and spew their deadly rockets.

Palmer called off the attack when he received a call requesting a medical evacuation of a wounded soldier. The Dust-off bird was still a few minutes away, and might possibly have to stop to refuel before it could reach the area. Those few minutes could be the difference between life and death for the injured GI.

Palmer radioed that he would be coming down for the dust-off.

While his crew prepared itself for possible enemy contact, and the pilot relayed the necessary information to the 18th Surgical Hospital in Quang Tri, Palmer searched for a suitable landing zone. Finding none, he was left with no alternative but to cut one himself.

The whirling rotors of the "Slick" sliced sharply at the jungle covering as the chopper rapidly descended. Seconds after the skids touched down on the dense jungle floor, four "grunts" rushed forward carrying another infantryman.

Palmer then lifted off as quickly as he had landed and sped away with the wounded soldier on board.

Flying low-level at a speed in excess of 100 knots, Palmer was able to deliver the GI to medical aid in less than 20 minutes from the time the distress call was received. It was a meritorious job to say the least, but one which neither Palmer nor the rest of the crew took any bows for.

In the course of that day the visual reconnaissance "Slick" had operated as artillery spotter, convoy security, recovery stand-by and dust-off.

Before leaving the Hospital helipad, Palmer radioed "Little Bird." The scorching sun had not yet settled behind the mountains of the Laotian border to the west, and until it did, the "Blue Ghost" of F Troop, 8th Cavalry would continue to fly.

Precise teamwork kills 11

By Sp/4 Les Bechdel

KHE SANH (23rd Inf. Div. IO) – The radio crackled: "You've got 13 NVA headed your way... (Pause) .... Correction on last, 23 enemy are coming. Engage them if you can."

The setting would have been appropriate for a movie scenario and the action that ensued would have made John Wayne proud.

But the action that involved the First Platoon of Charlie Company, 4th Battalion, 3rd Infantry wasn't any movie plot, it was a brutal small arms contact that destroyed an NVA command group, killing 11 of the enemy.

The day found First Lieutenant James Ronan's platoon on a search and clear mission near "The Rockpile", ten miles northeast of Khe Sanh. After sweeping the area, Ronan (Oreville, Calif.) set his squads into two manned ambush position, 500 meters apart.

The platoon was on the side of a hill about 30 meters from a small stream.

As dusk approached, the "Mountainmen's" quiet vigil was rewarded. Five of the enemy were seen coming down the stream bed.

Specialist Four Mike Beck (Springfield, Ill.) gave this account of the ambush. "We waited and waited and closer and closer they came."

"They were dead in our kill zone when we opened up. They were cluster-bunched and hardly got a shot off in return."

A patrol went down to search the bodies. Four AK-47's and several Chinese Communist (Chicom) grenades were found, but the men were more surprised to find two radioes, a telegraph set, maps and various classified NVA documents.

Apparently the enemy dead were members of a battalion command post.

But the action was far from being over for the First Platoon. About twenty minutes after the first contact, Private First Class Edgar Newsom (nickmaned "Kentucky" for his home state) was along the stream placing claymore mines.

"Kentucky" commented on the second enemy encounter of the day: "We heard footsteps on the trail behind us and shot one NVA who had just passed us less than eight feet away. At the same time I shot the next one coming down the trail and then shot the third."

The rest of the squad gave covering fire as Newsom and the others hastily rejoined them. A forty-five minute firefight followed as approximately ten NVA tried to outflank the squad.

Lieutenant Ronan related the contact: "We were able to stop them primarily due to the great M-79 firing of Beck and the M-60 machine gun work of Private First Class Dave Shefield (Mobile, Ala.). Those guys really put out the ammo when it was needed."

The next day dawned with a desire on the part of the men to link up with the rest of the platoon. They were low on ammunition and as one grunt put it, "we had seen enough action for one mission." But at 0700 hours movement was detected at the sight of the previous day's contact.

Ronan calmly called to Staff Sergeant Feddy Reeves' squad, "You have 13 NVA headed your way...(Pause) ... Correction on last, 23 enemy are coming. Engage them if you can."

Staff Sergeant Reeves (Dallas, Tex.) recalled the radio transmission. "I gulped when he said 13, but I had to swallow hard when it came out 23," he said.

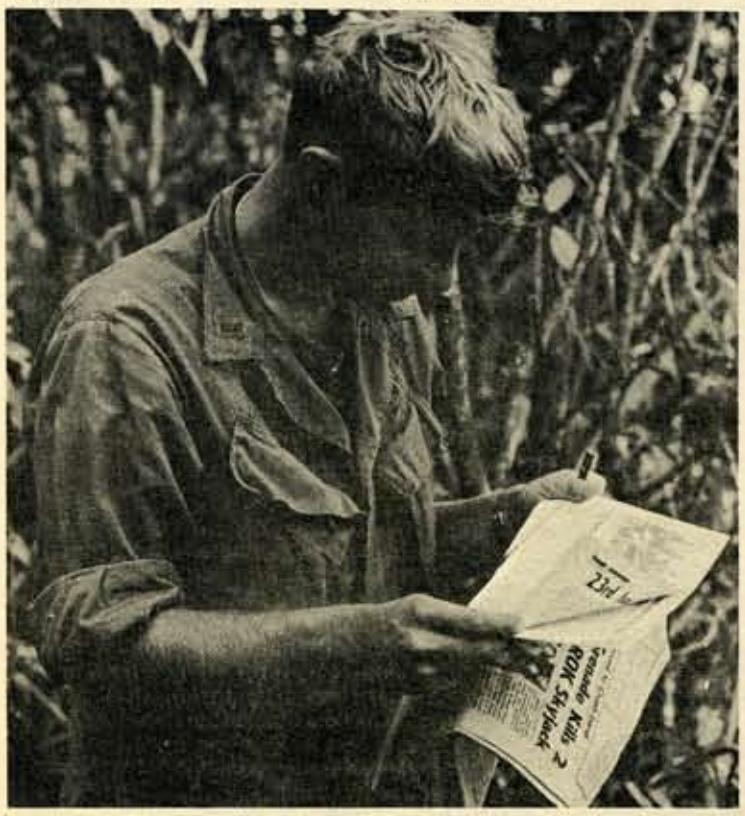
Apparently swallowing helps his aim, as his squad turned back the NVA platoon, killing two and wounding eight.

The final kill of the mission was make by Ronan. The men had just begun to move out to join Reeves' squad when one straggling NVA came out of the brush 75 meters away. Lieutenant Ronan dropped him with one M-16 round.

In less than 24 hours the First Platoon killed 11 enemy, wounded at least eight and captured two radios, a telegraph set, several vital documents and maps xand eight AK-47's. It was an excellent display of small unit tactics.

Shefield modestly summed up the platoon's actions: "Everyone just did the job they had to do, that's all."

This 23rd Infantry Division light observation helicopter (LOH) skims the treetops in search of the enemy. The aircraft is one of many in constant pursuit of enemy forces in southern I Corps. (U.S. Army Photo)



Letters and newspapers are two of the biggest morale builders to troops in the field. First Lieutenant Richard Anchsus (Minneapolis, Minn.) with Delta Co., 2nd Bn., 1st Inf., takes time out to catch up on whats happening back in the States. (U.S. Army Photo by Sp/4 John Cushman)

Ambush nets 3

By Sp/4 Thomas R. Boehler

LZ STINSON (198th Inf. Bde. IO) – Surprise and perfect execution usually spell trouble for the enemy, and that axiom proved true recently for a small element form Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 52nd Infantry. A squad-sized team of "Ready Rifles" pulled off a perfect day ambush, killing the three-man point element of a large NVA force.

The small group of infantrymen from the 23rd Infantry Division's 198th Brigade moved into an observation point near their day laager in a mountainous area southwest of Chu Lai. They had been at their post only a short time when three enemy soldiers emerged from thick vegetation.

"We knew a large NVA force was in the area," said First Lieutenant Wilson T. Clark (Maugatuckum Conn.), the platoon leader, "I took a small patrol a short way down the hill to watch a trail that would be the enemy's most likely avenue of approach."

The "Ready Rifles" slipped into position behind some bushes and waited to see if any enemy would come their way. The wait was a short one. About 30 minutes later three NVA soldiers were spotted a short distance down the trail.

"When the enemy were about 10 meters away we engaged them with our M-16's," said Clark. "The lead man was killed immediately but the second two took cover behind some logs. I threw a hand grenade to where they were hiding and it went off right between them."

Suspecting a larger force to be in the area, the element's machine gunner moved forward and sprayed the surrounding terrain with bullets. The suspicion proved correct as a rocket propelled grenade exploded to one side of his position. The small group of soldiers quickly moved the short distance back uphill to rejoin their main element.

"When we moved back down to sweep the area," said Clark, "we found pools of blood and drag marks where the three had fallen. We also found several blood trails in the bushes where the machinegun had fired. The first group was a point element for the second, much larger group."

Look familiar???? Probably all depends on how long you've been over here. If you've been keeping up on your "reading" you may remember this voluptuous lass, Carol Imhof, as the December Playmate of the Month. Who could forget a girl with a nose like that?

'Charlie Gunships' regulars over Laos

By Sp/4 Dave Goodrich

QUANG TRI (23rd Inf. Div. I0) – "Flying a gunship is tough because the only time you're really needed is when somebody is in trouble or a mission requires flying over hot territory."

The speaker was First Lieutenant Robert Hackett, a "Charley" pilot for the 174th Assault Helicopter Company (De Puniak Springs, Fla.). The guys around him nodded silently, as if to say "ain't it the truth."

A "Charley" (UH-lC) is the predecessor of the "Cobra", which has a larger engine. Still, a "Charley" has its advantages.

In the words of Warrant Officer Fred Thompson (San Fernando Valley, Calif.) "a "Charley" has four sets of eyes, which means that it can fly lower than is safe for a Cobra.

Thompson was referring to the fact that a "Charley"" comes equipped with two door gunners manning M-60 machineguns, which kind of makes it sound like a "Slick", except that a "Slick" doesn't have 14 rockets (seven on each side), two miniguns (one on each side) and a 40mm grenade launcher in its nose.

A "Charley" flies a little slower than a Cobra, but in the words of Thompson, "That means you're over your target for a longer tiem." In addition, a "Charley" can engage targets directly underneath it.

The "Charley" of the 174th have chilling red shark teeth painted over a white mouth, and their pilots are called "Sharks." Until quite recently they were regular visitors over Laos.

"For a while there," remarked Hackett. "everything we could get into get air was flying seven days a week."

All of this should have made for some memorable experiences, right? "Right On!"

"Dust–off asked if we were shooting up anything and we said no," he commented. The lead ship went over a ridge and said, "we're taking heavy fire!" When we went over the ridge we swung off to the left as the lead ship broke right."

Thompson's bird made a circle following the lead ship–powdering the area with rockets. He remembers, "about 500 meters to the west we took fire. One of the door gunners looked down and thought he saw a caucasian wearing shades and a lime-colored shirt cut off at the arms manning a dual 50mm machine gun."

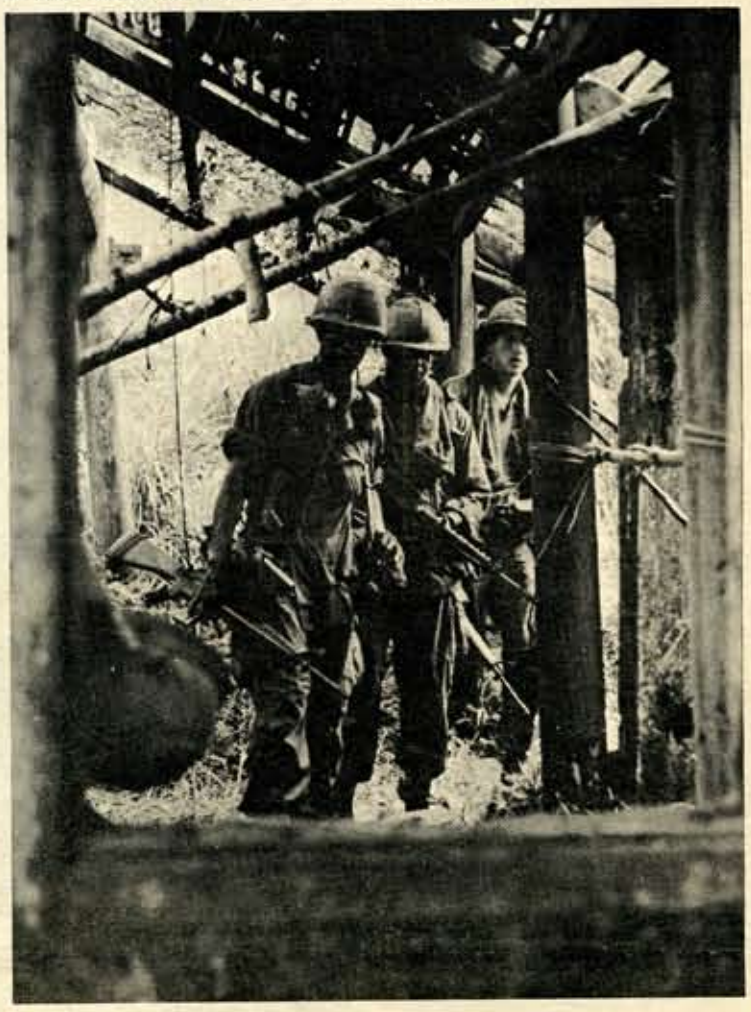
"He must have been just a tall, light-skinned NVA. Anyway we saw a flash in front of us, so we thought we'd taken a hit. A few seconds later, Warrant Officer Bruce Marshall (Nashville, Tenn.) in the lead ship reported taking heavy fire and getting hit."

Although Marshall's "Charley" swung out of control and looked like it would crash, he managed to set it down about 50 meters from the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Thompson recalls, "we'd lost contact with Dust–off. We put the rest of the rockets around his area, landed as close as possible, and the crew chief and I got our and tried to help Marshall and his crew get out of there. But we were pinned down by fire, and because of the triple-canopy foliage, we couldn't even get at them."

Thompson's ship finally made contact with dust-off. "We got in and threw off every kind of weight. We made it into the air, and found out the left minugn was jammed, but we put the rest of our minigun ammo around the downed chopper's position," he said.

"Dust-off got them out with a hoist, and we got everybody back in one piece, despite a .51 caliber bullet through the leading edge of one rotor blade. All in all, we were damned lucky to get back!"



On a recent patrol southeast of Tien Phouc 23rd Infantry Division troopers with Delta Co., 2nd Bn., lst Inf., examine an abandoned hootch for signs of enemy habitation. (U.S. Army Photo by Sp/4 John Cushman)

NVA have luxuries too

By Sgt Louis Miller

LZ STINSON (198th Inf. Bde. I0) – Running water may pose a problem for some U.S. troops but at least one NVA unit has that luxury or had it. Soldiers from the 23rd Infantry Division's 198th Infantry Brigade recently found an enemy training camp complete with a mess hall, a ringing telephone, running water, and a fire fight that cost the NVA three killed.

An element from Delta Company, lst Battalion, 52nd Infantry, was maneuvering through thick jungle terrain southwest of Chu Lai in search of a suspected enemy training camp. The elemet had been on patrol most of the day and by late afternoon the infantrymen were returning to their day laager position when they found themselves next to an enemy camp.

"The camp was located 200 meters from the top of a steep hill," said First Lieutenant Wilson T. Clark (Naugatuck, Conn.), a platoon leader. "Before we knew it our whole element was standing in the middle of the camp."

The "Ready Rifles" were searching the camp when a large enemy force entered from the opposite direction. The infantrymen surprised the enemy by quickly spreading out and engaging them before being seen. The heavy volume of fire drove the unsuspecting enemy from the camp to the top of the hill.

"As soon as the firing stopped we searched the camp again," Clark said. "There were a total of 10 structures, a mess hall with running water, eight sleeping positions and fourbunkers. All the structures were camouflauged.

Inside the structures the infantrymen found large quanties of ammunition, and eight packs on home made shelves. Also, each structure contained a small bunker and tunnel. Outside were small animal pens that housed pigs and chickens.

"One man entered a structure just in time to answer a ringing telephone," said First Lieutenant Byron Korte (Pleasantville, N.J.), a platoon leader. "The man let it ring awhile then decided to pick up the receiver to see who was on the other end. It turned out to be an NVA soldier."

As soon as the enemy found out who was on the phone, the infantrymen cut the wires on the Chinese-made field phone and vacated the structure. As darkness approached the infantrymen prepared to leave the camp when suddenly a group of enemy soldiers emerged from tunnels throughout the camp and began firing rocket propelled grenades, and small arms fire.

The infantrymen immediately returned fire with their M-16 rifles and machineguns. The heavy volume of fire surpressed the enemy's fire and killed three NVA in the process.

"We were in the camp for only a short time but it seemed like hours," recalled Clark. "When we reached our laager site I called in the location of the enemy camp to our artillery people and planned a heavy artillery strike for that evening, hoping that the enemy would spend the night in their camp."

"As we moved through the camp we found several models made from bamboo the enemy used to train their people with. It looked like a very sophisticated base the enemy used to train their people with. It looked like a very sophisticated base camp."

Charlie Company in retrospect

By SP4 David P. Goodrich

CHU LAI (23rd Inf. Div. I0) – The truck drivers on Route 9 were constantly beset by apprehension. Nightfall was the worst though, compounding personal danger as the risk of ambush increased. Ruts visible during the day became invisible, hidden by the shadows.

Dust would billow up at night, forming great blinders for the drivers' eyes. Glare from hundreds of headlights described grotesque images on the clouds of dust. The battle continued.

Sometimes the drivers would push for 48 hours without sleep, before collapsing from exhaustion. Their mission: to keep 9,000 Americans and 20,000 ARVN's involved in Operation Lam Son 719 supplied.

Company C, 23rd Supply and Transport Battalion was formed at the inception of the northern campaign, and inactivated recently in Chu Lai, its mission completed.

Major General James L. Baldwin, 23rd Infantry Division Commander, recently congratulated the men of the company for their outstanding performance, while explaining to them that now the northern operation had ended, there wouldn't be enough work in the Chu Lai area to keep them busy.

He noted that the Americal's northern perimeter is being expanded and artillery units from the division stationed there can be safely resupplied by truck now instead of having to rely on helicopters alone.

It is a little unlikely that the men of "House's Raiders" will soon forget the time when trying to stay busy wasn't one of their problems.

Captain Jonathan W. House (Dayon, Ohio), from whom the men of the company derived their unofficial name, remembers the time when one of his men thought he saw enemy sappers in the unit's quartermaster shower, located outside the company's perimeter at Fire Support Base (FSB) Vandergrift.

"Several of the men attacked with M-79 grenade launchers and pretty well blew the hell out of it," he recalled. "Of course there wasn't anything there, but the shower had damned good ventilation after that."

It's also a little unlikely that "House's Raiders" will soon forget Route 9 itself for awhile. Two-laned from Quang Tri to FSB Vandergrift, the road was one land for the 20 miles between Vandergrift and Khe Sanh.

"The road was in pretty sorry condition despite much work done on it by the engineers. The rain and constant traffic coupled with the rugged terrain itself played havoc with the serviceability of the road."

Armored Personnel Carriers (APC's) with names like "Mission Imposible" and "The Grim Reaper", a gun-truck named "Hard Core" and others hauled everything from rice to all the materials used in the construction of Khe Sanh's airfield used to travel on that miserable road that always seemed to be either mud or loose dust–"and never anything in-between," as one trooper put it.

Booby trap that didn't explode

By Sp/4 Thomas F. Boehler

LZ STINSON (198th Inf. Bde. I0) – When a soldier trips an enemy booby trap he usually finds out rather quickly–like in a fraction of a second. But one "Ready Rifle" from the lst Battalion, 52nd Infantry, didn't find out he had hit a trip wire connected to a Chicom (Chinese Communist) hand grenade until a half hour later.

An element from Charlie Company, 1/52nd Inf, 198th Infantry Brigade, had made contact early one day with a lone NVA soldier and wounded him. A patrol was sent to follow a blood trail left by the evading enemy.

The platoon leader, Second Lieutenant Martin Reyan (Olympia, Wash.) was walking second as his patrol moved through thick vegetation in an area near here.

"We were following a trail when our Luc Luong scout, who was walking point, found a bag of rice on the trail," said Reyna. "We picked up the rice and continued after the enemy. Little did we know, but we also walked through an enemy booby trap."

The "Ready Rifles" finally lost the trail when it entered a stream, and turned back toward their day laager position. As they neared the spot where the rice was found the pointman noticed some markings on a tree.

"Our scout is very good at finding booby traps," said Reyna. "He said the markings meant that one was just ahead. We searched the area and finally found it right where we picked up the rice."

The booby trap consisted of a Chicom hand grenade tied to a tree close to the ground. A piece of vine fastened to the firing device was used as a trip wire spanning the trail. Not wanting to disturb it further, the "Ready Rifles" blew the Chicom in place.

"We were really lucky," concluded Reyna. "The Chicom must have been defective. It was so well camouflauged that we couldn't have seen it until we were on our return trip. A lot of people could have gotten hurt."

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