

(Copy from C 4/31st Inf. Bn. veteran James B. Simms with the assistance of Mike Crutcher a veteran of E & HHC, 1/5 Cav, 1969-70 1st Cav Div. May 2014.)

31st Regt. Polar Bear (image printed top left)

196th patch (image printed on top right)

"WEST OF WEST" (text printed between the two images).

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the commander speaks

It is with extreme pleasure that I introduce to you the newly founded 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry "Polar Bears" bi-monthly newspaper "West of West". I think the name selected represents this Battalion extremely well. West of West simply signifies that we are ready to move further to pursue peace and to restore to the people of South Vietnam that precious freedom they so desire.

The "Polar Bears" are a tremendous unit, and every member should, and can, be proud of it, of not only the history of the 31st prior to Vietnam but also the fine record of accomplishments here in Vietnam. One of these accomplishments I'd like to single out—briefly, that is the reestablishment of Hiep Duc District by the government of South Vietnam.

In early 1965 the NVA and VC were successful in overrunning Hiep Duc and forcing the withdrawal of GVN Control. GVN was then forced to remain out of Hiep Duc until such time as the enemy force could be defeated and pacification could be initiated. The mission of eliminating the enemy force fell on the shoulders of you, and your comrades of earlier days, that mission has been accomplished with amazing results. The enemy within this area has been defeated and in order for any major enemy initiated action to occur it would be necessary for them to relocate forces within the area. On 4 March 1969 GVN reestablished the District of Hiep Duc by returning with local, District and village officials, rural and popular forces. The result you have all been eyewitness to.

It is results such as these that enable you as a "Polar Bear" to be proud of yourself, your associates and your unit. As other missions are assigned, I am certain that the fine records already established will be continued and improved.

malaria will kill...take your pill!!!

d company destroyers

The VC of the Que Son and Hiep Duc Valleys are finding out that big things can indeed come in small packages thanks to the accomplishments of ten "Polar Bears" from D Co. The ten-man squad is known as the "Destroyer Element." This tightly-knit group has done an outstanding job for us since it was formed three months ago, "explained CPT John Whittecar (Salina, Kan.) the D Co. Commanding Officer. "They have personally accounted for 23 enemy killed, 10 captured weapons, and 12 enemy prisoners!"

SP4 John Warren (Huntsville, Ala.) who acts as the element's squad leader explained the nature of their missions. "We are a small element; so we can move quickly and quietly". "Most of the time we can surprise the enemy before they know we are around". (CON'T PAGE 2)

sergeant major

I am proud to be the Command Sergeant Major of this fine Battalion with a combat record and esprit d'corps second to none in Vietnam. However, no matter how outstanding a unit is, it will always have its strong and weak points.

We must improve on our strong points and work hard to correct our weak ones. One such weak point is our military courtesy, especially when a company has just come up on a fire support base after coming out of the field. I expect a maximum effort concerning this point from every enlisted man in this fine unit.

destroyers (CON'D FROM PG1)

Typical of the fast reactions that have contributed to the success of the "Destroyer Elements" was the behavior of SP4 Joe Keller (Pittsfield, Mass.) during a recent mission. The "Destroyer Element" moved quickly into what appeared to be a deserted hamlet. Acting completely on his own, SP4 Keller moved quickly to the back door of a near by hootch. Peering inside, Keller observed two VC taking deadly aim on the unsuspecting Polar Bear Infantrymen outside. Without hesitation, Keller jumped inside the hootch and shot it out at point blank range with the startled VC. When the gunfire subsided, two VC lay dead, and an SKS rifle and a M-1 carbine had been captured. Keller had come through the fracas unhurt.

An interesting sidelight to the exciting exploits of the "Destroyer Element" is the fact that two member[s] of the squad are cousins. They are SP4 Richard Gastone (East Long Meadow, Mass) and PFC Charles Chaconas (Ludlow, Mass.) "We grew up about five miles from each other, explained SP4 Gastone. We have been together ever since we came in the Army". "We both had Basic Training at Ft. Gordon and AIT at Ft Jackson".

The "Destroyer Element" is an outstanding addition to the "Polar Bears". Other members of the group not previously mentioned include: SP4 Berry Harper (Haiawasse, Ga.) SP4 Pete Hernandez (Ivanhoe, Calif.) SP4 Terry Kuhnau (Tacoma, Wash.), SP4 Jim Bell (Riverside, Ca.) SP4 Thomas Dye (Oak Grove, La) and SP4 Bob Abbott (Gary, Indiana).

b co kills 2 vc captures 2 ak-47s

Scouting "Polar Bear" units can be [a] hazardous occupation. A two-man VC reconnaissance element learned this the hard way in recent action northwest of Tam Ky. B Co. of 4/31 was engaged in Hiep Duc Valley. As they moved in to their day laager, SP4 Louis Terry (Eldorado, Arkansas) observed two VC hiding in some tall grass on a nearby hillside. The VC appeared to be very interested in the activities of B Co. The VC were too far away to bring effective fire on them, explained CPT William H. Gayler (Mineral Springs, Texas), the CO of B Co. "I sent a reinforced squad up the hill toward the enemy since the high grass made it impossible for the VC to see my men". The Polar Bears moved to within 40 meters of the unsuspecting VC before they were finally detected by the enemy. The VC attempted to evade down the far side of the hill through the tall grass. They were engaged at a distance of 40 meters with M-16 rifles. Two VC KIA's resulted, and two AK-47 rifles with four magazines of ammunition were captured.

origin of the polar bears

Few units in the United States Army can equal the outstanding record of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry, The "Polar Bears" have contributed fifty-two years of overseas service to the Nation.

The birth of the unit occurred on 13 August 1916 in the Philippine Islands. Two years later the regiment was sent to Russia on its first combat mission. Landing in Vladivostok in Southeastern Russia, the 4/31st was responsible for defending the Trans-Siberian Railroad against attack from the various military factions competing for power in Russia in 1918. The 4th Bn., 31st In. withdrew from Russia in 1920 after distinguishing itself during the course of the Siberian Campaign. For its service in Siberia, the 31st Regiment was named the "Polar Bears" Regiment, and it received the first of its many battle streamers.

The "Polar Bear" became the official regimental crest within the next ten years. the Regimental Coat of Arms embodies the principle features of the units early history. Against a background of infantry blue stands a sea lion grasping a rifle in its paws and a fixed bayonet. Under the shield is engraved the regimental motto, "Pro Patria," which means "For Our Country". Above the shield stands a Polar Bear. The sea is taken from the Coat of Arms of the Philippine Islands, while the Polar Bear symbolizes the part played by the 31st Infantry in Siberia.

pacification of hiep duc

the "Polar Bears" of the 4th Bn., 31st Inf. are engaged in one of the most significant pacification projects in the I Corps Tactical Zone. The settlement of some 2,800 Vietnamese refugees at Hiep Duc, and the re-establishment of GVN control in the District are milestones of achievement in the area of civil affairs.

Hiep Duc Valley was once inhabited by 7,000 people. It was a productive, agricultural region with a busy marketplace, hospital, and a school for the children of the district. In 1965, VC/NVA terrorism reached such proportions that the district government officials were forced to flee to the provincial capital of Tam Ky for safety. Gradually, the majority of the populace was relocated in refugee centers at Tam Ky and Nui Loc Son. For years, Hiep Duc Valley was controlled by the VC/NVA. The region eventually came to be included in the area of operations of the 4th Bn, 31st Inf. To the "Polar Bears" fell the difficult task of eliminating the VC infrastructure and driving the NVA units from the Valley.

Two US elements remained on LZ Karen to offer assistance to the Vietnamese officials. The first such element is the 4/31 liaison team which has the responsibility of coordinating the joint efforts of the 196th Inf. Bde., MACV, and the Government of Vietnam. The liaison team is currently made up of two former "Polar Bear" Infantrymen who expressed a desire to help the people of Hiep Duc. They are SGT Jay Goodwin (ACo) and SP4 Bill Carroll (DCO). The second U.S. element found at Hiep Duc is a Mobil Advisory Team from MACV. This five-man team is headed by CPT Stanley Brown, the senior advisor to the Hiep Duc Project.

Much has been accomplished since the first small hand full of refugees arrived in March. Homes for the 2,800 refugees now at Hiep Duc have been constructed. Sanitation has been greatly improved in the refugee center. MEDCAPS have reduced the impact of disease among the people

Currently a rice harvest is being conducted that will enable the people of Hiep Duc to help sustain their own food supply. Hundreds of pounds of rice are being harvested each day; and often, the rice is carried great distances to the collection point by hand. A school and small hospital are in the plans for the near future. Refugees will be air-lifted to Hiep Duc on a regular basis until the former population is restored. Each individual will receive land of his own. Former inhabitants of the Valley will be allowed to reclaim their old homes.

Such is the story of the Hiep Duc Valley. The potential of this beautiful area is unlimited. Through the energy of the Vietnamese inhabitants, This area will hopefully blossom with prosperity. In the years to come a peaceful, thriving Hiep Duc District would be a fitting memorial to the Polar Bear who wrested it from Communist control. Many "Polar Bear" Infantrymen can remember taking part in combat operations in the shadow of the ruins of the Hiep Duc Hospital along Highway 534. Steadily, the VC leaders were eliminated; weapons were captured; VC rallied to the side of the Government of Vietnam under the "Chieu Hoi" Program. Units of the 2nd NVA Division who once moved about freely in the Valley were driven into hiding in the mountains. Early in 1969, it was apparent that the Hiep Duc Valley had been pacified to a great extent. It was time to restore the GVN to its rightful place on home soil. The farmers of Hiep Duc could once again cultivate their fields and paddies.

In March of 1969, Regional and Popular Forces arrived on LZ Karen to secure a place for the establishment of a temporary district headquarters. Acting as district chief, was 1LT Nguyen Duc Vinh (ARVN). He assumed command of LZ Karen from LTC Robert B. Longino, the Commanding Officer of the 4th Bn., 31st Inf. 27 GVN officials from the villages and hamlets of the district arrived to assist LT Vinh in the administration of the district.

comic: A bedraggled soldier staggers out of the jungle. Two soldiers observe him, as one of them says, "HERE IT COMES NOW! THE ULTIMATE WEAPON"

chaplain's corner – take the high ground

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord which made Heaven and Earth”.

-Psalm 121: 1-2

Every visitor or newcomer to LZ West is impressed by the surrounding beauty of the morning viewed from the hill. It's an awesome sight as the sun rises, casting it's glare on the white clouds that cling to the tops of the rolling hills and mountains. This high ground view reminds us that there can be beauty and peace in the midst of ugliness and war.

The high ground plays an important role in the life of the Polar Bears. One welcomes that hump to the high ground after a long hot day in the field or moving to a Fire Support Base after several days humping in the “Boonies”. From this vantage point he feels more secure and can rest much better. Is this not a parable about life? Sometimes all about us is difficulty and hardship; our lives are over cast with uncertainty and doubt. Visibility is limited, but in climbing to the high ground we see life from a new level, with a new perspective. We find rest, security and comfort from our problems and toils.

This suggests to us that many times we need to get away from our problem in order that we may properly size it up. We need solitude. We need to be still and not afraid to be alone. Even our Lord needed a new evaluation of the problems confronting him. He needed to climb a mountain, and there in the higher atmosphere of his father's presence life seemed less complex and the clearer. We need God, to whom we may go for help and reassurance. Evaluating our situation in the atmosphere of God's presence not only gives us a closer vision but also affords us power to see it through.

Prayer: O God, help us amid the noise and confusion of life to pull apart and be alone with thee. Keep us close to thee that we may know thy will and follow thy way. AMEN.

comics:

1) Soldier talking to doctor on sick call, “DOGGONE IT DOC!..THERE'S GOTTA BE SOMETHING'WRONG WITH MY EARS! ... I DISTINCTLY HEARD MULDOON VOLUNTEER FOR A PATROL”!!!!

2) DRAWING: Vietnamese girl wearing Ao-Dai

West of West

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LTC Cecil M. Henry CO

SP4 William Crawford Reporter

Do you know any interesting or humorous happenings concerning your fel-

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