

(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).

VOL. 1, NO. 3 / 4TH BATTALION 31st INFANTRY/ 13 JUL 69

4TH BATTALION 31 INFANTRY ALERT "KIT CARSON"

Alertness and the ability to track the enemy are two attributes that make "Kit Carson" Scouts valuable assets to "Polar Bear" infantrymen. This fact was proved once again during a recent operation involving the "Polar Bears" and the Popular Forces.

Working in Hiep Duc Valley, C Co was moving into position as a blocking force while on a joint operation with the "Popular Forces". Lee, a young "Kit Carson" scout who is assigned to 4/31 was walking with 1st LT. Jerry Josey. Known to the men of Charlie Company as "20" because of his identification number, Lee was intently searching for signs indicating the presence of VC in the area.

Suddenly, Lee stopped and pointed at the ground. There partially hidden by the grass, were fresh sandal tracks in the moist earth. LT Josey cautiously followed his "Kit Carson" through the dense under bush which ran along a nearby river bank. They slowly followed the trail on to a sandbar which jutted out into the water.

"I was sure whoever made the tracks had crossed the river" declared LT Josey. "I was peering across the stream trying to catch sight of him when Lee's M-16 went off in my ear. Spinning quickly to his right LT Josey observed an AK-47 rifle slumped in the sand a few meters down stream. Unknown to the infantryman, the VC had made a right turn and walked down the river's edge. the alert "Kit Carson" had spotted him before he could set up an ambush.

DELTA ZAPS nva

D Co, 4th Bn., 31st Inf., Commanded by CPT Norman Mekkelson (Miami Shores, Fla), killed five NVA and captured three AK-47's in a series of sporadic contacts in thick jungle terrain northwest of Tam Ky.

The "Polar Bears" infantrymen were in contact with an anti-aircraft company of the 2nd NVA Division. At one point during the fighting SP4 Thomas Snyder (Johnson City, Tenn) volunteered to walk point for his element. While walking along a river bank, Sp4 Thomas came upon five NVA sitting in a group. He emptied his M-16 at the enemy, and then he darted behind some bushes to reload. One NVA was killed during the exchange, and an AK-47 rifle was captured.

[Historian note: There are pieces missing and typos in the rest of this story]

In addition to the **five NVA killed and the captured weapons**, the "Polar Bears" captured several NVA packs, containing rice, Chicom grenades, and documents. D Co also uncovered a freshly-constructed 51 caliber machinegun position. Several rounds for an **82mm recoilless** rifle were also located.

"Commo's rangers"

An important group of "Polar Bears" who are frequently over-looked in the course of the daily operations of the battalion are the men of the communications Platoon- "Commos' Rangers".

Under the command of CPT Ronald Lockwood, the platoon is charged with a number of responsibilities which vary from providing communications for the entire battalion to pulling bunker security each night on LZ West.

"Our primary objective is to provide a complete system of communications for the battalion from the brigade level right on down to the lowest sub-level which is the PFC who is an RTO with the line company in the field", stated CPT Lockwood.

It is very important to any combat unit that the field radios be maintained in proper working condition at all times. When a problem arises concerning a radio in the field, that radio is air lifted to the commo shop at LZ West. There, able radio mechanics like Sgt George Carrey and SP5 Dennis Traxler diagnose the trouble and correct it. If there is a major malfunction or a part is unavailable, the equipment is sent to the Commo shop at LZ Baldy where Sgt. Lenny Edwards is NCOIC. Extensive technical facilities at Baldy enable the Commo platoon to handle problems that can't be corrected at LZ West.

Telephone service is another important contribution of the Commo platoon.

It is possible to call all over Vietnam from LZ West. Complete telephone connection[s] are provided to the different areas of LZ West as well as to LZ Baldy and Chu Lai. "Hot lines" provide instantaneous communications to the 4/31 rear area at LZ Baldy and to the Headquarters of the 196th Inf. Bde.

The VHF section which is a part of the 523rd Signal Bn. is attached to 4/31 and plays an important role in the battalions communications. On LZ West VHF is headed by Sgt. Ron Bartley. VHF provides much of the electric power used on LZ West. In addition, VHF transmits and receives all telephone messages to and from LZ West. Important to the morale of the "Polar Bears" are the MARS calls to the U.S. These calls pass through VHF equipment with the line companies receiving top priority. The Commo platoon provides a number of RTO's for the battalion. Sp 4 Mike Wilson, Sp4 Earl Eickelberger, SP4 Terald Graves and Sp4 Mike Snook work in the S-3 section.

Sp4 John Slink and PFC Billy Kingrey handles the radios for S-2. PFC Richard Stensvad works in S-4 as an RTO. "Every man in Commo must be able to perform more than one job well so that in an emergency situation, gaps in our staff could be filled:", explained CPT Lockwood. Examples of this versatility can be seen in such men as SP4 Denny Bichert who can perform as a switchboard operator and a wireman. SP5 Vanordt doubles as a generator operator and a radio repairman.

Versatility of the 24 hour vigilance helps help the battalion functioning smoothly. The next time you call in a re-supply list you can thank "Commo's Rangers" that your message gets through.

NOTRE DAME gridder joins "polar bears"

Bob Bleier has come a long way during the past few months. In December he was a rookie halfback trying hard to prove himself with the Pittsburgh Steelers. June finds Bob working hard to learn a new position on a different team. Bob Bleier is now a rifleman with the "Polar Bears" Co Co.

Football fans best remember "Rocky Bleier as a hard running half back in a backfield that included Terry Hanratty, Nick Eddy, and Larry Conjar. Bleier was a starter on the power house Notre Dame teams of 1965-1967. The starting line-up during these years reads like an All American team; Jim Seymour, George Kunz, Coley O'Brien, and Bob Gladieux were among the other standout performers not previously mentioned.

Following his senior year in 1967, "Rocky" was drafted 16th by the Pittsburg Steelers." The excellent coaching that I had at Notre Dame really helped me when I went into Pro football". "I wasn't the biggest or the fastest-back around, but I had been taught the fundamentals."

"I had been taught to be a smart runner. I knew how to hit the holes and when to [go] out.

Upon his arrival at Pittsburgh, Bleier found him self playing in the shadow of Dick Hoak, one of the top ground-gainers in the National Football League "Hoak isn't the flashy type" explained Bleier. "He is very consistent, and you always know that he will get a few yards almost every time that he carries the ball."

"Rocky" saw extensive [action in the pre-] season. He started most of these games for the Steelers as a running back. He impressed Coach Bill Austin enough to win a reserve back and member of the specialty team.

Bleier thinks that he will be able to comeback after missing the 1969 season. He plans to extend to get an "early out" in time for the 1970 season. "If a player wants to play bad enough, he will be willing to work hard to back in shape", explained Bleier. "It is all a question of attitude and desire.

alpha spoils vc barbeque

Forty VC were stuffing themselves with freshly-roasted water buffalo. Bowls of cooked rice and vegetables were neatly arranged in a circle. The VC were enjoying an early-evening barbecue in the flickering firelight. suddenly, an American voice rang out from the darkness. Forty VC went in forty different directions. M-16's blazed away from hidden positions.

A patrol of "Polar Bears" left their company at dusk. Co A was working in the thickly-wooded mountain terrain some 26 miles northwest of Tam Ky. The patrol under the command of Sgt. Bruce Chalis (Walla Walla, Wash.) moved quietly down a walking trail.

"We heard laughing and talking and saw the fire flickering when we were still 300 meters away", explained Sgt. Challis.

"There were about 40 VC gathered on a patio near some old French ruins". "The VC wee busy dividing up that water buffalo!" "We low crawled to within 20 meters of them, and then I yelled for them to stop!" " They took off in every direction".

Ten VC were killed in the ensuing fracas, and ten others were captured. A search of the area revealed a small quantity of VC medical supplies.

delta scores

"Polar Bears" infantry men killed five NVA and captured three individual weapons in recent action south of LZ West. In addition, the "Chargers" from the 196th Infantry Brigade uncovered a large enemy base camp consisting of more than 200 reinforced bunkers which were connected by extensive tunnel complexes. The base camp was spread out over a large area which is characterized by thick jungle terrain.

D Company, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry, Commanded by CPT Norman Mekkelsen (Miami Shores, Fla.) encountered the enemy fortifications while conducting search and clear operations northwest of Tam Ky. A platoon sized element under 1st Lt. Juan F. Gonzales (Gomez Palacio, Durango, Mexico) killed three NVA and captured three individual weapons in a small hamlet.

"We moved up on a hootch area, and my point man Sp4 James Coyle (Philadelphia), and SSG Robert Spillner (Honolulu, Hawaii) came in from both sides", explained Lt Gonzalez. The infantrymen observed an NVA sleeping in a hammock inside of the hootch. Two other NVA slept on a nearby table "Suddenly, the guy in the hammock spotted us and went for his rifle", declared Sp4 Coyle. "We opened up and got all three of them before they could get moving."

Three weapons were captured, including an M-1 carbine, an Ak-47, and an M-16 rifle.

Later the same afternoon, D Co was set up in their night defensive position. Five NVA wandered into the area and came under intense fire from the Americal Infantrymen. Two NVA were killed and blood trails leading from the area indicated the others had been wounded. Two captured packs yielded rice, canned fish and 9mm pistol ammunition.

recon clicks

Working in the difficult terrain of "Happy Valley, the Recon Platoon killed 6 VC in a series of small contacts. The "Polar Bear" platoon commanded by 1st Lt. Barry Brandon engaged eight VC with weapons at a distance of 300 meters. One VC was killed, but the others evaded successfully at dusk the platoon received fire consisting of several mortar rounds and about 50 rounds of AK-47 fire. Recon pursued the enemy and killed five VC in that area in the course of a night patrol. Several packs were captured containing VC literature and rice.

reenlistment

A battalion reenlistment office has been established recently on LZ Baldy. Anyone interested should obtain permission from his First Sergeant or CO to visit SFC Stice the re-enlistment NCO for 4/31. SFC Stice can be found at S1 on Baldy.

Two of the most popular options available for those wishing to re-enlist involve the following: 1) If a man has completed eight months service, he can re-enlist for any major or subordinate command in RVN if there is a vacancy in that command. 2) A man can also re-enlist for a change of MOS of his own choosing if training is available for that MOS.

Personnel who are qualified will be removed from the field four or five days prior to reenlistment for processing purposes.

West of West

LTC Robert B. Longino CO
SP4 William Crawford Reporter

This newsheet is published monthly by the 4/31 Infantry, 196th Infantry Brigade APO 96374, as an authorized publication. Views and opinions herein do not necessarily represent those of the Department of the Army. AFPS material used.