

(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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Polar bears kill 53, spoil nva attack

Alertness and a breath-taking display of fire power aborted a pre-dawn attack by elements of the 2nd NVA Division on LZ West. 53 NVA soldiers died in the action that saw Alpha and Echo Companies (including the Recon Platoon) hammer the attacking enemy through out much of the night. Outstanding artillery support from C Battery, 3/16 Arty. and C Battery, 3/82 Arty added to the misery of the large NVA force. Five wounded NVA were captured during reconnaissance operations early the next morning.

Early detection of the enemy was instrumental in spoiling the NVA's effort. SGT David Gray (Danville, Va.) was the first to see the enemy on a dark night, having only two percent illumination. "They were moving very slowly; it took them nearly five minutes to complete a single step, said Gray." While I was looking through the VC scope, I stared an NVA soldier right in the eye," declared SGT Gray. The alert was sounded, and PFC James Chapel (Elgin, Ark.) began firing on the advancing NVA. During the course of the night, Chapel was to fire over 400 rounds from his M-79 grenade launcher.

SP4 Gerald De Young (Kalamazoo, Mich.) and SP4 Robert Morrissey (West Springfield, Mass) of the Recon Platoon peered out into the darkness. "I couldn't see a thing; it was so dark," declared Morrissey. "We fired M-79's and threw hand grenades each time we heard a noise," explained SP4 De Young.

Daylight revealed several dead NVA soldiers directly to the front of the bunker defended by the young "Polar Bear" Infantrymen. (CON'T PG 2)

Polar bears battle 2nd nva division for hiep duc

The "Polar Bears" of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry have been engaged in a life-and-death struggle against the major elements of the 2nd NVA Division since August 17. Through August 25, 531 NVA soldiers have been killed in fierce fighting around LZ West.

Initial contact was claimed by Delta Company late on the afternoon of the 17th.

The "Polar Bear" infantrymen killed an NVA soldier in what appeared to be a routine search and clear mission just to the south of LZ West. Within a matter of minutes, D Co. was embroiled in heavy contact with an estimated NVA battalion.

On the 18th of August, Bravo Company and the Recon Platoon encountered a large NVA element while searching for a rice cache northeast of Hill 118. Fighting now raged to the north and to the south of LZ West.

"We undoubtedly spoiled the NVA plan to over-run Hiep Duc," explained LTC Cecil M. Henry (Rome, Ga.), the 4/31 CO. "Their plan was to hit LZ Center, LZ West, and LZ Siberia to keep us busy." "Then, another large force would wipe out Hiep Duc," continued LTC Henry.

The NVA have boasted openly that they would wipe out the refugee center at Hiep Duc by early September. NVA propaganda agents broadcasting with loudspeakers told the people that the United States and the Government of Vietnam were unable to provide adequate protection for Hiep Duc. "The NVA are placing great importance on the mission of destroying Hiep Duc," explained LTC Henry.

Thus, the "Battle for Hiep Duc" takes on prime importance because the confidence of the Vietnamese people in the GVN and the U.S. is hinging on the outcome. As West of West goes to press, the fighting continues. A detailed report of the "Battle for Hiep Duc" will appear in the next edition of this newspaper.

nva attack (CON't FR PG 1)

Illumination rounds were fired by Echo Co. mortars and C Battery, 3/16 Arty. No enemy were visible as the illumination rounds burst. As the illumination faded out, the VC scope detected the NVA moving again. Anti-personnel radar confirmed the presence of a large number of the enemy. Each time illumination was fired the NVA attackers sank down in the tall elephant grass which covers the northern slope of LZ West. SP4 Robert Yates (Lucedale, Miss.) observed a group of 30 NVA through a night observation device. "Their leader divided them into three groups and sent them up toward different sections of the perimeter," declared Yates who was joined at the "VC" scope by SP4 Robert Kiely (Philadelphia.)

It was at this point that the intruding NVA encountered a devastating barrage of fire power from the tense fire support base. Mortars from E Co. lobbed high explosive rounds just outside the perimeter. C Battery, 3/16 Arty brought direct fire on enemy concentrations with their 155mm howitzers. C Battery, 3/82 Arty covered the hillside with 105mm rounds from nearby LZ Siberia.

As dawn broke on LZ West, 60 NVA were detected evading down a western ridgeline. .50 caliber machine gun fire and artillery rained on the fleeing NVA. Patrols from A Co. and the Recon platoon were dispatched to search the smoldering hillside. An arsenal of enemy munitions was scattered throughout the area just outside the perimeter. Included in the captured enemy weaponry were 225 Chicom grenades, 19 B-40 rocket launchers, 5 AK-47 rifles, one AK-50 rifle, 6 Bangalore torpedoes, and 6 shape charges ranging from 20 to 40 pounds. A .38 caliber Russian pistol was also discovered.

Patrols around LZ West located five wounded enemy prisoners in the hours following the attack. These NVA divulged significant information to CPT Gabriel Akiona, 4/31 Intelligence Officer. The attacking NVA were members of the 31st NVA Regiment, 2nd NVA Division. They were part of a large force of over 600 NVA operating in the general vicinity of LZ West.

The NVA plan had been to attain an advantageous position just outside of the concertina wire surrounding LZ West. At dawn a multi-wave attack was to be launched under the cover of RPG, mortar, and small arms fire. Sappers were to penetrate the perimeter and place explosives charges around strategic targets such as the 155mm howitzers and the 4/31 tactical operations center. Then, Chicom grenades were to be lobbed into the remaining defensive positions.

A captured 26 year-old NVA PFC related that his unit had been in position and observing LZ West for the past three days. The LZ had been designated as point "F" in the NVA battle plan. He had been assigned to man one of three 12.8mm Russian anti-aircraft machine guns that were to be employed by his company around the base of Hill 445. They were ordered to shoot down all MEDEVAC helicopter and gunships that entered the area. The captured NVA also stated that many of their officers deserted their units when the .50 caliber machine guns leveled their deadly fire on the advancing enemy.

Mobile medcap helps at Hiep Duc

3,000 Vietnamese refugees are receiving daily medical care thanks to the efforts of the Mobile MEDCAP Team of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry. This five-man medical element can be transported by helicopter to any location in a matter of minutes. The group was organized by LTC Cecil M. Henry (Rome, Ga.), the "Polar Bear" CO, and CPT Phillip Kinman (Petersburg, Indiana), the battalion surgeon.

"The purpose of the MEDCAP Team is to provide daily medical care for the people of Hiep Duc," explained CPT Kinman. The Hiep Duc refugee center, located near LZ West, contains over 3,000 refugees who have recently returned to the area following an absence of several years due to VC/NVA terrorism. MEDCAPS have been conducted at Hiep Duc before but only on a weekly basis. "The MEDCAP Team can provide follow up treatment as well as aid in the instruction of the Vietnamese medics who assist in the daily treatments," observed CPT Kinman.

The Vietnamese constructed the dispensary which houses the daily MEDCAPS. Over 1300 patients received the treatment during the first week of operation. Twelve Vietnamese medics are currently in Tam Ky to receive intensive training related to their duties in Hiep Duc. They will assist in the daily treatment of refugees upon the completion of their instruction.

SSG John Weary (Shamokin, Pa.) heads the Mobile MEDCAP Team. His four assistants all served as combat medics with 4/31. Medics like SP4 Steve Daniell (Chicago, SP4 Tony Ramella (Huntington, W. Va.), SP4 George Sweat (Orangeburg, S.C.) and SP4 Barry Berral (Puget Sound, Wash.) are turning their talents from combat to pacification with the appreciation of the people of Hiep Duc.

WEST OF WEST - Do you know any interesting or humorous happenings concerning your fellow Polar Bears? Send it into S1. It may be used in West of West.

recons youthful ally

A platoon of "Polar Bears" has found a useful ally in the person of a 13 year-old Vietnamese lad named Hai. In recent days, Hai has been instrumental in eliminating two NVA and a high level VC leader as well as capturing three enemy weapons.

The Recon Platoon of the 4th Bn 31st Inf first became acquainted with Hai several weeks ago in his native hamlet of Phouc Son. The Infantrymen learned that he was an orphan who was being cared for by the local people. The "Polar Bears" shared their hot chow with Hai and gave him candy and sodas.

When the platoon moved out early the next morning, Hai followed along determinedly. He refused offers to go the refugee center at Hiep Duc, declaring that he would rather stay with his American friends.

Hai somehow became separated from the platoon after a couple of days. He was captured by the VC who knew that he had been friendly with American troops. The VC imprisoned Hai beneath a hootch in a dug out cell. He was cramped in this prison for two days. Early in the morning, while the VC guarding him dozed, Hai crept out of the hole and disappeared into the jungle.

Later that day, the men of the Recon Platoon were astonished to see an exhausted Hai stumble into their day position. He related the story of his imprisonment and gave the location of the VC Guerillas.

Acting on this information, an element was sent to search the area. As the 4/31 Infantrymen moved along a winding trail, the encountered four NVA soldiers who appeared to acting as an observation position. As the enemy attempted to scatter, two of them were killed. Two AK-47 rifles and several Chicom grenades were captured. The next day while searching the same area the platoon killed a VC province leader who was carrying a .38 caliber revolver.

Hai remained with his friends in the Recon Platoon for several weeks. He carried a rucksack and a pistol belt with a canteen as well as jungle boots Hai learned how to break down and clean an M-16 rifle, and he soon was proficient concerning the maintenance of an M-50 machine gun. On "circus day" Hai received a ration of soda and c-rations just like the other men of the platoon.

Recently, Hai left the Recon element to accompany his platoon leader, 1st LT Barry Brandon, (Huntsville, Ala.), to LZ West, LT Brandon took over a new post as CO of E Co. "Hai will stay here with me until the paperwork has been completed so he can enter school," explained LT Brandon. Eventually, LT Brandon hopes to provide Hai with a college education in Saigon as soon as he comes of age.

reenlistments accomplished during the month of August 1969,

with option and reassignment shown after each name, were as follows:

HHC:

1. RHEINER, Austin M. - 91B20 - Fort Sam Houston, Texas

A CO:

1. Hazlip, Robert L. - 67A1F - 1st Avn Bde, APO 96384
2. DEBILZAN, Vance J. - ACG 96 - 635th Mil Intel Det, APO 96374

B CO:

1. CARMEL, Paul, F. - ACG 96 - 635th Mil Intel Det, APO 96374
2. HOUSE, John D. - ACG 96 - 635th Mil Intel Det, APO 96374
3. HAMMOND, Robert W. - ACG 96 - 635th Mil Intel Det, APO 96374
4. WOOD, William A. - Sec Gd - 14th Avn Bde [sic Bn], APO 97374
5. GERMOND, Mark M. - ACG 63 - HHC, 723rd Maint Bn, APO 96374

C CO:

NONE

D CO:

1. GARCIA, Ramon P. - Sec Gd - 527th PSC, APO 96238

E CO:

NONE

RECAPITULATION:	Objective	Reenlistments	Percentage Attained
	4	9	225%

D Co NETS 9 NVA

"Polar Bear" Infantrymen killed nine NVA soldiers during a day of heavy fighting in "Happy Valley. Delta Company encountered an estimated company-size NVA unit in rugged mountain terrain where the enemy was dug in caves under rocks described by "Polar Bear" Infantrymen as being "bigger than a house."

The first contact came when a platoon-sized element of D Co. surprised five NVA near a stream. Four NVA died in a hail of small arms fire while the fifth NVA escaped up a rocky hillside. As the 4/31 element gave chase, they came under a barrage of automatic weapons fire from the rocks above.

"They opened up on us at a range of ten meters, "declared 1LT Juan Gonzales. "They rolled Chicom grenades down on us from up in the rocks!"

D Co Commanding Officer, CPT Norman Mekkelson, took a machine gun squad and raced to the aid of his stricken platoon. "The rocks and heavy brush really made it tough for us to get to the platoon that was pinned down, "explained SP4 Jerry Faraci. SP4 David Roland heard a noise as he approached a darkened cave entrance. Roland dropped a hand grenade in the cave and moved on.

As the gun squad reached the trapped platoon, the enemy opened up again with heavy automatic weapons fire. SP4 Donald Pettengill sprayed fire at the enemy positions with his M-60 machine gun which allowed the rest of the squad to take cover. PFC Konald Eades and PFC John Houts flanked to the right and knocked out an enemy sniper position.

At the end of the day's fighting, LT Gonzales discovered several enemy bullets had ripped through the bandolier of M-16 magazines that he wore around his waist. Lt Gonzales was unhurt, but said he "almost passed out when he saw those bullet holes."

Charlie company clicks in happy valley

"Polar Bear" Infantrymen killed eight enemy soldiers and captured three others during recent action in "Happy Valley". The 4/31 soldiers received close support from "Saber" gunships from the 1st Squadron/1st Cavalry [**D 1/1st Air Cav**] which accounted for three additional enemy killed.

Charlie Company under CPT Thomas Murphy (Savannah, Ga.), made sporadic contact with VC/NVA soldiers who were apparently surprised by the appearance of the 4/31 element in the area.

A Platoon-size element commanded by SFC Marshall Robertson (Portsmouth, VA.) proceeded cautiously down a winding, jungle trail. They observed numerous hootches and tunnels as well as a large number of sandal tracks. Nguyen Van Ly, the "Kit Carson" known to most Polar Bears as "20", was accompanying SP4 William Rozier (St. Paul, N.C.) on point.

Suddenly, the alert "Kit Carson" detected movement in a thicket ahead. "I deployed my men right away, and we soon had the enemy surrounded," declared SFC Robertson. As they attempted to evade, three NVA and one VC were killed by small arms fire. A detailed search of the area yielded a hidden tunnel entrance. Demolition of the tunnel produced a loud secondary explosion. Twelve Chicom were also located near the scene of the action.

Another platoon-size element under 2nd LT James Simms (Clarendon Hills, Illinois) killed three VC as they moved to investigate enemy casualties inflicted by the supporting "Saber" gunships. the helicopters aided the advancing infantrymen by marking the enemy's location with smoke grenades. SGT Albert Gentry (Bumpass, Va.) observed several packs hanging on a fence. Advancing slowly, he located three VC in a bunker underneath a hootch. The VC attempted to flee from the "Polar Bears" and died under a hail of fire. Several AK-47 rifles were captured during the course of this engagement. Three additional enemy dead were discovered in the immediate vicinity: the victims of the devastating fire from the "Saber" gunships [**D 1/1 Air Cav**].

Comic: Soldiers observe a large explosion coming from their Ammo Dump. A senior NCO makes this comment to an officer observing the explosion, "BUTTERFINGERS SPRATT'S BACK FROM LEAVE SIR!!"

West of West
LTC Cecil M. Henry CO
SP4 William Crawford Reporter

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