



# WELCOME TO "A WALK WITH THE 35TH"



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## 03 July 66

*As I Remember It*

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After a brief period spent at base camp we were back out on Operation Paul Revere on or about 15 June 66. After about 2 weeks humping the hills looking for "Charlie" we were told we would be securing a portion of the BN. H.Q. perimeter. This was supposed to last about a week so when I dug my foxhole. I made it, along with our hooch, a very comfortable position.

We weren't there but a couple of days when the word came down that we would be moving out that evening to hook up with the rest of the Company. This news came right after chow so we were told to get ready to move out ASAP with darkness only a few hours away.

As I remember we moved out about 1830 hrs. Everyone was cursing because we were looking forward to staying put for a week without constantly being on the move. We walked for 2 ½ hours without stopping with an occasional pause for the point to get its compass bearings. A great deal of this ground pounding was done through ankle and knee deep mud which made the trip all the more maddening. We arrived at the company's location around 2100 hours just as it was getting dark.

The next day we were split up into four man positions securing a tank trail that 3/4th Cav. was using to move rapidly across our A.O. Our M-60 was in the last position with the Lt. along with a 90mm recoilless rifle that was manned by Paul Solis and someone else who I can't remember. As I recall this was 2 July 66. That evening one of our positions spotted a small group of NVA walking along the tank trail. I believe there were 5 to 7 of them. The four man positions did not know what was behind the first group so with help not too close by they were reluctant to open up on them.

This infuriated Lt. Sturdivandt and he gave orders for the next outpost to open up the moment they saw them. They too let them pass. Once again the Lt. went ballistic. He instructed us to set up the 60 pointed at the crest in the trail and that we were going to annihilate them the moment they came over the ridge. Well they must have veered off the trail because we never saw them. The Lt. got the whole company along with 3/4th Cav together and we searched the area for most of the night with negative results.

We returned to our positions exhausted and after figuring out the remaining guard duty, dropped quickly off to sleep.\*\*

On the morning of 3 July 66 we were awakened at 6 A.M. by Lt. Sturdivandt informing us that we were continuing the search so eat something quick because we were moving out soon. The platoon was going to re-group at the point on the trail where the NVA were first spotted.

When we all got there the Lt. split us up in to two groups of 22 each. He would take a group west toward Cambodia and the other group would search in another direction. Because he was going toward Cambodia he thought it would be best if he had both M-60's with him.

As we came to the end of the tank trail we moved into a heavily wooded area where we found a trail that went west and then turned south. While walking on this trail we passed another trail that headed east. After a while the trail ended so we decided to go back and investigate the east bound trail. We were only on this trail when suddenly we had entered what appeared to be an enemy base camp.



**Overhead View – Beginning at 1030h and lasting until well past 1600h 3 July 1966**

We spilt up and searched the camp and we re-assembled and agreed that it was between Bn. and Co. size. We all also agreed that we did not like the feeling we were getting from this location. It was too quiet. We all felt that we had no business being here and that it would be a good idea if we left quickly. It was close to noon so the consensus of opinion was to go somewhere, heat and eat some C-rats and continue the search after chow.

We formed a column and our 60 was bringing up the rear with the other 60 up at the front of the patrol. We hadn't gone but a few steps when the rounds started popping. Thinking we had found the ones we were looking for we figured we had them outnumbered and would soon have them right where we wanted them. Boy, were we wrong.

Charlie sent in a few to lure us out into the ambush that they had prepared for us. It wasn't long before they slammed the door shut and had us completely surrounded.

We didn't know this right away.

As we were at the rear of the column Sgt. Garcia hustled us up on line with the rest of the squad who were assaulting to our front. I think we were up too far because they were able to



flank us with ease. "Smitty" and I were moving, dropping and firing the 60 every few seconds. Every time "Smitty" said that he had got one I kept encouraging him.



**Photo by Marshall Jackson Bravo 1/35<sup>th</sup> 1966**

We settled behind a good size tree and I continued to feed the gun with ammo as "Smitty" kept the 60 humming. I looked to my left and I saw Sgt. Garcia lying face down next to a foxhole. I informed "Smitty" that I was going to see if I could help him. I grabbed my shotgun and ran to the foxhole and jumped in. I saw a few NVA and I shot at them while I was calling for the medic to come and assist the Sarge. I took out my Buck knife and cut open his jungle fatigue shirt and exposed what looked like a gunshot wound in his left upper back. I had no way of determining

whether this was an exit or entrance wound so I took out my first aid pouch removed the bandage and placed it over the wound. He was too big to turn over to check for more wounds, plus I was shooting my shotgun at every movement I saw in front of our position. I kept screaming for the medic who I figured was treating other wounded men from our patrol. When (medic) Brockington got to us I asked for his M-16 so that I could provide some cover fire while he worked on Sgt. Garcia. I switched to semi-auto to conserve rounds and began firing single shots across the front of our position to keep the NVA from firing at the medic and the Sarge.

After the 20th round I dropped back down into the foxhole to change magazines. They must have been counting because the moment I stopped firing an AW burst came in and killed both Brockington and Garcia.

At this instant I saw a figure moving to my left. I spun around and fired 2 rounds at him. I didn't know if I hit him so I lobbed a grenade in his direction. I looked around but saw nothing. "Smitty" was calling for me to come join him and Colette so we could figure out what the hell was going on and what we could do about it. I fired off a magazine from the 16 and grabbed my shotgun and crawled back to where "Smitty" and Colette were.

We all knew we had been surrounded and were trying to figure something out when I saw an NVA crawling up on our position. I told everyone not to move that I saw one. "Smitty" quickly said to shoot him. The one I saw from the foxhole must have eluded me because just as I prepared to shoot the NVA I heard a round go off and a split second later I was screaming in pain. My left lower back felt like it was hit by a train and my entire body burned like hell.

Lying in the prone position and being shot from my right rear, the round entered my right buttock and traveled diagonally through my pelvis missing my lower spine by less than an inch. I rolled onto my back and lost control of my arms and legs. I was thrashing and screaming that I had been hit.

"Smitty" grabbed me and rolled me back onto my stomach. He and Colette removed my web gear and loosened my belt so they could have better access to my wound. There was a gaping hole in my lower back that was an exit wound that was the size of a big lemon. "Smitty cut off

a hunk of his T-shirt and stuffed it into the hole. After a while I calmed down and the first thing I did was wiggle my feet and toes. When they worked I felt a little better.



**Haze Howard KIA 7-3-66 Photo Marshall Jackson**

I had no idea whether I got the shot off or not and I had no idea where my weapon was. The doctors' told me weeks later that the round caused significant shock to my spinal cord and that is why the pain was so excruciating and any movement only caused the pain to intensify. I was lucky I was again told. If the bullet hit the spine I probably would have been paralyzed and if it hit the abdominal aorta I would have bled to death in about 30 seconds.

Shortly after that "Smitty" and Colette went off to try to gather the valuables, dog tags, and weapons of the men who were KIA. While they were gone I must have

been slipping in and out of consciousness as I laid there with my face in the dirt. I was awakened to the sounds of Vietnamese voices who sounded like they were right on top of me. I stayed as still as possible so that they thought I was dead. I thought of being dragged off and made a POW.

A few moments later the voices ceased and I hoped that "Smitty" would return fast.

After "Smitty and Colette left me they got as far as RTO Billy Lewis, who "Smitty" was very close to because they were Arkansas "Home boys", and Sgt. David R. Stone. When "Smitty" saw Sgt. Stone sitting against a tree KIA he lost it and began to cry uncontrollably. Colette slapped him in the face and told him to "snap out of it, now is not the time for grieving." "Smitty" composed himself and returned to my position a short time later to check up on me and to tell me who had been killed.

When "Smitty" began to tell me who he saw that was dead I began to cry. I knew of Garcia and Brockington and had crawled passed Hatchett on my way to hook up with "Smitty" and Colette. So when he told me of the others it was just too much for me to handle and I started to cry. But I was brought back to reality real fast when "Smitty" said these next few words.

"They stole the medic's bag, our camera, and I see they got your Buck knife off of your web gear."

I couldn't grasp what he was telling me. But when I raised my head and looked to my right I saw my web gear and the missing Buck knife and sheath. Then it dawned on me. When I heard those voices so close to me, one of them must have been stealing my knife. They were right on top of me. If I so much as twitched I probably would have been finished off with my own knife.

Occasionally I would raise my head and look around to see if the rest of the company had found us yet. All along, the artillery rounds kept dropping on top of our position and the sound of helicopter gunships overhead continued. Plus the monsoon rains kept drenching us on and off all afternoon. Also the artillery rounds were causing large trees to come crashing down all around our position.

Things would quiet down for a while and I thought the NVA had taken off. Then someone would moan or cry out for the medic and a burst from an AW would silence them for good. All day I kept pleading with them to be quiet if they could.

"The medic is dead so don't call out for him, he isn't coming to help you."

These poor guys either didn't hear me as I was talking in whispers or they couldn't comprehend what I was telling them. The sound of them crying out as they were hit again and again has haunted me for the past 39 years. I will never forget those awful, agonizing cries.

And then it happened. I saw John Dewey who I knew was with the other half of the platoon. If he was here, there had to be others.

There were.

Next I saw Haze Howard the other medic who was with their unit. I called to him and when he came to me I begged him for a shot of morphine. I had been in agonizing pain for hours and couldn't stand it a moment longer. As he was preparing to give me the injection he was shot in the arm and he now had become a wounded soldier like me and some of the remaining original 22 men who had made the initial contact.

Out of those 22, 15 had been killed and out of the remaining 7, 4 had been wounded. I didn't know it but "Smitty" had been shot in the arm. Sgt. Totten our FO had also been wounded in the arm by fragmentation from an enemy grenade he was throwing back at the NVA. His RTO PFC Isaac Quick had been wounded as well. PFC Booker T. McCoy would later succumb to his injuries on 7Jul66 at Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas. To my knowledge SP4 Colette was wounded later in the day perhaps while we were pulling out. He was shot in the upper leg.

Dewey had come over to check on me and I asked where the others were. He said that they were coming. They fought their way in with 5 or 6 APC's from 3/4th Cav and they were able to break the enemy encirclement. When I saw the armor my spirits soared. I quickly figured out the area we were in was too tight to bring in tanks but the sight of the APC's was good enough.

Ha Ha Charlie here's where you get your butt kicked big time.

Wait a minute. What the hell is going on here? He's not running for his life, he's staying put and fighting all the harder.



I couldn't believe it. The crap hit the fan worse than it had all day. I saw an enemy machine gun crew brazenly out in the open firing at will. I couldn't believe my eyes. They were fanatical; like they didn't care one bit that we had armor.

The machine gun crew didn't last too long. Our M-79 man Jimmy Morgan dropped a well-placed round right in the middle of them and took them out. But it kept up. Why?

It was the most chaotic scene I have ever witnessed in my life. I was scared and felt I would never see another day. I cried when I thought of my parents reading the telegram announcing that I had been killed in action.



About 4 of the PC's had formed a wall and most of our fighting was coming from there. One of the other PC's had begun working its way toward the enemy trying to collect the wounded. One stopped about 25 yards from my position and had begun taking on wounded men. I yelled for them to come and get me but the noise was too loud and no one heard me.

"What about me?"

Just then it happened.



"BOOM!!!"

At first I thought they had lobbed a grenade into the open top of the PC. "Wow, thank God I didn't make it on to that PC."

Behind me I heard another PC and I turned on my belly to investigate. Another PC was loading wounded. I screamed as loud as I could for someone to come and get me but no one could as they too were badly wounded. These were men from the first PC that had been hit plus wounded men from the rescue group that had to endure the NVA's fanatical stand.

If I was going to get on that PC I had to somehow get to it some 15 yards away. So I began to crawl on my belly. Every move caused a level of pain I had never felt before. But I had to get there before it pulled out without me. Finally I made it to the rear door of the PC. Guys who were sitting on the floor of the vehicle reached out and pulled me in by the seat of my pants.

I had no idea but "Smitty" who had been on the first one was also on this one as well. I was on the floor on my belly. The vehicle was loaded with wounded. From the bottom to the open top there were wounded GI's.

We started moving and then the APC got hit causing a tremendous explosion.

Everyone got out of the track and I was alone on the floor. That's when I felt the heat. The sucker was on fire. My guess was the fuel tank got hit. I also looked down and saw a piece of shrapnel sticking out of my inner thigh. I pulled this out and determined that if I didn't get up and out I was going to cook in this death trap.

So with all my strength I stood up. My pants that had been loosened by "Smitty" and Colette earlier in the day dropped down to my jungle boots. I waddled over to the doorway, covered my face with my right arm and jumped out through the fire. My body quickly caught fire so I knew enough to drop to the ground and began rolling back and forth while I slapped at the flames burning my legs. Fortunately the monsoon rains left my uniform soaking wet or I would have been burned worse than 25 to 30 % of my body.



4th man from right is Kenneth (KIA 3 JUL 66), 1st man from the right is SSG Jim Gunter, 2nd man from the right is Jim Barrett Photo by Marshall Jackson

After I had the fire out I rolled onto my belly and I realized that I was un-armed. What was I going to do if I saw one?

Then I heard, "Psst. Psst".

I looked and there about 20 yards away was Ray Buzzard one of the guys from one of the other platoons. He said for me to crawl over to him. When I got to him he told me to crawl onto his back. With me on his back, he crawled the both of us over to where the remaining PC's had formed a wall of defense.

Once we were there the men tried to comfort me and got me ready to be loaded onto a third APC for a removal attempt. With a belt under my arms two men dragged me over to the rear of a PC and loaded me onto it. On this one there were wounded men who had been on the two previous ones that had been hit. We were packed in it like sardines.

The driver was conferring with the unit commander on his radio as to the best way to leave the area. We were all pretty tense so in not so kind words we told him to just get this thing moving. He did so and we began to move. Slowly at first. Then a little faster. And now faster still.

As we moved through the enemy base camp our APC was crunching over saplings as it roared through. As we went, the gooks were peppering the track with AW fire. Men who were lying on the open top of the vehicle were being shot again and again. There screams reverberating through the vehicle and my ears.

"My God leave them the alone they've been shot enough."



Left to right:SSG Sharpe, Ozisy McCroy, Ralph Blackerby (KIA 67), Robert Catling (KIA 3 JUL 66), SSG Jim Gunter, James Bellomy, Jim Brassard Photo by Marshall Jackson

This one was the lucky one I guess because we made it out into a large clearing that would make a perfect LZ for the choppers to come and take us away from this insanity. The men began removing the wounded and lining us up as we awaited the dust off choppers. Sgt. Wong came over to check on me and I asked him for a cigarette which he lit for me.

As I lay there smoking it I looked up and saw the "Fast Movers" as they descended from the sky to drop their load on the remaining NVA after the last Americans had withdrawn to the safety of the LZ. I clapped and cheered and I was then lifted and carried to a waiting chopper.



It lifted off and I wondered what's next.



Dustoff Joe Kline 174<sup>th</sup> AHC Artwork

After a short flight we landed at the BN Aid station. As I was being carried into the tent I saw the Chaplain and First Sgt. DeRado standing at the entrance. They followed me to the exam table they placed me on and asked me what happened.

I began to tell them what a mess it was and began to name my dead comrades. After 3 or 4 names I got so choked up I couldn't speak. The Chaplain placed his hand on my shoulder and they left me so the medical staff could assess my injuries.

A stretcher was placed on the floor next to my exam table. I looked down and it was Sgt. Moore my friend from NY. He was two weeks short and was packing it in after 10 years.

"We made it MO."

"Yeah Giorgi we made it."

From there it was on to Brigade hospital and then to the 85th EVAC at Qui Nhon.

The next day, July 4<sup>th</sup>, Sgt. Totten who was walking wounded came by my bed to tell me what he had learned about the previous day.

Before he could speak I asked him how Sgt. Moore was. He told me that he had died during the night. Again I cried.

He left me and, the next day, before I left for Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, he again came by to fill me in. He was told that we had been up against a Bn of NVA regulars who had possibly just gotten back from a re-supply and maybe even an R&R. They were ready to fight and go the distance. The Brigade commander went into the area to get a body count and to retrieve all America dead and our equipment. The body count I was told was well over 125.

That afternoon I left for Clark and from there back to the "World."

My question is why is so little said about that day? It was one of the biggest battles the Regiment was involved in during their time in country. Was their base camp in Cambodia where so many of them were? If there were reports of large enemy troop movement in the area why were we operating with such a small amount of men? I want some answers. I think that "Smitty", Colette, Quick, Sgt. Totten and the others that fought there and lived through that day all deserve some answers. The question is will we ever get them?

Respectfully prepared and submitted with the help and contributions of my very good friend and comrade in arms James F. Smith of Star City Arkansas.

The faces of the men who gave it all that day



Curtis Brockington



Christopher Brooks



Tommie Campbell



Robert Catling



Daniel Fields



Eurey Hatchett



Haze Howard



Joe Johnson



Herbert Lapp



William Lewis



Raymond McGarvey



Charles Moore



Robert Morris



Harold Reed



Kenneth Schaefer



Gilberto Soto-Garcia



David Stone



Jasper Sturdivant



Bernard Walinski



## **DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS**

### **JASPER STURDIVANT**

**For extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam. On 3 July 1966, Second Lieutenant Sturdivant was leading a two squad patrol during a search and destroy mission near Thang Duc. When his unit received intense hostile fire from a reinforced Viet Cong company, Second Lieutenant Sturdivant and many of his men were seriously wounded. As the insurgent onslaught continued, a portion of his hasty defense was overrun and the remainder of his force was surrounded. Despite the severity of his wounds and repeated attacks by the fanatical Viet Cong, Second Lieutenant Sturdivant rallied his isolated force, radioed for reinforcements, and continued to direct and encourage his comrades. Realizing that his force was about to be overrun, Second Lieutenant Sturdivant, with complete disregard for his safety, called artillery fire onto his own position in an effort to break the encirclement. He continued to operate the radio and fire his weapon until his ammunition was expended. Fully aware that he was critically wounded, Second Lieutenant Sturdivant disassembled his weapon, placed the bolt under his body, and died. Second Lieutenant Sturdivant's extraordinary heroism at the cost of his life was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflects great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.**

**Authority: By direction of the President, under the provisions of the Act of Congress, approved 25 July 1963, and Department of the Army message 782774, dated 19 September 1966.**