



WELCOME TO "A WALK WITH THE 35TH"



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RECON PLATOON, 1ST BN, 35TH INF., 3rd Bde. 25TH I.D.

JUNE 24, 1966

My name is Ed Hill. I was a PFC with the 1/35th, Recon Platoon, 3rd Brigade, 25th Div. stationed in Pleiku, RVN. About 4 or 5 days prior to June 24th, SFC Allan T. Shishido, our Plt. Sgt. whom we fondly called "Plat", held a pre-mission briefing with our Recon Platoon. Our platoon leader, 1LT Robert J. Familetti, was on another assignment. Therefore Plat was our leader. He briefed us on the terrain and the infiltrating NVA units. The NVA's mission was to cut South Vietnam in half. He also told us that some units from the 4th Div. had "stepped on it" in this area. My squad leader was SSG Charles W. Quillen.

A few days later, our recon platoon had been out on patrol for a couple of days. We had run out of about everything edible as well as water. A log bird (resupply helicopter) had not been able to get in to us because the weather had us socked in.



4.2" Mortar

On June 24, 1966, we woke at first light and were told to saddle up to move out and check the area. We could hear sounds of wood cutters and digging noises relatively nearby. We stayed inside the tree line and held up while our point man, Sgt. Michael G. Padilla, crawled over to the edge of the tree line for a better look. We could see approximately 50 to 100 NVA about 100 meters or so across the clearing, which we called a natural LZ. They were digging bunkers and holes, and cutting trees for logs to fortify their bunkers. I think at that time we called in 4.2 mortars from battalion. I can't exactly recall the timing. After the shelling ended, we were told to move to the target zone and check it out.

Staying inside the tree line, we found an NVA outpost. We got online and charged the outpost position. During the charge, I tripped over some commo wire that led to that outpost. My buddy, Sp/4 Dale Johnson thought I was hit. Sgt. Damien K. Kaaihue charged into the bunker and killed every man. (Later in the day, Sgt Kaaihue was wounded in the left shoulder.) Plat radioed our situation to our battalion commander, LTC Bob Kingston. His orders were to "check it out".

We were soon crossing a little stream. SSG Quillen told us to fill our canteens. He said as soon as we checked out this situation, they were going to pick us up and take us back to the oasis for a

well-deserved rest. Some of us felt a little casual about filling up our little canteens and just took a big drink of water because we were getting picked up shortly.

We formed up and then started moving out on line (probably five or six feet apart) toward the target area. Recon numbered about 25 to 30 men. I was located about in the center of the formation. I remember Clarence LaFrance was on my left. Allan J. Altieri, and my good buddy, Billy Green were on my right. We passed by some freshly dug NVA holes. When we had moved maybe 30-40 feet, one round went off. We all hit the ground. Someone told me later it was an NVA officer signaling to open fire on us. We had run into an NVA Regimental rest station. They were well trained and organized. They fired low to the ground where we fell, causing many GI casualties within minutes. It seemed like the whole world had opened up with incoming machine gun rounds being fired at us and hand grenades being thrown at us. I had landed in a relatively open area and was lying flat on my face. I could hear the NVA talking.

Keeping my head down, I threw a grenade in the direction of the voices. Someone from behind me yelled that I had thrown it about 100 yards (adrenaline I guess) and overthrown them. He yelled to "throw it a little shorter this time, Hill". I managed to throw a shorter one that did some damage because we could hear the NVA shouting and screaming.

I yelled to Sp/4 Clarence LaFrance to my left and asked if he could cover me because I wanted to get out of this open area and get to his position. His position was behind a mound of dirt about 2-3 foot wide by 1 foot high, and a little tree. So LaFrance jumped up on one knee, shot off a burst of about five rounds before his magazine ran out, as I am scrambling toward him. My helmet fell off. I scrambled back, got the helmet, and scrambled over to his position. Machine gun fire was everywhere. LaFrance and I fought from that position for the rest of the day.



NVA Attack

NVA would pop up. We would knock them down. To hold the NVA off of us, during the course of the battle, Forward Air Control (FAC) brought in A1-Es, and jets (or as we called them Fast Movers) with bombs. Battalion brought in gunships, and artillery. The NVA tried to charge us a few times, but our return fire accuracy kept them in their positions. Sgt. Franklin Robinson, I found out later, was the only one to survive to the right of me. He alone was holding the flank and doing a real great job. Every time the NVA would try our right flank, Robinson would knock a few of them down and they would retreat.

There was an NVA machine gun shooting at us off to my left front. He was shooting too close for comfort, just inches from us. This kid from Chicago, Dave Preston I think, kept firing his chunker (M-79 Grenade Launcher) into that hole. It would be quiet for a while, then the next thing you knew there would be more gun fire from the same machine gun hole. We later found out that there was a trench leading to that gun and when a gunner was knocked out they would send in another gunner and Preston would knock him out, too.

Doc had all or most of the wounded to my left behind a huge ant hill and he was firing away doing his part to keep the enemy from overrunning us. During another outburst of enemy fire, one of our

machine gunners, SP/4 Aaron M. Hopkins, got stitched across his body and was killed. The assistant machine gunner, whose name escapes me, was a new guy. The new guy was hit and completely knocked onto his back. A little later, I saw that same assistant machine gunner back in the fight and firing his machine gun. Later, he told me that a round had hit him directly in the front of the helmet and knocked him backwards. It stunned him for a while, but he managed to get back under his machine gun and kept up steady fire and did a great job the rest of the day.

The firefight seemed to ebb and flow. It would get real quiet for a while and then the firing would start up again when they would try our flanks. Guys kept yelling around for everyone to hold on that A Co. was coming. Finally, off to my right behind a tree, I saw a wonderful sight. Cpt. Tony Bizantz, C.O. of A Co., dressed in an OD t-shirt, was firing away with his M-16. Someone yelled, "Hill, Hill, LeFrance, come on back".

By this time we were all wounded, half starved, and suffering from heat exhaustion. We had Chicom grenade fragments embedded all over our legs. We picked them out with our fingers. Duane D. Swanson "Swanie", LeFrance, and I started working our way back to the LZ. They were going to pick us up and take us to Doc Baldwin's medical tent in Pleiku.

Charlie Company, 1/35th and a platoon of tanks came in as a blocking force from the rear of the NVA regiment's position. They got into a big firefight. There were so many NVA scrambling to get out of there that our tanks actually fired Fleshite rounds at each other to knock the NVA off of their tanks.

The NVA were now trying to escape back into Cambodia through the very same tree line we had been in that morning. We were weak and groggy and walking to the LZ and we could see the NVA running in small groups. We actually stopped and fired at groups of them and a couple went down. That sent the rest on their way.

We finally made our way to the LZ. Before you knew it, Swanie and I were sharing one can of fruit cocktail with the guys. It tasted just wonderful. Remember, we had not eaten in a couple of days with the exception of a little coffee with creamer. LTC. Robert C. Kingston had flown down to check things out. Because we didn't have enough medevac's available, they used his bird to fly us back to Pleiku to the hospital tents.



Pleiku 1966

By the time we arrived at the hospital tents, it was already dark. The medics stuck IVs in our arms right away. It didn't take long for us to start feeling better. When Cpt. Jack P. "Doc" Baldwin came in to check on us, he knew all of us because he had come over with us from Schofield Barracks. I said, "Doc, there are two things you can do, if you would". First - After we have some food (we eventually had scrambled eggs), we would like to have some cold beer. And we need you to write it on my medical sheet or the medics won't do it. Doc said no problem and he wrote on my medical sheets "This man able to drink cold beer." What a great guy! Second -Someone had brought a wounded NVA soldier into our tent. I asked Doc if he could have him moved into another tent. We didn't feel very tolerant right then. Doc Baldwin had the NVA soldier moved.

They kept me in the hospital overnight. The next day I was released back to the company with a 30 day profile. HA! That same day, I caught the log bird to the Battalion LZ. When I arrived, the guys told me about going back into the battle area to retrieve our KIA's that morning. Sp/4 Dale Johnson had been on point and as he approached the ant hill that Doc had used to shelter our wounded during the firefight, an NVA officer jumped out and fired point blank at him. Miraculously, Dale was not hit and he put four rounds in the NVA's chest area and picked up a new NVA 9mm pistol and holster as a souvenir.

Writing this has not been easy. However, I want to honor all the brave men in Recon and the other units that fought in this battle. June 24, 1966 will forever be imbedded in my memory. On that date, Recon lost about 50% who were killed in action, and almost all of the rest of the men were wounded in action. I will never forget the horror of seeing my buddies die before my eyes. We were greatly outnumbered. And, I will never forget the valor I witnessed to keep us from being overrun. As I mentioned earlier, every man to my right was killed during the first moments of that battle, with the exception of Sgt. Franklin Robinson.

Written by: Edwin E. Hill, Recon 1/35th 1966

Author's notes: I want to thank Jim Sinclair, 1/35th Armorer (among his many duties) for helping me with valuable information. I would like to thank my wife, Linda, for her encouragement and assistance in organizing my thoughts.