



WELCOME TO "A WALK WITH THE 35TH"



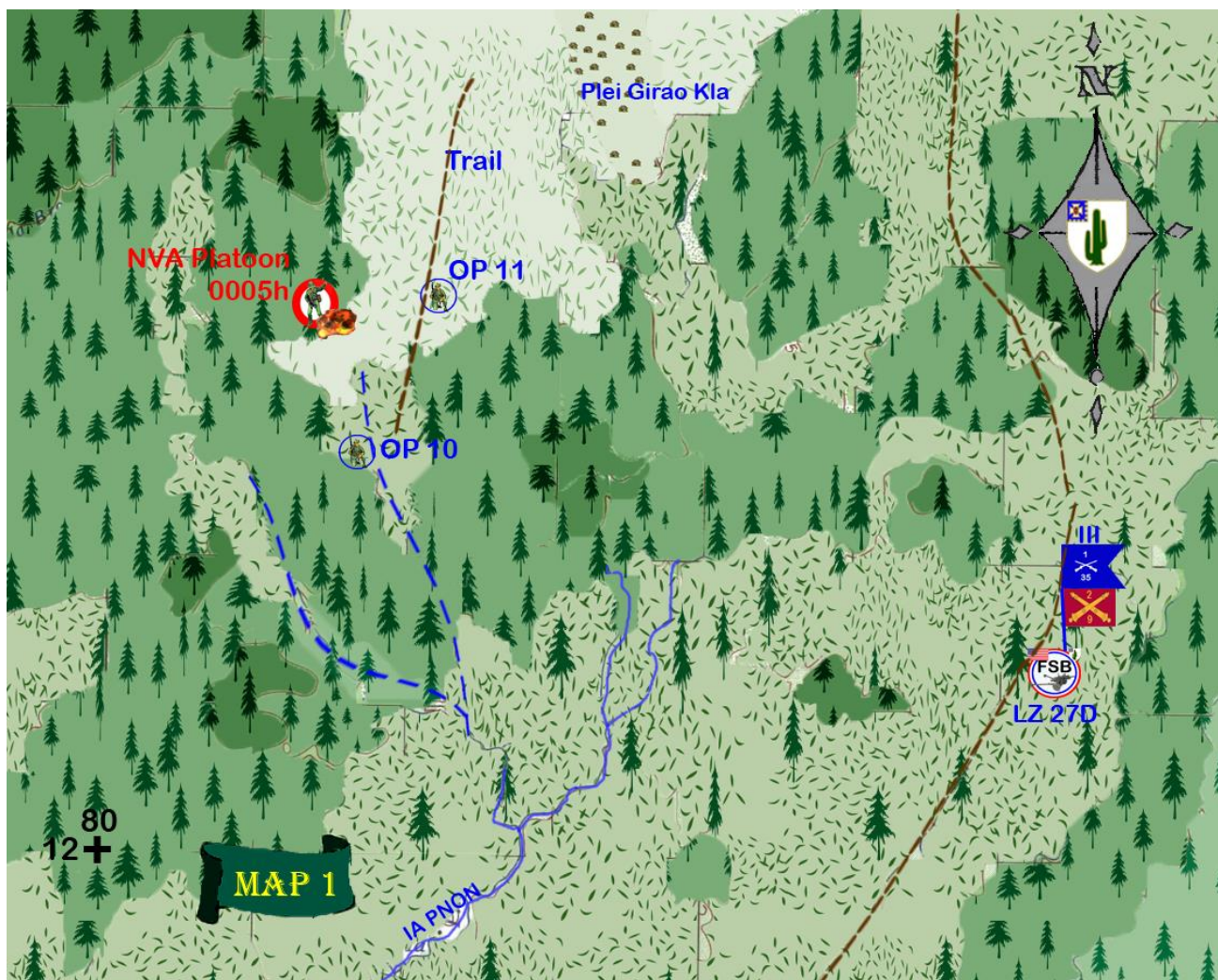
[Back to History Index](#) | [35th Infantry Regiment ASSN Home](#) | [Contact](#)

A Fight of Survival - 3 July 1966

The following description of the battle on 3 July is taken from accounts provided by Thomas Giorgi and Jim "Smitty" Smith, 3d Platoon, B Co and Jim Barrett, 1st Platoon (the relief force), B Co, 1/35. As well as details from the daily journals (DJ) 1/35th, 7th Air Force AARs, and 3d Bde TF Operations Report.

(DJ 2 July 2215H: B Co OP 10, YA816146, reported movement 100 meters to their front. Called in indirect fire with negative results.)

(DJ 2 July 2330H: B Co OP 11, YA 822157, reported a platoon size force passing in the vicinity of YA 822157. B Co moved reinforcements from N to S to set up blocking positions. At 0005H, 3 July, B Co brought artillery fire on an estimated platoon of NVA at YA813157. Failing to establish new contact with the enemy, B Co OPs were reestablished at 0210H, 3 July.) **(MAP 1)**



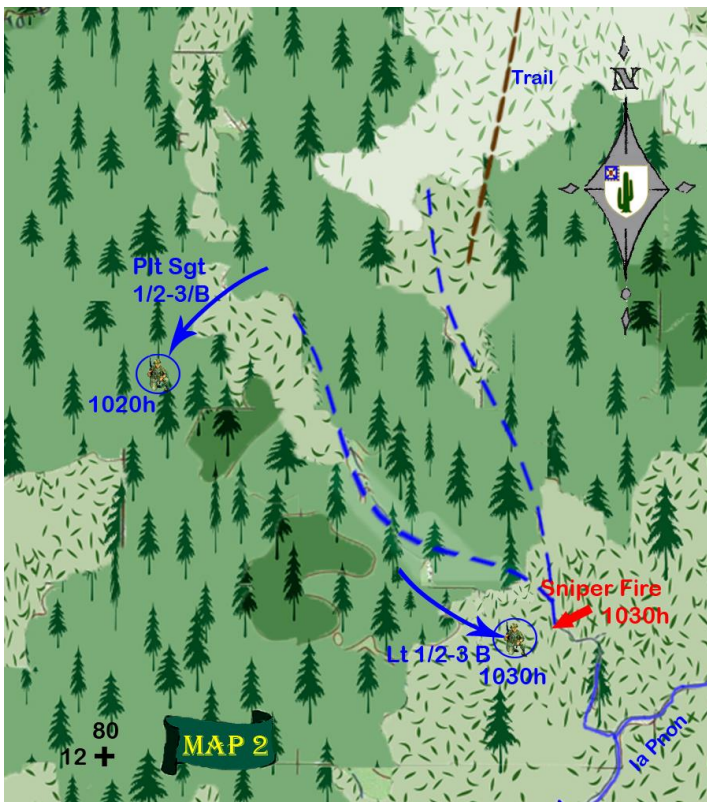
(Giorgi) We returned to our positions exhausted and after figuring out the remaining guard duty, dropped quickly off to sleep.

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 the night before.

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.

(DJ 1020H: One half of the 3d platoon led by the Platoon Sergeant was located to the north at YA805145.)

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.
(MAP 2)



(DJ 1030H: Lt Sturdivant reported his half of the platoon had received sniper fire from the vicinity of YA826127. Details of the encounter would follow once the situation developed.)

We split 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, eat 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.

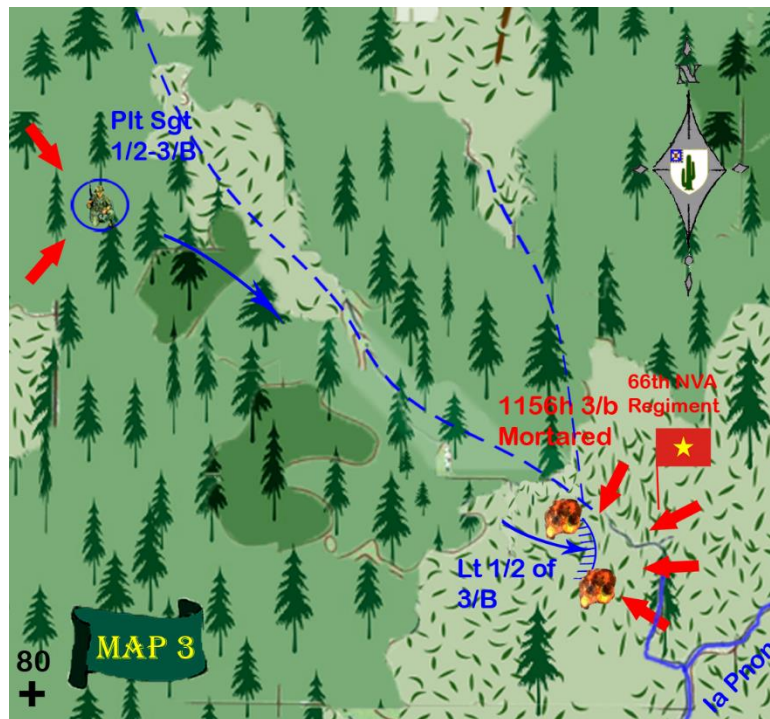
We didn't know this right away.

(DJ 1156H: Sturdivant's section of third platoon is receiving mortar fire and the unit has two WIA at YA 826127. Artillery is called in. The northern half of the platoon was notified to help, but they too had become surrounded.)

As we were at the rear of the column Sgt. Garcia hustled us up online 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.

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 M16 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. (Giorgi)

(Smitty) As the fighting progressed, it was now around mid-day. I finally settled close to Sgt Totten, part of the FO team who was attached to us. He had access to a radio and was literally calling in artillery on our own position. It was breaking tops of trees right beside us. I remember telling him to keep it coming in because that was the only thing that was going to keep the enemy away until help could arrive.

The monsoon rains had started sometime during the battle. We were all wet and I literally made mud out of the dirt and smeared it over my face and exposed skin for camouflage. I stayed right next to Sgt. Totten for quite some time, maybe two hours or so. (Smitty)

(Giorgi) 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.

The other two squads had broken through their contact and joined the rest of the 3d platoon. They too became part of the continuing fight to survive.



Haze Howard photo by Marshall Jackson

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. (Giorgi)

(Smitty) The activity started to slow down and there was only a shot heard every now and then. Me and Dale Colette got up and started walking around the area trying to help the wounded and gathering up weapons and ammunition, both enemy and American guns were collected. We piled them all together in one pile. You see, we thought the fight was over

And we were just waiting for help to arrive to get us out.

While we were checking things out, I remember seeing Lt. Sturdivant sitting against a tree, still alive with bullet holes all over his body. I tried to help him; but knew in my own mind that he would soon die. He told me two or three times, "Help me and I will make you a scene." This has never left my memory all these years and I have yet to know what he meant by this.

I saw one of my best buddies, William E Lewis, dead. He was one of my best buddies all the way from Fort Polk, LA., then to Hawaii, and on to Vietnam. Another was Sgt Joe E Johnston, whom I recall laying on his back. He had a bullet hole in his forehead that ants were crawling all around.

Sgt. Stone was also killed, and after having seen so many of my comrades killed, I just lost control and began to cry. Dale slapped me and made me realize that this was not the time for that. (Smitty)

(Giorgi) Out of those 22, 15 had been killed and out of the remaining seven, four 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 7 Jul 66 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 five or six APC's from the 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." (Giorgi)

The Relief Force

(DJ 1320H: The first platoon of B Co, operating some 8000 kilometers to the north was regrouped and loaded on to APCs of the 3/4th Cav and moving to the battle area.)

(Barrett) That day July 3, 1966 was a typical morning out in the boonies for the men of the 1st Platoon, B Co, 1/35th. As I remember we were late getting info as to where our AO was and what we were going to be doing. A little later word was that our 3rd platoon had made some contact. Then a short time passed and we learned that the contact was heavy and they needed assistance; then becoming urgent and we were to hook up with a Cav unit who was going to rush transport us on their APCs to the 3rd platoon contact position where they were pinned down under heavy fire.

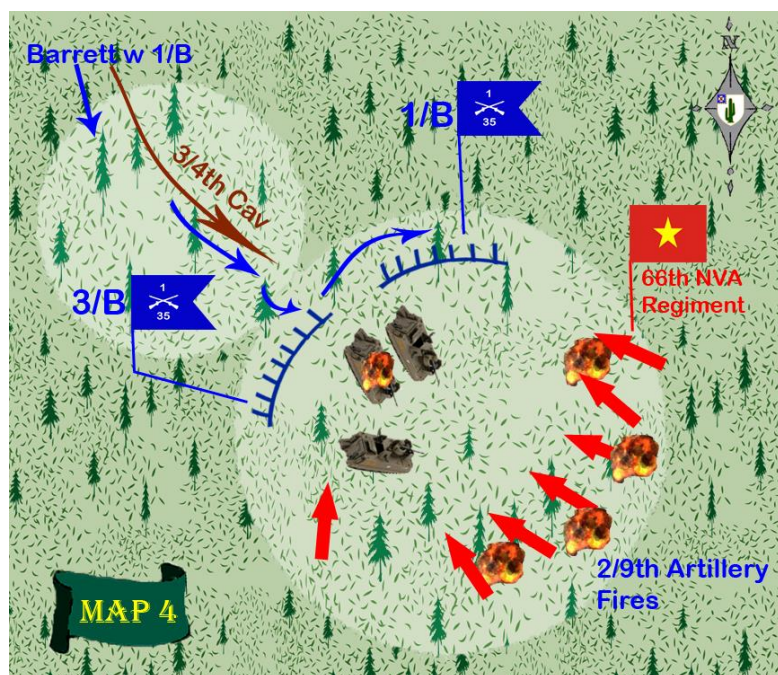


Somehow, I got tapped to be the RTO that day; not my normal. Our squad of the 1st platoon usually pulled point duty and occasionally swapped carrying the radio taking turns. We loaded up on the Cav APCs and raced like hell to an area just short of the 3rd's position. As I remember we got off the APCs and started up a small narrow semi dirt trail in thick heavy vegetation jungle with the APCs following to the area that the 3rd platoon got ambushed in.

I'm going to describe this area as how I saw and felt the layout. Take two circles and put one next to the other like clocks touching at the outer perimeter edges, one at 10 o'clock and the other at 4 o'clock. I will refer to circle 10 o'clock as circle # 1 and circle at 4 o'clock as circle # 2. **(MAP 4)**

I was carrying the radio alongside of Lt Nichols. Basically, we were at point coming into the circle area of circle #1 when we both came upon Sgt. Joe Johnson KIA laying behind a large log at about the 5 o'clock position. We took cover for an instant and then proceeded to move thru the circle and to our left 30 to 40 feet to about the 9-10 o'clock position when all hell broke out all around us. We started taking what cover we could and returning fire.

Again, we got up and moved to our left now into what I call circle area #2 at about the 3-4 o'clock position, were taking rounds from all over it seems. We again move to our left and drift back to about the 6 o'clock position where we pretty much stayed returning fire back and forth, being pinned down at times. As I remember Lt Nichols and I were down behind 2 logs or fallen trees giving us some cover of protection. We were taking rounds from all angles hitting everything around us along with explosions front, rear and above.



At one time I think Lt Nichols got up and moved to his right to some other 1st platoon member's positions, we had pretty much been pinned down and firing out to our left mostly at the 9-10-11 o'clock position area where we were getting heavy fire from and a lot of movements and yelling in Vietnamese, then Lt Nichols coming back next to me for the radio. We both were back and forth on the radio yelling to be heard to whomever on the other end over all the noise. As I was firing off to the left, I then think he got up again moving back and to his right.

A short moment later 2 explosions went off above and behind me that showered me with dirt and tree fragments and everything else. I don't know where Lt Nichols went to; I think now we are separated. Soon after 3-4 APCs

that I could see move into our circle #2. Off to my right about 15-20 feet I could see Joe Gilliland and Raymond Buzzard and another guy from our squad firing to their front right. About 10 feet to my left was Daniel J Donaldson lobbing away M-79 rounds out to the 10 o'clock position where we kept seeing a lot of movement. We just kept firing in that area; it seemed like slow motion and high speed all at the same time.



Two APCs moved into position on my front left at about 8 o'clock vertical with rear door facing me about 30-40 feet out. The other APC moved almost straight out in front of me horizontal with its side facing me about 50-60 feet out. Soon after at about 20 feet to the left of the APC on my front left, I saw movement between two large standing trees, there were 2 logs or trees on top of each other forming a crisscross or scissor like look. Three NVA became clear with the one in the middle jumping up several

times real fast. We traded fire; with them bringing on a lot more, I tried to stay as low as possible knowing the radio was sticking up high for them to see. The radio took a couple of hits and the antenna was winged once and smacked me in the face, but it was still working. I was trying to fire and yell at the same time on the radio hardly making out anything with all the confusion and noise.

What stuck out in my mind was the NVA in the middle of the three was so much bigger than the other two. He got up a couple of more times real fast and this time I let off a small burst from my M16 and I hit him high in the right shoulder and neck and possibly in the chest. He fell backward going into a sitting position, I never saw him or the other two again. (Barrett)

(Giorgi) 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. (Giorgi)

Air Power

(7th AF) Cpt Hubert E Thornber relieved the first FAC, who was running low on fuel, and therefore unable to finish the flight of F-4Cs he was controlling. Flying over the enemy positions, Cpt Thornber came under heavy automatic weapons fire from numerous enemy gun positions.

After calling in two more flights of fighters, the FAC then rolled in and marked the target through a hail of small arms fire. The F-4Cs succeeded in silencing three automatic weapons positions with their remaining ordnance before departing. A few minutes later, two flights of A-1Es arrived and the FAC went down to take a look. The enemy was attempting to outflank the friendly positions, so Cpt Thornber brought the airstrikes to within 50 meters, while he flew over the friendly positions as a mark for the fighters to prevent them from coming too close.

The enemy maneuver was repulsed by the airstrikes and ground forces. The battered enemy force withdrew under a heavy bombardment that inflicted heavy casualties. Cpt Thornber lead the strikes against the retreating enemy, by making simulated strafing attacks, with the fighters following him in trail. The next day, the 3d Bde TF commanding general, Glenn D Walker commended the FAC for the "excellent air work" For his part in the action, Cpt Thornber was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. (7th AF)

The Relief Force Arrives

(Smitty) Suddenly from behind us we could hear motors. Most of us that could, stood up and motioned for them to come over our way. "This is where we are, come and get us out of here." We were all happy that help had finally arrived and we would be safe now. What we didn't know was that the VC were being patient and waiting for our relief to arrive. They could have shot us at any time they wanted to but chose to wait until help came so they could kill even more Americans. The action started up again even fiercer than before.

I scrambled to get behind a tree while bullets were pecking the dirt right at my face and body. My right arm was hit at the wrist and the bullet went up, blowing out the top joint of my elbow. My arm was jerking uncontrollably. I had to grab it with my other hand to hold it still. At this time, I realized that I could no longer defend myself, so I crawled and made it to an army personnel carrier. Once I got inside, someone gave me a shot of morphine, then "Boom"; the VC hit the APC with some sort of antitank weapon that dismantled it. (Smitty)

(Giorgi) About four 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.



Tommy Giorgi

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.

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? (Giorgi)

(Barrett) Some of the wounded were helped into that same APC off to the left a short time later and the intensity of everything seemed to pick up again. Just after that I was told to make contact with the Cav because they and Bn wanted us to pull out so they could call in air strikes and artillery shelling of the area. Someone told me I had the only working radio, although the only way I could contact the Cav was by getting their attention which I couldn't.

So, I had to run to one of the APCs and get them to notice me. First, I thought about running to the closest APC to my front left which was full of wounded, but I felt it had too little cover since I knew we were still taking a lot of rounds from the 9-10-11 o'clock positions. I then decided to run straight to the APC farther out which had a full side facing me giving me more cover. As I ran and was even with the APC on the left, I looked over just as an RPG round hit the rear causing a large explosion and fireball that I'll never ever forget.



Jim Barrett photo by Marshall Jackson

I made it to the other APC and got as flat to the side as possible and started yelling and pounding with the palms of my hand as hard and loud as I could to the guy on top blasting away with his 50 cal. Machine gun. He couldn't hear me, so I started slamming my M16 with both hands on the steel side and yelling. Somehow, I finally got his attention and after yelling to him several times he then understood what I was trying to tell him, to contact the other APCs in his unit and pull out so they can call in artillery and air strikes.

I then ran back towards my old position yelling to everyone that we were getting out now. Soon the APC's were busting out through about the same way we came in, everyone was running alongside and trying to get into the APCs, guys were grabbing and pulling each other into the moving vehicles up ahead of me and as I kept running alongside of one close to the rear it seemed like I'll never get in one, when out of

nowhere some guys grabbed me and yanked me up on top and we made it out to a large open clearing with high grass all around, and that is how we made it out. I also remember one of the guys running alongside an APC getting injured when an APC track ran over a log kicking it up and out slamming into his leg, I think breaking it. (Barrett)

(Giorgi) 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 NVA were peppering the track with AW fire. Men who were lying on the open top of the vehicle were being shot again and again. Their screams reverberating through the vehicle and my ears.

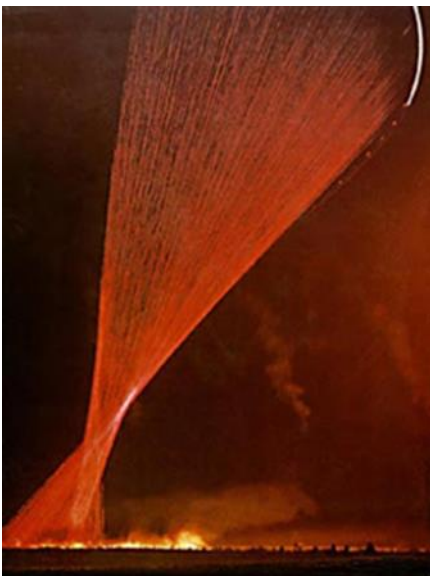
"My God leave them alone they've been shot enough."

This APC 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. (Giorgi)

(DJ 1525H: Dustoff is called in for three personnel at YA820148.)

(Barrett) After getting off and out of the APCs the choppers started coming in to take out the wounded and bring in some other officers. Then later with the 1st platoon I remember kind of sitting off to the side near the high grass in a daze trying to comprehend what just happened to us today. We had nineteen KIA and many severely wounded and evacuated out on dust offs. I was sitting at one time all by myself behind Raymond Buzzard just looking at him and all the others in total silence, I still had the radio on my back, someone even took a picture of all of us in this daze.



Time lapse of "Puff" miniguns

We all had little or no ammo left and now had to re supply not knowing what was next for us. I don't remember how or when but later I no longer had the radio I don't know what ever happened to it that evening. It started getting dark and we set up for the night with the artillery dropping in rounds one after another along with a CH-47 Puff shooting streams and streams of tracers out of the dark sky into our battleground area. Possibly the worst fear was knowing we were going back in in the morning with additional reinforcements to retrieve our KIA and see what was left of the enemy and their ambush setup positions.

(DJ) 4 July 03332H: Recon Platoon linked up with B Co at YA821153.

We went back in the morning. The enemy had collected their wounded and some of their dead and was gone, but we had inflicted a heavy body count on them. They somehow had gotten out of the area or they were close by in clever hiding looking for the next time,

it was very scary and no sound but us retrieving our own and accessing the AO. (Barrett)

The toll from the fight stood at 17 KIA from B 1/35 and 2 KIA from HHC (Medics). And an additional 25 were WIA from B Co and five from the 3-4th Cav. The enemy force was estimated to be at least a battalion. The NVA battalion, the 7th Bn, 66th NVA Regiment, lost 39 KIA and another estimated one hundred fifty. (ORLL 3d Bde TF 31 Jul 66). For their actions that day, both Lt Jasper Sturdivant and Sgt Clifford Totten were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.