

1st Battalion 35th Infantry

A Brief History Covering 1968 - 1970

Our Thanks to Rick Gallina for Submitting This Report

1st BATTALION - 35th INFANTRY

FIGHTING GYPSIES

PLEIKU, RVN

1968 – 70



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MESSAGE FROM THE BATTALION COMMANDER

To The Men of the Fighting Gypsies:

During the past three months as your battalion commander, I have had the extreme pleasure of working with this proud and vigorous unit. I have witnessed its operation in all sections and units, from Camp Enari to our forward areas. After this short, but reflective period, I can say with great admiration that am glad to have been part of the 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, especially now as it closes a glorious page in the history of this country's fight for freedom.

Our task here has not been easy, conflicts never are. But our record speaks for itself. From Dakto to Kontum to Chu Pa and back to Pleiku, this battalion has left behind a spirit that is parallel to the best units in Vietnam. In past actions, when the going got tough, the men of the Cacti Green kept the pace and made the grade. That is not only the key to success in military life, but in civilian too.

This decade of the seventies will call for Leaders of the highest and most redeeming qualities, those that I find in our young men within this battalion. With men such as you, I know our country will be steered in the proper direction. Keep with you that undying spirit you held for your battalion, your fellow soldiers, and your country. Now let me wish all of you the very best of luck in your future years and endeavors.

LTC Cliff R. High

Fighting Gypsies

COLORS GO HOME

On the 10th of April, 1970, 17 men from the 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry will represent the Third Brigade's pull-out and de-activation of the Fighting Gypsies.

The colors of the battalion will leave from Pleiku Air Base by C-141 jet and will fly direct to Fort Lewis, Washington. Upon arrival there, the 17 men representing the Fighting Gypsies will practice for the de-activation ceremonies, which will take place April 15, 1970.

The two officers going with the colors are 1st Lt. Charles Barrett and WO I George Prince. NCO's will consist of PSG David Eberly, SGT Nelson Cronkright, SGT Tony Alexander, SGT George Franklin, SGT Gerald Jelen, SGT Paul Lee, SGT Steven Moore and SGT James Zell. EM's traveling with the colors will be SP/4 Eugene Garity, SP/4 Tom Gibson, SP/4 William Gregroy, SP/4 Harry Hudson, SP/4 Gordon Miller, SP/4 Robert Runge, and SP/4 Gene Zunker,

IMPRESSIONS OF VIETNAM AND A BATTALION

It doesn't seem as though a year has passed in Vietnam, and in the 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry. How many of you ever had that thought? Just about everyone who went home. But can you remember those first impressions when exiling from that C-123 (C-130 if you were lucky) at Pleiku from Cam Ranh Bay. You were a new guy then. Loading a Japanese built bus heading for a place called Camp Enari, home of the Fourth Infantry Division.

As soon as you hopped off that plane, grabbed your gear and piled on that bus, you took a quick look around at the Central Highlands. Several thoughts filled your mind. Would I make it? Was the enemy close at hand? When was the last time this place was rocketed? What unit will I be going to?

You rode along the paved highway, seeing perhaps your first Montagnard villager, holding a cloth wrapped baby. Before you knew it, the bus had entered base camp, and you were unloading at what was called "Repo-Depot" and those passing by were yelling '*SHORT!*'

At Repo-Depot, you learned once more, how to zero, your weapon, read maps, call in artillery, and distinguish various models of helicopters. Words like 'di-di' and 'beaucoup' became part of your vocabulary.

Then, the big day came, the day you were assigned to the 1st Bn, 35th Infantry. More than likely, you were picked up in a 2 1/2 ton truck and driven to the battalion area. Now more processing was in store, this time with your new company clerk; who would issue you ration cards, and help plan your R and R.

Once through with processing (remember handing in most of your Ft Lewis issued clothes') and receiving your rucksack, it was out forward. For those going out 'to the boonies, it was perhaps your first helicopter ride or the bounciest 2 1/2 ton truck ride in your life. There would be more.

Jumping off your means of transportation, you were now out in the boonies; a new guy, more than likely a PFC. You were anxious, yet nervous, to meet your company commander, your platoon leader, and the men you would hump, fight, eat, sleep, dig holes, laugh, and sometimes cry with. They would be your friends for life; for this was life.

From that day you carried out different missions with your company. You humped in valleys, and over mountains, in dry weather and those seemingly endless monsoons. You grasp the method of cooking C rations to perfection, and perhaps created some new meals by mixing meals together, or with the aid of a package from home.

IMPRESSIONS OF VIETNAM AND A BATTALION (Continued)

You remember the times your company come onto a battalion size firebase, and you had hot meals and cold drinks, and some time to write home in the privacy of a bunker. It was also the time to resolve any problems, request to see a finance clerk or 're-up' clerk or be asked to make a radio hometown interview with a PIO representative. If you were real lucky, a visiting USO show would make a one day appearance

As the months passed along, you kept a record of how much time you had left in Vietnam. Then one day, you would awaken and tell all you were getting '*SHORT!*' With it came a sudden overt awareness for even more security and precaution in your daily life in the field.

That big day finally arrived when the 'old man' came up to you, and with a smile, told you to "*Catch the next thing smoking*" into Camp Enari. You were getting too short. Anxiously, you packed your rucksack, giving some items of value away to your fellow 'grunts.'

Somehow, when you jumped on that 'slick' and she started to lift off, blades cutting into the air, and dust and grass blowing around you gave the 'V' sign to your friends on the ground. Now that misty feeling in your eyes told you. You would never forget those men in the field, for they were perhaps the best friends you would ever have in life. And you hated to leave them behind.

AS WE SEE IT

Creating a scrapbook newspaper of the battalion's history, in Vietnam, is not a simple task. Old newspapers, records and other publications had to be found, thoroughly read, and pieces picked out and edited: Also, memories were put to the test in relation to those events which were not written or otherwise recorded.

Naturally, the entire operation took time. But we believe it is definitely worth the effort to present the departing men of the Fighting Gypsies with a living scrapbook newspaper of their battalion's history in Vietnam. It is a proud one, indeed. And this publication is dedicated to those men who made the Cacti Green a proud unit, the infantrymen who gave their utmost, some the supreme sacrifice. To those men, this publication is in your honor.

Sgt. Gerry Ducharme 1/35th PIO

Sgt. Nels Cronkright

1968 - THE YEAR OF HEAVY ACTION - CHARGING CACTI GREEN KILL 45 ENEMY

KONTUM - The 1st Bn, 35th Infantry dealt a punishing blow to North Vietnamese Army elements west of Kontum last week when sweep maneuvers by the Ivy force and supporting artillery overpowered the entrenched enemy soldiers. When the fight was over 45 North Vietnamese soldiers were dead and dozens wounded.

Plans called for Companies A and D to forge through the jungle, divide and sweep the base of Landing Zone Mile High, rejoining after they had circled the hill. Company D would remain behind as a support element.

The two company sweep netted dozens of NVA mortar rounds and rockets and hundreds of feet of communication wire.

As the companies fanned out into the surrounding jungle, enemy riflemen cut loose with bursts of automatic weapons fire and mortars. The Ivymen countered quickly with M16 and M60 machine guns while the 2nd Bn, 9th Artillery gunners found the range of enemy targets.

Companies A and D regrouped, and forged back against the enemy before darkness ended the battle. A sweep the next day tabbed 45 enemy bodies for the action.

CACTI GREEN STOP ENEMY PATROL

KONTUM - July is the traditional month for fireworks, and a Fourth Division recon patrol, searching for the enemy and arms, recently saw plenty of them.

The Cacti Green patrol, a part of Company B of the 1st Bn, 35th Infantry, made contact with a squad of Viet Cong, killing two of the enemy and wounding four others in the process.

Second platoon of Company B was taking a short break near two cross trails. One of the squads was checking out one of the trails while the rest of the platoon was watching the other trail, when the platoon spotted a squad of six VC coming down toward the reconnect trail. Some of the VC were wearing black pajamas, others were sporting tiger fatigues.

The recon element opened fire, killing two VC and wounding four others. The Fighting Gypsies also policed up two SKS rifles and two AK-47's, along with enemy canteens, knives and protective masks.

AWARDS FOR A DESERVING BATTALION

Above are just two stories from the action of 1968. During that year, awards were presented to a line unit and to some valiant men of the Fighting Gypsies.

In December, 1968, Company A received the Presidential Unit Citation and three men from Company C were awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry for actions against the North Vietnamese Army.

EDITOR'S NOTE - 1969 saw a change in the action of the Fighting Gypsies. Action with the enemy was less frequent, but the battalion was hurting the enemy more with large bunker and rice caches. Following are some 1969 stories on these caches and one on a rocket attack on LZ Gypsy.

CACTI GREEN UNITS HUNT ENEMY AT PLEI MEI

In the largest combat assault (CA) of the year, the 1st Bn, 35th Infantry flew 500 men and support equipment 12 miles south of Landing Zone (LZ) Oasis for an operation that has led to the discovery of enemy caches and huts.

Four companies and a command element were lifted by 15 Hueys and 5 Chinooks and was completed within an hour to Plei Mei. Each company was immediately assigned a search area.

Found during the mission were over three tons of rice, sleeping huts, and enemy anti-personnel devices.

AUGUST MARKS THE MONTH FOR ENEMY BUNKER FINDS

Sixty-six enemy bunkers, including four mess hall bunkers, were discovered 15 miles northwest of Pleiku. Company A of the Fighting Gypsies found the bunkers while on a late afternoon sweep.

Surrounding the company sized complex were 40 foxholes of various sizes. The complex was destroyed before the company moved on.

Twenty five enemy bunkers were found later that month by Company A, this time 10 miles northeast of LZ Oasis. The complex was also complete with outside kitchen areas and sleeping positions.

Each bunker has two feet of overhead cover. Also found at the complex were ammunition pouches and medicine.

As the month ended Company C found a bunker complex, consisting of 50 positions which had overhead cover and were well camouflaged.

ROCKET ATTACK QUICKLY SILENCED

September - A rocket and mortar attack on Landing Zone Gypsy, home of the Cacti Green, was quickly silenced by a heavy return of mortar, artillery and light automatic weapons fire.

Just as dusk was approaching, enemy 82mm rounds were fired at the LZ, and the 4.2 mortar platoon responded with rounds fired at suspected enemy positions, along with artillery support from the 2/9th Artillery.

Results were immediate. Seven secondary explosions were reported, and the bunker line opened up with small arms fire to prevent a ground probe.

The next day, various sweeps netted enemy detainees, one dead Viet Cong soldier, and fresh bunker positions.