

# WEST OF WEST



## 4TH BATTALION 31<sup>ST</sup> INFANTRY

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### POLAR BEARS STOP 2nd NVA

### DIVISION-PRESERVES Hiep Duc

The 4th Bn., 31st Inf. found themselves locked in a grim struggle with a major portion of the 2nd NVA Division during recent action in Hiep Duc Valley. The "Polar Bears" were confronted with an excess of two NVA regiments in fierce fighting which raged to the north and south of LZ West. Ten days of battle produced 516 NVA killed by Task Force 4-31, which was made up of the 4th Bn., 31st Inf. and other elements of the 196th Infantry Brigade.

The 2nd NVA Div. was apparently in the area to carry out its avowed mission of destroying the refugee center located at nearby Hiep Duc. The NVA have repeatedly boasted that they would "wipe out" the settlement which contains over 3,000 Vietnamese. Several weeks ago NVA propaganda agents armed with loud speakers conducted nightly broadcasts telling the people of Hiep Duc that the Government of Vietnam and the United States were unable to provide them with adequate security.

In a prelude to the battle, the 4th Bn., 31st Inf. killed 59 NVA and captured six others when a sizeable force was discovered before they could launch a pre-dawn, surprise attack against LZ West. A small arsenal of Chicom grenades, RPG's rocket launchers, and explosive charges was found scattered on the slopes of the "Polar Bear" fire support base.

"We definitely disrupted the NVA plan to attack LZ West and Hiep Duc", declared LTC Cecil M. Henry (Rome, Ga.), the 4-31 CO. "The first two days were the worst because we were one battalion against more than two NVA regiments!"

Initial contact was made by Delta Company during a routine search and clear mission south of LZ West. The point element engaged and killed an NVA soldier. As the Infantrymen advanced to investigate the area, they came under intense automatic weapons fire from NVA soldiers hidden in an adjacent woodline.

Darkness halted fighting for the afternoon, and dawn found the "Polar Bears" stalking the NVA. "They tried to lull us into thinking they had pulled out," explained PFC Richard Forrester (Wellesley, Mass.). "They didn't fire at us during the night." D Co. had gone only a short distance when they came under a barrage of enemy fire. "They hit us with everything," declared PFC Forrester. "They had .51 calibers, M-79's, .30 caliber

### FORTUNATE REUNION

#### FOR D CO

A former "Polar Bear" company commander returned to his old unit and helped to avert impending disaster during recent heavy fighting South of LZ West.

Delta Company had encountered an NVA Force estimated to be of battalion size while on a routine search and clear mission. The 196th Infantry Brigade unit had recently lost their CO due to wounds received in a previous engagement.

D Co was in heavy contact with an NVA Force which was dug into well-camouflaged positions. CPT John Whittecar (Salina, Kans.) was intently following the action involving his old company over the radio. CPT Whittecar had recently left the field to take a new position as Air Operations Officer for the 4th Bn., 31st Inf. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, CPT Whittecar rushed to re-join his former unit.

Arriving at the point of contact by helicopter, CPT Whittecar found that the NVA were bringing intense fire on D Co. with machine guns and RPG's. The enemy was also attempting to encircle the badly out-numbered company.

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machineguns, and AK-47's!" D Co now faced an NVA battalion that was well-supplied and dug into well-camouflaged positions.

Meanwhile, Bravo Company, commanded by CPT William Gaylor (Mineral Wells, Texas), was moving toward the suspected location of a large NVA rice cache. The 4/31 recon platoon, under LT Robert Williams (Watsonville, CA.), was also operating in the area. B Co. encountered a large NVA bunker complex in the vicinity of "Million Dollar" Hill. The "Polar Bear" Infantrymen came under heavy fire from enemy .30 and .51 caliber machinegun positions. The NVA mortared the hard-pressed company at every opportunity.

A platoon of Charlie Company was dispatched to aid their stricken comrades. "Blue Ghost" gunships from F Troop, 8th Cavalry sprayed enemy positions with their deadly fire. Airstrikes pounded the enemy bunkers.

As darkness fell, LT James Simms (Clarendon Hills, Ill.) was maneuvering his platoon to assist D Co. "Shell casings from the gunships overhead rained down on us," declared Lt. Simms. As the element advanced toward an enemy position which had been hard hit by airstrikes and gunships, they moved up to what they thought to be a water-soaked slope. "The gunships made another pass, and we had to hit the ground," explained Lt. Simms. "It was then that we discovered the ground was soaked with blood instead of water! 146 NVA were killed during the first full day of fighting.

Fighting raged on for another full week. Artillery from the 3rd Bat., 82 Arty. and 3rd Bat., 16th Arty shelled enemy positions around the clock. Tons of bombs rocked the enemy bunker complexes, and the relentless advance of 4/31 Infantrymen kept constant pressure on the NVA. Slowly, the invading North Vietnamese were pushed back toward the Nui Chom ridgeline where the 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Division waited to inflict further damage.

Enemy equipment captured by Task Force 4-31 included 26 individual weapons, 11 crew-served weapons, 2 mortars, 4 damaged .51 caliber machineguns, 208 Chicom grenades, and 19 B-40 rockets.

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## -REUNION

"The morale of the whole company went up as soon as we saw CPT Whittecar get off the chopper," related a tired machine gunner. "We really thought this was the end of the line for all of us!"

CPT Whittecar immediately became aware that the NVA were attempting to surround his position. "I knew when we started receiving fire from three sides it was time to pull back," explained the "second tour" Veteran. "We just got out the back door before the enemy could close us in!" D Co then set up a tight defensive perimeter and waited for the night's activities with grim expectation.

As darkness came, the besieged Infantrymen detected the enemy advancing toward their position. Machinegun fire and RPG's rained in on the stricken company. A "Spooky" gunship was called in to help repel the advancing NVA.

"CPT Whittecar directed "Spooky's" fire to within 25 meters of our perimeter", stated PFC David Roland (Bellingham, Wash.) "He had to the NVA were that close!" "He talked to the pilot of that gunship like he was back in the States telling his wife he might be a little late for supper," added Roland. At one point, CPT Whittecar called the 4/31 Tactical Operations Center and equipped. "Well, I've got them where I want them now!" "They are around me for 360 degrees!"

A CP was set up in an old French building. The early morning brought an RPG hurtling through the window as a reminder of the ever-present enemy. Several "Polar Bears", including CPT Whittecar, were wounded by the blast. Miraculously, no one was killed. CPT Whittecar, moved among his wounded men helping to administer first aid. Then, he "talked in" a daring MEDDEVAC pilot to extract the most seriously wounded.

Delta Company lived to fight another day. Hurt but far from finished, the company was replaced by Alpha Company and airlifted to nearby LZ West. To a weary group of "Polar Bear" Infantrymen, an impromptu reunion with their old CO had been a lifesaver.

## Polar Bear BUGLE

The "Polar Bears" of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry were recently presented a silver bugle by COL Gildo Godisjoti (New York City), Commanding Officer of the 7th Regiment, 1st Marine Division.

The bugle was presented to LTC Cecil M. Henry (Rome, Ga.) as a "token of appreciation for the spirit of cooperation and hospitality" that was extended to the Marines during recent operations around LZ West.

Troops from the Americal Division and the 1st Marine Division recently joined forces to smash two regiments of the 2nd NVA Division during ten days of heavy fighting in Hiep Duc Valley. The battle cost the NVA in excess of 1,000 dead.

Major Roger Lee (Colorado Springs, Colo.), 4/31 Operations Officer, said that daily bugle calls will be heard on LZ West in the near future. A recruiting drive is currently under way to find a bugler among 4/31 personnel.

# ESCAPE AND EVASION

A young "Polar Bear" Infantryman survived a harrowing night alone with an NVA battalion during the recent Battle of Hiep Duc. PFC Marion Feaster (Deland, Florida) of Bravo Company became separated from his unit when they were ambushed by the NVA in the vicinity of "Million Dollar" Hill.

The NVA ambushed Bravo Co. when they were attempting to reach their night position after a day of heavy fighting against an estimated NVA battalion. The 4-31 soldiers dove for cover and escaped casualties, at that time, PFC Feaster sought cover in an adjacent streambed. As he glanced up, he detected an NVA sniper hiding in some nearby brush. Knowing he faced certain death, Feaster froze and remained motionless for some fifteen minutes.

The enemy fire subsided and Bravo Co. began to move cautiously back up the trail. Feaster remained still, expecting the NVA soldier to open fire on his departing comrades. Feaster was powerless to fire at the NVA because he had dropped his weapon to the side when he dove for cover. The enemy soldier was clutching an AK-47 rifle.

Strangely, the NVA did not fire at the withdrawing 4-31 company. He only crept away in another direction. Feaster listened and detected NVA soldiers moving about in the area. Fearing another

ambush and being alone with two hand grenades as his only weapons, Feaster made his way down the stream. Several times he heard NVA soldiers talking above him on the stream bank. Where the water was deep, Feaster swam beneath the surface to avoid detection by the lurking enemy.

It soon became apparent to Feaster that he would have to travel in another direction to re-join his unit; so he left the stream and set out through the underbrush into the darkness. Several times he encountered small groups of NVA, but he managed to avoid them. Returning to the trail, he set out to catch his company. Suddenly, a barrage of AK-47 fire erupted from behind him. Apparently, Feaster had walked through another NVA ambush. Thinking that he was an advanced point man for a larger element, the enemy allowed him to walk through, hoping to catch the entire force. Realizing their mistake, the NVA had opened fire; but it was too late as the young "Polar Bear" scurried away into the dense foliage.

The men of B Co. could scarcely believe their eyes at day break. Amid the crackle of NVA sniper fire, a dazed Feaster raced into their defensive position. Clutched in his hand was a damaged handset, all that remained of a PRC-25 radio which had been riddled by shrapnel during heavy fighting the day before.



# 31 SAPPERS KILLED AT LZ SIBERIA

31 NVA sappers were killed, and one was captured during a pre-dawn attack on LZ Siberia in Hiep Duc Valley. Twenty individual weapons were found scattered on the slopes of this strategic base which serves as a guardian for the 3,000 Vietnamese civilians located at the nearby Hiep Duc refugee center. The ground was littered with Chicom grenades, satchel charges, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPG's) which served as a grim testimony to the determination of the enemy.

A captured sapper revealed that his unit consisted of more than 200 NVA soldiers. A similar attack against LZ West on August 11 served as a prelude to two weeks of heavy fighting in which over 1,000 NVA troops were killed in Hiep Duc and neighboring Que Son Valley.

The NVA attack was launched under the cover of intense RPG and automatic weapons fire. Several sappers breached the perimeter with the use of Bangalore torpedoes and wire cutters. One enemy soldier carried a flamethrower.

The attack was repelled through the efforts of B Co, 4th Bn, 31st Inf. and C Battery, 3/82nd Arty. The 105mm howitzers leveled direct fire on the attackers, smashing their advance.

Infantrymen from B Co. killed several sappers on the slopes of LZ Siberia as well as several others within the edge of the perimeter. "Spooky" gunships also aided the mountain-top outpost. Among the weapons captured were 7 AK-47 and 6 AK-50 rifles, 2 rocket launchers, and a flamethrower.

# B Co Teams With 3/82 Arty on LZ Siberia

LTC Cecil M. Henry CO  
SP4 William Crawford Reporter

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Reenlistments accomplished during the month of September 1969, with option and reassignment shown after each name, were as follows:

HHC:  
NONE

A Co:

1. McDaniel, James S. - Aircraft Maintenance-176th Avn Co,

B Co:

1. Price, David R. - Supply-Co A, 23rd S&T Bn, APO 96374  
2. Sinderman, James H. - Security Guard-11th Security Plt  
3. Harrison, Richard W. - Motor Maintenance-HHC, 723d Maint  
4. Scutter, Rodney L. - Administration-23d Admin Co, Chu Lai  
5. Templeton, Everett E. - Welding-HHC, 723d Maint Bn  
6. Grice, Daniel H. - Standdown-196th Inf Bde, Chu Lai  
7. Furman, Blair G. - Military Intelligence-635th MID

C Co:

1. Albright, Kenneth L. - Motor Maintenance-HHC, 723d Maint B  
2. Camp, George W. - Communications-Cat, 26th Engr Bn  
3. Miller, Thomas E. - Security Guard-11th Security Plt  
4. Brown, Dale G. - Finance-23d Admin Co  
5. Rozier, William - Nvy Equip Gp & Maint-26th Engr Bn  
6. Laney, John E. - Law Enforcement-23d MP Co  
7. Barker, Robert A. - Administration-23d Admin Co  
8. Davis, John S. - Finance-23d Admin Co

D Co:

1. Renier, James A. - Administration-23d Admin Co

E Co:

NONE

RECAPITULATION: Objective, Reenlistments, Percentage Attained

4	17	425%
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RAYMOND G. STICE, SFC  
En Reenlistment NCO



"Nonsense, captain-where th' Dickens would I get a nickname like 'Col. Ding Dong'?"



"...But, golly gee, I'd hate t' do anything that might hinder th' Paris peace talks."