

'INVISIBLE TROOPS' CATCH NVA LOAFING

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BONG SON

If it had been possible to eavesdrop on their conversation you probably would have heard the North Vietnamese soldiers say something like "What the Heck, Over" or whatever NVA say when – out of a clear blue sky – artillery, rockets and air strikes come booming down on their position and wipe out 72 men.

The Communist soldiers, part of the 3rd NVA Division, had been infiltrating all morning through the southern Crow's Foot area of the An Lao Valley when they stopped for a little smoke break. They sat down, lit up, unloosened their packs and began chattering to one another when a barrage of 105mm rounds came flying in on them.

The NVA ran for nearby bunkers only to be hit again by aerial rocket artillery. After the rockets came air strikes which forced them out of the bunkers. Then gunships, more rockets, more tube artillery.

Sitting on a ridgeline above the NVA and calling in all of the firepower were six fearless 1st Air Cavalrymen who make up team "Two Bravo" of the Cavalry's long range reconnaissance patrol.

"We had ringside seats," mused Specialist Four Donald W. Glover, the assistant team leader.

A sweep through the area the next day by elements of the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry turned up 72 bodies and 58 weapons including AK-47's, SKS's, rocket launchers and machine guns.

The recondos left the area without a scratch and without having fired a single shot themselves.

There are 11 LRRP teams in the Cavalry. The teams were organized last February and are made up only of volunteers. Each includes one Montagnard scout.

They are out in the field every day and are frequently responsible for intelligence on enemy activity. Though Team Two Bravo had never run across 72 enemy before, said Staff Sergeant Robert L. Carr, the team leader.

"First we saw seven and then we just kept counting and counting," Carr said.

The recondos are all trained as infantrymen. They tromp around in rakish "Tiger" fatigues and most of them wear a triangular green patch with 'recondo' embroidered at the top and a big "V" at the bottom.

The patch is proof that they have run for over a mile and a half with a 25 pound sand bag on their backs, become highly proficient in map reading, first aid and the other specialized subjects and physical requirements crammed into a special three week course conducted by the 5th Special Forces in Nha Trang.

According to Private First Class Stephen L. Fox, Two Bravo rear scout, they sometimes get a strong urge to fire on the enemy. But unless cornered this is not their job. They are sent out as observers and not to engage the enemy. Though well-armed with M-16's and M-79's, even the rough-tough recondos will admit that the six man team may be outmatched by what could be a company or larger-sized enemy element.