

HISTORICAL OCCURRENCES

Team 31 mission

on 30 April – 1 May 1969

From Tim Greenly (TL), Steve Curtis (ATL), Mike Blymyer (RTO), Dan Roberts (Medic).

Sorry, we can't remember the fifth member

It seemed like it was going to be a normal mission. There was nothing out of the ordinary as we prepared at our rear base at Phouc Vinh. As usual the mission was recon and surveillance. We had planned for a late afternoon/early evening insertion (suicide insertions as Steve Curtis called them) into our AO (area of operation).

As we heliocoptered into our LZ (landing zone) it was approaching twilight. Exiting the Huey we moved off the LZ and into the tree line to monitor the LZ for any movement/enemy. As the bird cleared the LZ and headed back to Phouc Vinh the silence was deafening. After feeling it was safe we moved towards our planned night position in our standard patrol formation.

We hadn't moved very far before we found what appeared to be an overnight position for a platoon of US army infantry. There were a lot of discarded and unopened C-rations. As we paused to take a look at what had been left, rounds started going through the foliage around us. We hit the dirt and got "small" as our TL (team leader), Tim Greenly, got on the radio to find out what was going on.

We were told that the 11th ACR (Armored Cavalry Regiment) was in contact on the other side of the river. Our position, apparently, was getting the "spent" 50-cal rounds from that engagement; kind of spooky. We quickly moved on towards our night position. A short time later we came across a "high speed" trail (looked like a dirt road). Tim decided this would be an excellent ambush site and night position. We set up to monitor the trail in our classic pinwheel formation (our packs set back to back in the middle, with our feet towards the trail, sides, and rear like a wagon wheel). We only put out one claymore on the trail hoping for a fast ambush. After setting out our claymore we watched the trail and jungle around us for movement and waited for darkness.

As we continued to maintain full alertness, we heard movement to our left. Within a few seconds NVA (North Vietnam Army regulars) soldiers came into view and Tim told us to get ready to engage the enemy. As they approached the team, Tim observed another group coming behind the first group and we hunkered down to wait for a better opportunity. The first group went past, the second group went past, and more and more enemy came down the trail.

When we had set up our night position it seemed that we were hidden within the jungle behind bushes and trees with no clear or open view of the trail. Now, however, with the enemy moving through our ambush zone we could see two to three soldiers at a time from their boots to their faces with full NVA uniforms and weapons. It was unsettling to consider that any of these NVA soldiers, if they were alert or attentive, only had to turn their heads to the side and they would see us.

Part of the enemy column stopped right in front of our position and we could hear the moans of their wounded. The NVA started pulling bicycles out of the brush across the trail from us and used them to move the wounded. As the column continued to pass in front of us Tim attempted to make radio contact with Slashing Talon, our TOC, informing them of the high number of NVA passing us.

Tim remembers when Xray picked up our squelch-code and asked if we had enemy close by and he coded back "yes". X-Ray then asked him to break squelch once for each one in sight, and he coded back "no". They finally asked him to break squelch once for each five enemy in sight and Greenly started breaking squelch. With that change in squelch-code they finally figured out the problem and relayed to Talon 65 that Team 31 was in deep doo-doo.

As the TL was communicating that we were approaching 300+ NVA passing our position it became dark. About that time the NVA column stopped and set up their night position in front and around the team. Tim was talking about blowing the claymore and getting out of Dodge. Blymyer remembers thinking that he really, really

didn't want to attempt an E&E (escape and evasion) with that radio on his back slowing him down. He was also wondering how healed his ankle really was and if it would hold up to a run in the dark (he had goofed it up pretty badly on a fumbled attempt at a PLF on another mission about a month earlier).

As the NVA settled into place they moved their security soldiers out around their column. Roberts recalled that we heard movement to our left and when the soldier stopped we heard a metallic clicking sound (like our old Halloween/4th of July clickers) coming from that soldier, and then movement of another soldier to that location. The original soldier moved on to another location and stopped, which was to the rear of us, and once again we heard a metallic clicking sound and another soldier moved to that location.

This action went on for a long time with a number of NVA now surrounding the five of us and the enemy column still directly to our front. As these soldiers continued to move to their night guard positions we hoped they would not trip over or into us. We were lucky that none of the sentries they put out around us discovered we weren't NVA.

The enemy starting laying down around us and Blymyer remembers that his stomach started to growl and rumble. One NVA came over next to him to relieve his bladder and Blymyer knew the enemy had to hear his stomach and wasn't sure how long he was going to be able to keep the ol' sphincter muscle tightened up. He remembers not being very optimistic about living to see the sun come up.

Roberts recollects that he sat there, trying to be motionless and calm, watching soldier after soldier carrying their wounded, heavy machine guns, mortars, AK-47s, RPG's, and a complete arsenal of weapons. He remembers becoming more and more fearful as each soldier passed. The NVA soldiers were close enough for us to see and hear everything they did. The smallest sounds they made; packs creaking, water sloshing in canteens, the moaning and groaning from their injured, playing grab-ass with each other, laughing, talking, and playing music from transistor radios. It seemed surrealistic and odd but it made them seem human.

The scariest thought Dan had was if any one of the 300+ soldiers turned their head to the right they would see our team and we would have the firefight of our life. Dan remembers shaking so much he made the jungle floor under his body make noise. He tried to control his fear, but continued to make noise that could have given our position away. Greenly leaned over and told him that he had to try and stop making noise. Dan acknowledged that he'd try (while still watching soldier after soldier passing us). Dan became aware of just how scared he'd become. Never before, during, or after Vietnam had that level of fear gotten a hold of him (that was a sentiment probably shared by all the team!).

Dan thought he would die that night and began to negotiate with the Man. He can personally attest to the fact that "There are no atheists in the foxhole". He vividly remembers that he negotiated with God telling him if he lived or got out of this he would go back to church and at some time build him a shrine.

Greenly decided that he and Curtis would stay awake for the remainder of the night and we would not rotate guard as we normally do. Tim whispered for the remaining three of us to get some sleep; that it'd be a long night.

As Dan continued to negotiate with God he fell into a deep sleep. The next thing Roberts noticed were birds singing their beautiful songs. He knew there had to be birds in heaven and said to himself, "I made it to Heaven, thank you God!".

As he lay there with his eyes closed and listened to the birds singing he felt warmth on his cheek. Curious about the source of the warmth Dan opened his eyes one at a time to locate the source. He saw a ray of light shining through the double and triple jungle canopy and it was the only direct light making it through the trees. It was this ray of light shining on his face and warming his cheeks.

As Dan considered if this was truly heaven or a Divine intervention, he heard laughter coming from his right and turning his head towards the laughter, he saw his team members laughing at him. Roberts then knew that this was not Heaven but was still deep in the jungles of Vietnam and in harms way.

"What happened?" Dan asked. They told him the NVA pulled out about sunrise and the Huey and pink team (a Cobra gun ship and a light observation helicopter, LOH) were on their way to pick us up, but they wanted to ensure that the NVA got further away before they picked us up. Dan wanted to know why no one on the team woke him up. Someone replied, "You looked liked a sleeping baby and no one on the team had the heart to wake you up". Dan then wanted to know when we were getting outta' here and was told "shortly".

After the NVA had clearly left the area Tim called in a fire mission on where he thought they might be. The team collected the claymore, which to our amazement had blood from one of the wounded NVA on it, and packed our packs.

As we were leaving we even found an NVA helmet. As the team moved towards our LZ for extraction, we saw the pink team come into view. Shortly the Huey was on his final approach to the LZ to pick us up. We loaded onto the Huey and flew back to base for debriefing and a warm beer.

An overflight the next morning didn't find anything and nobody believed us at Division. A day later that Regiment attacked a fire base. The CO made mention of that mission in his farewell letter where he says we proved the doubting Thomas's wrong.

Dan (and the rest of the team) are still not sure if our mission had some Divine intervention or just dumb luck by our not engaging them or the NVA not physically falling over us!