

Cacti Blue Pitching

7 NVA Strikeout Victims

By SP4 Michael Tousey

OASIS — A ditch which provided protection from artillery turned into a deathtrap for seven NVA when they were caught there by the Reconnaissance Platoon of the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry, near the village of Plei Tower.

Private First Class Richard W. Tolbert of Seattle, Wash., on an observation post (OP) for the Recon Platoon, sighted the enemy and reported their location to Sergeant First Class James F. Tibbit of Leesville, La., acting platoon leader.

"Charlie Company had come by here earlier," said PFC Tolbert, "but this time I knew they were NVA. They had a different pack and did not act like our men. I think Charlie Company had scared them out."

While he prepared his men to pursue the enemy, Sergeant Tibbit utilized artillery. In a half hour the mortars expended 123 rounds and the 105s fired 91 rounds as the enemy tried to escape.

Rounds Come In

"It seemed as if we had a round coming in every five seconds," said Private First Class David Peterson of Allendale, N.J., who serves as forward observer (FO) for the Recon Platoon. "The guns pinned them down until we could move up and engage them."

As the artillery was advanced in the direction of the enemy movement, Sergeant Tibbit moved his men behind it in several separate squad-sized elements searching for the NVA.

Sergeant Tibbit, moving with

"We had them, we were on both sides of them and they could not get out of the ditch without exposing themselves," said PFC Peterson. "We just saturated the trench with frags. They kept moving up and down the ditch trying to avoid the grenades."

The ditch with the NVA in it was as close as seven or eight feet to the Recon Platoon's position at places along the trail.

At one point Specialist 4 Tomothy V. Marrick of Auburn, Neb., went into the ditch and emptied his magazine, killing an enemy soldier.

A few minutes later Sergeant Tibbit ran up and jumped into the ditch to engage the enemy.

"Cook Off"

In addition to moving along the ditch to avoid the Americans' grenades, the enemy was catching many of them and throwing them back. This was

stopped by pulling the pins and holding the grenades several seconds, "cooking them off," before throwing.

To prevent enemy evasion of the grenades by moving up and down the ditch, Sergeant Tibbit had all his men throw grenades at one time, covering the entire length of the ditch.

After an hour and fifteen minutes the fight ended with all seven of the enemy in the ditch dead, bringing the total for the day to ten dead NVA.

"Playing catch with a CHICOM really isn't my idea of athletic recreation," said Specialist Ryan. "Now that it's all over I'm a little perturbed. My buddies keep accusing us of 'playing ball' with the NVA."

Seven weapons were recovered after the fight, along with a large quantity of communication wire and miscellaneous equipment.

2
Sergeant Tibbit, moving with the squad led by Specialist 4 Robert L. Carson of Barnesboro, Pa., spotted three or four of the enemy in a stream bed.

"We threw some frags in there and killed one," said Specialist Carson. "Two others there looked as if they had been killed by the artillery."

By this time the first squad had found the main enemy element hiding in the ditch. Moving along a trail about ten meters from the ditch, Specialist Dennis C. Johnson of Shelton, Conn., saw one of the enemy in the ditch and fired his M79 at him.

Sergeant Tibbit brought the rest of the platoon up to support the first squad, deploying them on both sides of the ditch.

Calls Cease Fire

"Sergeant Tibbit called a cease fire and yelled to the NVA to Chieu Hoi," said Specialist 4 John S. Ryan of Chicago, a Signal Corps photographer attached to the Recon Platoon. "The only answer we received was a burst of automatic fire so we resumed the fighting."

"I hit the ground and tried to get as low as possible. The next thing I knew CHICOM grenades started popping up out of the ditch.

"One of them landed right beside me. Without thinking twice, I picked it up and threw it back. My surprise couldn't have been greater when I saw the same grenade come flying back up out of the ditch and land beside me again. This time I thought it would certainly explode.

"I rolled over several times and waited for the blast. Nothing happened. I went back, picked up the grenade and threw it back again. I don't know if it ever went off. But I think, if nothing else, that NVA soldier and I succeeded in nearly scaring each other to death."

144 + 29 F

4-20-69

pb

↪