

Jim and kay Anderson

From: David Dunn [REDACTED]
To: Jim Anderson [REDACTED]
Cc: Art Johnson [REDACTED]; Pete Dykstra [REDACTED]; Ben Youmans [REDACTED]; Dick Arnold [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, August 14, 2002 11:28 PM
Attach: David Dunn.vcf
Subject: March 67

Chandler, Robert RA17467799 —
Nelms, Joseph no SN California
Roberts, Lance no SN, no HOR
Werner, George RA1747757 - colorado
Beebe, Stephen US52603682
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*Colorado, Iowa, KS, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska
N + S Dakota, Wyoming*

Fond?

DAVID R. DUNN

April 11, 2001

Mr. Ben C. Youmans, Secretary/Treasurer
35th Infantry Regiment Association

Re: 35th Infantry Regiment (Cacti) Association Membership

Dear Ben,

Thank you for sending the newsletters. I appreciate having the opportunity to share in the perspectives, observations and feelings of my brothers. The story in the last edition, recollecting the exemplary qualities of two fine men that died on March 21, 1967, by Ron Rykowski, was particularly heartfelt.

I remember that day, and following night very well. It was my platoon (2nd Plt., A-2/35th Inf.) that led the relief column up the ridgeline to what was left of C-2/35th Inf. late that afternoon. It is a day that I have thought about often, with very conflicted emotions. While I am extremely proud of my platoon's performance that afternoon, night and the next day, I am also sorry that we were not there sooner and perhaps been able to save more lives. Charlie Company was special to me.

When I joined Alpha Company in November of 1966, it was clear to me that there was a strong bond between the three line companies of 2/35th Inf. . However, I felt that there was a special connection between Alpha and Charlie companies. I don't know why. That feeling grew stronger in me during the next few months. I always felt comfortable when Charley Company was working with us. I simply knew that we could always count on them. For me and my platoon, that feeling had reached a high a few days preceding the action that took the lives of David McLemore and John Odierno. It was during the "Battle of Plei Djereng", March 11-12, 1967.

During that battle, the 1st and 3rd platoons of A-2/35th Inf. came into contact with a greatly superior NVA force about mid-morning. As they maneuvered to support one another they both became heavily engaged. I was directed to hold my platoon, with which the company HQ section was traveling, short of the main battle area in a location that offered good vision and the opportunity for a somewhat secure LZ. In the early afternoon, the 3rd Plt. began to run low on ammunition. They dispatched a small element to link up with my platoon for re-supply and then to return quickly with the ammunition. Five of my men, together with one man from the HQ section, volunteered to return with them. During the return trip they ran into a large NVA

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element that was then encircling the remainder of 3rd Plt. In short order they were pinned down, with many wounded. They continued to receive heavy fire and were ultimately separated into two groups. The sortie was, by then, completely enveloped and cut off from retreat. One of my men, Sp.4 James Perrone, was among the truly fine people that died with that group.

Now completely surrounded, both the 1st and 3rd platoons continued to defend their small perimeters valiantly. Everyone was low on ammunition and medical supplies but they continued to hold.

My platoon, with the exception of the five brave volunteers that had joined an ammo re-supply effort, remained relatively isolated from the main part of the battle. We were held in-place, providing security for the makeshift LZ and the company HQ section. Elements of the battalion HQ (C.O., S-3 & Arty.) also joined us that afternoon. Though we skirmished a bit with what were probably recon elements of the much larger NVA force, we remained fairly isolated from the main part of the battle.

Late that night, in a truly professional and quite heroic manner, Ron Rykowski led C-2/35th Inf. to the relief of the beleaguered re-supply element that included the remaining four men of 2nd Plt. Nearly all remaining were wounded but still alive. Charlie Company got them all out. They accomplished it without further loss of life, though still surrounded by a large number NVA.

During that same time, Bravo Company, moving to assist on another axis, became totally committed on their own. They also lost a number of good people. Travelling at night, they were apparently caught on a likely avenue of approach, complete with preplanned fires, to the large NVA complex that 1st and 3rd platoons had discovered.

It was again Charlie Company, so ably led by Ron Rykowski, that linked up with the 1st and 3rd platoons of A-2/35th Inf. the next morning. My friend Steve Karopczyc, 3rd Platoon Leader, was among the dead. Steve was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. I'm sure he deserved that and much, much more, as did many of the rest.

When the Charlie Company guys later described to me what they found that night and the next morning, I felt a deep, nearly unbearable sense of anguish. I really wished that I had been there with my brothers, arrogantly thinking that my presence could have made a positive difference in the outcome. In a nutshell, I felt that Charlie Company had carried 2nd Platoon's (my) load that night. That was a tough burden for me at the time. Had the Alpha Company HQ section not been traveling with us, I knew that my platoon would have gone to the aide of our two sister platoons. Instead, it was Charlie Company that made the effort. There is no question that their daringly aggressive actions that night saved the lives of what was left of the ill fated ammunition sortie. Further, I am convinced that their audaciously heroic actions that night saved many more of my Alpha Company brothers. They accomplished this by becoming a strong threat to the NVA flank, forcing their withdrawal from the field of action. In my eyes, Charlie Company had become "close family" and I owed them.

"The Battle of One-Niner", March 21, 1967, only a few days later was another, even more serious emotional blow to me. For many years after that day, I felt a deep sense of regret that I was not there for my Charlie Company brothers. Though I still regret not being there for them today, I

have largely forgiven myself. I know that I did my best, though I was too late to make a difference.

I remember hearing the first few shots about 1500 hrs that afternoon. I knew that it had to be Charlie Company. I recall reporting this to my company commander over the radio. It wasn't long after that, that I could tell that a serious battle was in progress. I asked my C.O. numerous times if I could move 2nd Plt. so as to be in a better position to support Charlie Company. When my orders finally came, it was to hold in place and await instructions.

I remember switching to the battalion frequency on the radio, trying to understand what was going on. I then jumped over to Charlie Company's net and listened as they worked to maneuver and close with one another. It was professional and composed but it was clear that they were facing a vastly superior force. In short, they were being decimated and I still wasn't there to help.

When I finally got the OK to move, it was to an assembly point. The location was near the base of the ridge that Charlie Company was on. I was to ordered to hold my platoon there until the rest of the company closed with us. We moved quietly but quickly to the assembly position. We waited and waited. It seemed like we waited forever for the other two platoons and the company HQ section to join us. It seemed like hours, though I know it wasn't. Granted, I knew that my platoon was the closest to the battle area but the wait for the rest of my company was seemingly interminable. The battle was continuing and I knew that Charlie Company was getting weaker by the minute. I remember becoming very angry that my Alpha Company was so seemingly slow in coming to Charlie Company's aide.

I recall that my C.O. had wanted the company to move up the ridgeline with three platoons "on line" with the HQ section following. What worked better was my platoon taking the point and center with the other two platoons, one on each flank, in a "U" formation. The company HQ section followed well to the rear. This, in effect, placed me in operational control of the company. That arrangement worked just fine. We rapidly worked our way up the ridge from the assembly point employing fire and maneuver, quickly eliminating the little resistance that remained. Shortly thereafter we closed with and moved through Charlie Company's positions. It was clear to me by then that the main NVA force was withdrawing, leaving only a small covering force.

After linking up with what was left of two platoons of Charlie Company, we consolidated, tended the wounded and silenced the remaining snipers. By this time it was getting dark. I remember that we received a number of 82MM mortar rounds fired from a position that was fairly close. We offered counter fire with M-79's at moderately high trajectory through holes in the tree cover to where we thought the mortars were firing from. Our counter fire may have been close because they ceased fire immediately. The NVA mortar fire was never again accurate for the remainder of that night.

It was a long night. The carnage was terrible. There were many continued acts of true heroism that night, and many men were saved. All too many were lost.

After reading Ron Rykowski's wonderful tribute to John Odierno and David McLemore, I again re-lived those days in my mind. I again felt a strong feeling that I should have been there for

them. I wasn't, and it hurt. It still does. I will always remember my Charlie Company brothers though I didn't know all of their names. I still wish that I could have been there sooner. I know that I will always have them close to my heart.

The guilt suffered by many survivors, myself included, can often be extremely devastating. The knowledge that others did not return, perhaps by your actions and perhaps even in your place, is awful. It is frequently far easier to forgive someone else, even a total stranger, than it is to forgive yourself.

I know because I have wrestled it, off and on, for a lot of years. Though I haven't yet totally mastered it I know that I'm getting much better. Occasionally it creeps up and jumps me again, as it did when I read Ron's loving words for those two men. But it also prompted me to write this letter. I write partially in thanks to those that gave so much and partially to help forgive myself for not making there in time and, strangely enough, for surviving.

I have been truly blessed in this life, in so many ways. I have just celebrated 30 years with a truly fine lady that has incredible strength and courage, not to mention patience. I have three wonderful grown children and have been honored in life again with beautiful grandchildren.

I was also supremely fortunate to have only one man of my platoon killed while serving as a platoon leader. That man was James Perrone, a truly nice young man from New Jersey that volunteered to carry ammunition to his brothers. His generous offer caused him to pay the ultimate price. James may not have looked the part of a squared away soldier, but he was all soldier when it counted. In many ways he reminded me of Bill Mauldin's W.W.II caricature of the front line soldier. In truth, it seemed like he always needed a shave. Even when all cleaned up with spit and polish, James looked like he had just crawled out from the bottom of a duffel bag full of dirty laundry. But he was also a man with a very big heart. He was always very generous and selflessly shared the goodies his mother sent him with the rest of the platoon. I recall that the hard Italian sausage she often sent was an especially big hit with the guys. Most importantly though, he was a man that you could always count on, no matter what. James selflessly volunteered for the mission that ultimately took his life and I miss him. I miss him today as much as ever. I miss all of my brothers and thank them for the sacrifices they have made. I miss and heartfully thank, those many fallen. They made the ultimate sacrifice so others could live.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts. Enclosed is my membership application and check. I look forward to being a part of the organization and hope that I will be able to contribute, if only in some small way. I am truly proud to be in such august company.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Dunn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

David Dunn, A-2/35th Inf. '66-'67