



IVY LEAF

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1 Dec 1968 Ivy Leaf (get Photo)

2 companies Take President's Honors

BY SP5 Jeffrey Tarter and SP4 Craig McGowan

CAMP ENARI—Two 4th Division units received the coveted Presidential Unit Citation from the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson.

General Creighton W. Abrams, commander of U.S. Forces Vietnam, presented the award to Alpha Company of the 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, and Bravo Company of the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry, during a ceremony at the Ivy Division's headquarters here.

Also present at the ceremony was the 4th Division's commander, Major General Charles P. Stone.

The two companies were cited for a joint heliborne assault against several battalions of North Vietnamese Army forces near the Ia Drang Valley on May 28-29, 1966.

For 26 hours, the enemy made repeated efforts to dislodge the American infantrymen from their hilltop position. The NVA finally withdrew after losing 241 soldiers.

In the text of the citations, the two companies were praised for "outstanding performance and exceptional valor in action against a numerically superior and heavily-armed North Vietnamese Army force.

"Outnumbered and surrounded, Company A fought valiantly, shoulder to shoulder with Company B, as successive waves of the foe sought to overrun their position.

"With great professional skill, the officers and men repelled each enemy onslaught. Gallant acts by all men and inspired leadership were the order of the day.

"When the rear of battle subsided, the enemy had withdrawn to reorganize his battered units, leaving 241 of his troops dead and numerous weapons as mute evidence of the intensity of the engagement and the valiant efforts of the defenders.

"Through their heroic stand, another illustrious page was written in United States military history," the citations concluded.

Both units are now part of the Ivy Division's 3rd Brigade, commanded by Colonel Stan L. McClellan of Ventura, Calif., and are currently operating against enemy forces along the Cambodian border in the Central highlands.

CPT Beal Accepts Citation

Accepting the citation for Alpha Company was Captain Richard A. Beal of Dallas, who commanded the company between March and August this year. He said:

"I remember the action back in 1966. At that time I was in the 1st Battalion of the 14th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division, and Alpha and Bravo Company were also part of the 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division. All the battalions were part of a task force which was operating near Cambodia, west of Pleiku in 'the battle of 10-Alpha.

"At that time, this was one of the largest battles in the Vietnam War. Both Alpha and Bravo were under extreme enemy fire for a two-day period.

"Tremendous amounts of U.S. air and artillery support were being used. There were about six 12.7mm anti-aircraft weapons captured by the two companies, a number of 82mm mortars, and a large amount of other enemy weapons and ammunition.

"It was a hard-fought battle, but due to the skill of the commanders and the spirit of the men, they did an outstanding job and really put one over on the NVA."

Another man at the ceremony who remembered the action was Staff Sergeant Santiago Vasquez of Brownsville, Tex. Sergeant Vasquez now serves with Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, but he was with Bravo Company in 1966.

Aboard First Choppers

"I was aboard the first wave of choppers that landed on the LZ," he recalled. "On the way in we started receiving small arms and anti-aircraft fire. When we landed on the LZ, the people on the first chopper were already engaged.

"You could hear the grenades and heavy automatic weapons fire. We got out of the choppers and ran about 10 meters to the woodline of the LZ and hit the ground.

"We hollered for more men to come up to our position, and as I looked back I saw a squad of NVA coming at us.

"I opened up at them, killing several.

"The whole perimeter was engaged. Later on a squad of our men assaulted an anti-aircraft gun which was keeping medevac choppers from landing.

"We captured it and employed it against the enemy. Alpha Company came in and was immediately heavily engaged. But with the aid of air strikes and gunships our two companies were finally able to defeat the NVA.

"The enemy was very determined, but our men were more determined," Sergeant Vasquez said.

Alpha Company is currently commanded by Captain Richard D. Wandke of Vacaville, Calif. Bravo Company's commander is Captain Andrew J. Mundy Jr., of Jersey, Ga.