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Cav, Infantrymen Battle North Vietnamese Troops

DUC PHO—It was the “Blue Team,” a platoon of air cavalrymen, from the 1st Squadron, 9th Air Cavalry who first collided with units of an estimated North Vietnamese battalion.

The cavalrymen had been inserted shortly after noon to check out a suspected enemy position. The helicopters had barely lifted off when they were hit from all directions.

The “Blues” held their own but were running low on ammo and being pressed by the NVA when the 1st Platoon, Company B, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry was airlifted into the battle.

“As we approached the landing zone I could see it was plenty hot,” said Second Lieutenant Walter Twyford, 1st Platoon leader. “My chopper was hit and missed the LZ by 200 meters. We were all able to make it in and link up with the fighting cavalrymen, though.”

The bitter fighting continued and an attempt to overrun the American positions was repelled before more help arrived.

The remainder of Company B and the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry’s Recon Platoon joined the fighting along with two platoons of armored personnel carriers from the 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry.

With the APCs and Infantrymen battling side-by-side, the NVA lines were shattered.

“We really had the enemy on the run,” said Lieutenant Twyford. “Forced from the trenches, he couldn’t find enough holes to hide in. As we moved through the area we started receiving fire from the rear. Many were in spider holes and we had to sweep back through the area.”

Darkness fell and contact continued throughout the night. The infantrymen of the 3rd Brigade, 25th Division now had a new danger to contend with as the NVA began firing mortar and recoilless rifle rounds into the perimeter.

"When the mortar rounds began to fall I was too busy to be scared," said Sergeant Kenneth J. Hills of the 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry.

Sergeant Hills certainly was busy because during the night he fired 50 to 60 magazines of M-16 rounds, a case of M79 grenades, and 3,000 rounds of 50-caliber machine gun ammo.

Aided by air strikes, artillery and "Spooky," the "Cacti" and 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry routed the NVA. A total of 87 enemy were killed and the 3rd Brigade troops captured numerous weapons, including a 60mm mortar, a recoilless rifle, and a machine gun.