

10 - SECOND COMBAT ASSAULT IN CAMBODIA

Located in the northeast corner of Cambodia

May 11, 1970

As we approached the LZ we saw that all hell was breaking loose. The LZ was going to be a hot one. Our chopper made all kinds of evasive moves to make it more difficult for the NVA to shoot us down. Due to a mix-up in the air, we were the fourth chopper to land on the LZ. As we descended we became the focus of the fire. I hoped they weren't using any heavy-caliber anti-aircraft weapons against us. It seemed that all the tracer paths were now coming at us. Each tracer looked as though it was going to hit you right between the eyes, only to curve away at the last minute. Our chopper took a couple of rounds in the tail.

The NVA used green-colored tracers, while we used red ones. It must be some rule of war, like game jersey colors in football. The visiting team shoots green; the home team shoots red. We were the home team, weren't we?

As we got closer to the ground, the tracers picked up the choppers landing behind us. Our door gunners kept firing into the surrounding wood line and encouraged us to exit as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the choppers were six feet off the ground and had a fairly rapid forward motion. We jumped with rucksacks on and landed on all fours pretty hard. I looked around and saw Sgt. Hubbart grimaced in pain. His hand was impaled on a small shrub. I helped free him by cutting the base of the shrub with my machete. He was able to move now, but with a shrub sticking out of the top of his hand! We tried to find the rest of our squad.

HUEY GUNSHIP IN ACTION

Everybody who landed was moving to the perimeter of the LZ to try to return fire on the NVA who were firing on the arriving choppers. The NVA was a good distance from the LZ and we couldn't see any targets of opportunity. Some of the guys were making wild shots in the general direction, but I didn't, since I was already low on rounds. I figured it would be better to save the rounds for a more desperate moment. Eventually, we all regrouped into a small wood line on the east side of the LZ and set up a defensive perimeter. The firing stopped with the departure of the choppers.

It was about 5 pm by the time we were set up defensively in our night logger. During that time, a chopper evacuated Sergeant Hubbart to a hospital to treat his hand. I don't remember if it was a Medivac. I also don't remember if his chopper took fire. I now had the shovel to myself.

A Medivac was a helicopter fitted out as an ambulance. Also known as a "Dustoff". The choppers had red crosses painted all over them to prevent them from receiving enemy fire. Rules of war, you know. The NVA thought they made great targets.

The heat was unbearable. We were thirsty and had no water left. We were desperate for water.

It was decided to send half the company to a nearby blue line, which was about 200 meters to the north. The 2nd platoon led the march, with the 1st platoon following at a distance. By the time we arrived at the blue line the 2nd had already filled their canteens and were returning to the night lager.

Before we had a chance to fill our canteens, the firing began. The 2nd Platoon had run into 3 to 4 NVA heading to the river. The 2nd Platoon took cover behind a huge log that was about 3 feet in diameter, and engaged the enemy force that was about 100 meters away.

For some reason, the 2nd did not have a radio with them, so Sgt. Brown, who replaced Hubbard as squad leader, me, and a radioman, quickly went to the 2nd platoon to establish a communication link with the rest of the company and artillery support. Although we didn't realize it at the time, our night lager had also come under heavy fire from another NVA force. All hell was breaking loose again.

We were still short on water, so Brown had me gather up a bunch of canteens from the 1st platoon, and we headed back to the blue line along with two other guys from our squad. I wasn't too thrilled about leaving the cover of the log to go back to the openness of the small river, but I figured Brown knew what he was doing.

To get to the river one had to climb down an almost vertical ten-foot bank. We found a cut in the bank that allowed us to get to the river easily. While Brown and I filled the canteens, the other two guys stayed on top of the bank and covered us. Suddenly, we heard a whoosh as an RPG passed over our heads and buried itself in the top of the bank without exploding. It was a dud! Following the RPG, the NVA opened up on us with AK-47s.

Brown had me continue to fill canteens while he and the other guys covered me. I filled furiously and got the water we desperately needed. We got out of there and rejoined the rest of the guys at the log as our artillery support began raining down on the NVA position. We decided to withdraw back to the night lager under artillery cover. Life was getting hairy. As we were leaving, Brown jumped up on the log and emptied his rifle magazine at the NVA while yelling some salty remarks about their mothers. Brown was always a perfect southern gentleman.

We arrived at the night lager, which was under intense fire, and joined their firefight. We were taking fire from two sides, but were essentially at the NVA's mercy from all directions. McGee was behind a large tree returning fire with his machine-gun, but taking a concentrated return fire that was shredding the tree he was behind.

Later we would inspect the 2 foot diameter tree and find about 4-6" gouged out from the intense fire on McGee's position. This really had an emotional effect on McGee. In 2008, McGee located me via email and I have included it at the end of the chapter.

It seemed as though we had landed in the middle of the force we were trying to block instead of in front of them. Our situation seemed precarious.

This time I wasn't as scared as when I had my first firefight. In retrospect, I should have been more frightened. I was concentrating on making each round count. The only problem was that it was difficult to locate a definite target. I could see some muzzle flashes, but my shots were essentially guesses. Artillery rounds were falling all around the perimeter, in support, while we luckily did not receive any incoming from the NVA. During the fight, we got some cover from a gunship while another chopper dropped us some crates of ammo. After an hour the firing ceased, and darkness began closing in. Saved by the bell! No overtime for the NVA?

Just when you thought you had it made in the shade, the other shoe drops. The CO wanted to send out a "volunteer" night patrol to make a body count, but nobody volunteered. He wanted that body count, so elected our LT to go out with his men. The LT asked for volunteers and the whole platoon decided to go with him. Everybody respected the LT, which was more than could be said about the idiot who wanted a body count. I doubted that the CO was the brainstorm behind this mission. It was probably some lifer REMF who needed brownie points for his next promotion.

REMF Definition as per Webster's Dictionary: Rear Echelon MotherF%@#r.*

For some reason I ended up walking drag for the whole platoon. I was the last man in the line of march. It was dark and scary. I could feel the eyes of the whole NVA army on my back. Every shadow looked like a soldier. As it got darker I could hardly see the man in front of me. I was scared that I would be jumped from behind and taken prisoner.

We were told that enlisted men would be executed by beheading, or worse. They wouldn't waste a bullet on a lowly enlisted soldier. We were told it would be better to take your own life, than be captured. Save one grenade for yourself and take a few enemies with you.

Not many enlisted men were in the prisoner release that happened in 1973.

The CO sent us in a NE direction that everybody thought was wrong. Maybe that was the idea. If the NVA were still out here, we were dead ducks. We swept out to about 500 meters in a big loop but found no sign of the enemy. Were the NVA ever missing a golden opportunity by not engaging us. Maybe they had some inept leaders on their side also. Who knows in the fog of war?

After an eternity, we returned to the night lager empty-handed. The official report was that we found a potato (yam) patch and a NW-SE trail which we followed for about 100 meters running into another couple of trails running N and SE. We followed the SE trail for about 150 meters and found some freshly dug potato plants. The trail was used that day but we could not determine the direction of travel. The trail could not be seen from the air. We returned back to our night lager. The plan was to return to the area in the morning. Who saw all that in the dark?

Double guards were posted at each machinegun, and we tried to get some sleep. The night was quiet without any incidents, including errant pigs.

It was a tough night for a few of us because we had developed a case of diarrhea. Usually we would step just outside the perimeter, dig a hole, relieve ourselves, cover the hole and return to the perimeter. Not so tonight, it was too dangerous. You had to find a spot in-between the sleeping troops and perform your duty. It was gross. A lot of holes were dug inside the perimeter that night. The medic thought we had contracted dysentery from drinking contaminated water from the pig and chicken watering hole. He gave us some pills to counteract the diarrhea, and they worked. Boy did they work! The rest of the mission I was severely constipated. I don't know which condition was better.

Later that night, we spotted flashlights about 400 meters to the east. We suspected that the NVA was policing the firefight area for their wounded and dead. Artillery was employed in the area and the flashlights promptly went out.

During the same day, other units were finding enemy complexes and being shifted to different assignments:

A Company was assigned an area west of FSB Conquest.

B Company was extracted from the field and assigned to replace A Company on FSB Conquest.

C Company stayed in their original area on a search and destroy mission. Late in the day they found a large enemy complex with 23 bunkers and three 10x15x6-foot mess hall hooches. In the complex they found 35 ponchos, 11 rucksacks, 28 US canteen cups, 40 sets of clothes, 6 sets of new NVA fatigues, 400 AK-47 rounds, 200 pots & pans, 20 shovels, an unknown amount of money, 125 1-gallon water jugs, 13 ampules of an unknown medicine, 800 lb. of rice, 180 sleeping mats, an NVA jacket with an insignia above the pocket, a brown pouch, 8 pickaxes, 100 personal items, 40 sewing kits, a bayonet, 130 balls of string, 8 mess kits, 40 axes, one US rucksack, 100 pipes, 100 homemade tools, 30 belts, 2 diapers, 30 lb. of salt, 25 pairs of NVA slippers, 60 pairs of Ho Chi Minh sandals, 55 blue sweatshirts, 12 NVA pistol belts, 55 NVA blue

blankets, 30 lb. of charcoal, 20 lb. of fish, 6 pith helmets, two pouches of documents, and 2 ID cards. Also in the immediate area were 15 chickens, 6 pigs, and 10 dogs that had been dead for about two days.

Recon also stayed in their existing area on a "recon in force" mission. Early in the morning they had to evacuate a man that was vomiting, and had dysentery. Later in the morning Recon found a large enemy complex containing seven 50x15x6 foot hooches., six 12x10x5 foot hooches., ten 4x4x4 utility hooches., one 16x8x10 foot hooch that contained 1000 lb. of uncut rice and 30 lb. of salt. The area also contained twelve 6x8x6 bunkers with 4 foot overhangs. Items found in the area included 10 balls of blue yarn, 3 khaki uniforms, 4 blue sweatshirts, 6 sets of black pajamas, 6 mosquito nets, a hammock, 14 AK-47 rounds, 12 pans, 10-15 baskets, a US canteen, a bottle of rice wine, an NVA belt, a tiger fatigue shirt, cloth, and a bag of documents. Also in the area were three water buffalo tied to stakes and three dogs. All items were packed and ready to be moved. Tracks indicated that the inhabitants had fled to the west within the last 48 hours. The complex was only about two months old.

In NYC for the second time in three days New York's hard-hatted construction workers showed their support for the Vietnam War by attacking onlookers, snarling traffic, and vocally abusing Mayor Lindsey. They chanted "Lindsey is a Bum" and their signs read "Impeach the Red Mayor."

May 12, 1970

The morning was quiet and beautiful. I had lived through a harrowing experience and was feeling pretty good about life, although not very arrogant. I kept thinking about the Greek gods I had studied in college and their wrath bestowed upon mortals with too much hubris. I wasn't taking any chances.

Before sending out another sweep to the firefight area of the previous day, artillery was employed in the area. The sweep of the area had negative results other than finding drag marks in the ground and blood trails. We had no way of determining the damage we inflicted, but blood trails showed that we had done something.

Late in the day we ran into two 10x15x5 hooches. with sleeping positions. The hooches. were about a month old and were used within the last 24-48 hours. Also found in the area was a rice grinder (For making polished rice?), two fatigue shirts and about 30 chickens.

During the same day:

A Company found a high-speed trail running NE-SW that was 1-1/2 feet wide and was about a year old. The trail had not been used in the last three weeks. Nearby were some old bunkers estimated to be 10 years old that were torn down. The bunkers measured 8x4x4 feet. A short

time later as a sweep was checking an old 8 x 15 foot hooch; two NVA were spotted about 50 meters away moving to the north. They were engaged with small arms fire and fled to the west. An inspection of the area discovered Ho Chi Minh sandal prints but nothing else.

C Company's point man was 20 meters away from a hooch; two enemy exited the hooch and fled to the NE. They did not appear to be carrying any weapons. One individual was wearing khakis, a pistol belt and a soft cap. A sweep of the area had negative results.

Recon, early in the morning found three storage hooches. located four feet above the ground and measuring 12x8x5 feet. The hooches. contained 2000 lb. of unpolished rice, baskets, and a bird in a cage, Australian jungle boots, some empty bottles, and cooking utensils. Later in the afternoon Recon found two 8x4x4 hooches. located 4 feet above the ground. They contained 500 lb. of rice, 3 entrenching tools, a machete, an AK-47 cleaning kit and two sweatshirts. A few minutes later they found a large enemy training complex containing twenty-three 15x10x8-foot hooches. with bunkers located inside each hooch measuring 6x5x4 feet. There were two classroom areas containing blackboard frames and benches to seat thirty students. The area also contained wooden models of B-40 rockets and chicom grenades. Nearby was an obstacle course that was 75 feet long and that included concertina wire, hurdles and a ladder. The complex included four 2-seat "shitters" (Outhouses). There were also slogans hung on the trees. The entire area measured about 300 x 150 meters.

In Georgia six blacks were shot dead in the back at a rally.