

## **3,000 Against 120+1**

By Jay D. Shaulis

SOUTH VIETNAM, Oct. 25, 1966: Company B of the 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Division received a radio report that their counterparts in Company C were under attack. Because we were the closest company to their position, Company B was ordered to go to their aid. Due to the amount of battles underway at the time, our assistance would be without artillery or air support.

We walked all night, and all of the next day, to reach them. At dusk, we were about a quarter of a mile from their position when we received another radio message that they had been completely overrun and wiped out by a unit of North Vietnamese regulars, who were now moving toward us. The small aircraft which had spotted, reported that they were strung out through the jungle, every fourth man carrying a flashlight, and estimated the force was 3,000 men.

In preparation, we dug in for the night into the hard, rocky ground of Hill #389. My ammo bearer and I were only able to dig our foxhole about one foot deep, before nightfall, just enough to lie in a prone position.

On the night of Oct. 26, a North Vietnamese soldier called out from the jungle, "Hey GI, what time is it?" Someone from inside our perimeter answered, "11 p.m.," and all hell broke loose. We fought hard all night long. Things didn't slack off until daybreak. I guess it was so they could regroup and take care of their dead and wounded.

We could still see them moving through the jungle, so we took turns on the machine gun and digging our foxhole deeper. By dusk, our foxhole was a bunker five feet deep. As the night fell on Oct. 27, they hit us again. Wave after wave, they kept coming. The barrel of my gun was so hot it glowed white. We carried an extra barrel, but didn't have time to change it. There were bodies as close as five feet from our bunker. Just before dawn, the fighting stopped. The night was completely black and deathly quiet. At daybreak, not a single enemy body was found. Somehow, under the cover of darkness and without a sound, they had crept up and removed their dead. I don't know if it was because of a promise to bury those killed in action, or in an effort to deceive us of their numbers.

On the morning of Oct. 28, our logistics chain tried to resupply us with food and ammunition via helicopter. However, the incoming choppers began receiving such heavy enemy fire that they dumped their loads without landing and left. We got the

ammunition, but the food and water fell outside our perimeter. By this time, we had gone without food, water, or sleep for more than 72 hours. We spent that day fortifying our bunkers with logs and reloading magazines. We eventually received word about possible air support and placed flares in the trees surrounding our perimeter to signal our position to any incoming aircraft. When that support arrived, it came in the form of a AC-47 with a 20 millimeter Gatling gun attached, an aircraft everyone nicknamed *Puff the Magic Dragon*. It was capable of hitting its target within three feet from 10,000 feet in the air.

As usual, as darkness set in, the fighting raged once more. Our air support arrived, but as we tried to trigger the flares, we found that the enemy had cut all the wires leading to them. As a last resort, we used our strobe lights, meant only to call in close fire on your own position in the event you were overrun.

*Puff* made one pass, circled and came back for another. The 20 mm shells impacted within inches of our position. More friendlies arrived overhead. This time it was F-4 Phantoms who would drop napalm and set the jungle ablaze. When the rifleman to the right of our position was killed, my ammo bearer moved to that bunker in an effort to fill the gap in our perimeter. We didn't know at the time, but our company of 120 strong was now down to just 20.

The fighting again ceased at daybreak on Oct. 29. Confused and exhausted, we slowly crawled out of our bunkers. Still in awe of the night's fighting as we watched the jungle continue to burn. We thought of all we had just been through. Surely, this must be the end of the fight. We survived! My ammo bearer sat just 10 feet away on the edge of the bunker. Suddenly, a rocket propelled grenade hissed from somewhere out in the jungle. The round failed to detonate, but passed clean through his chest. He sat there in what seemed to be an eternity, but as I know could only have been a few seconds. There was no last burst of gunfire in retaliation. No call for a medic, and no final words of anger. Instead, he calmly looked up to heaven and said, "God, forgive me."

For him, the battle was over.

If you have God in your heart, He will be with you until death. Knowing then, with complete peace, you will be with Him.

Ever since that day, anytime we encountered more danger, I would recite part of the 23rd Psalm, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For thou art with me."

I wanted to receive the complete peace in my heart that I saw my friend had that day. How he knew that battle was 3,000 against 120+1. The Lord.