

VNL: At what point in the battle did you hear what was reported to be execution fire? When were your men being executed? Please try to be specific regarding the time, as there seems to be some confusion as to exactly when this occurred.

Milton: I never heard execution fire. We heard several shots fired between 3 and 5, or in the afternoon, approximately 3 to 4 p.m. C Company reported shots being fired throughout the night. It wasn't until C Company arrived in the battle area the next morning did they and I learn each soldier had been shot several times in the back of the head in an attempt to prevent later identification of each man. In fact, it took the 1st Sergeant and me 12 hours to ID each and every soldier -- carry that picture in your head for 44 years. After we identified them they were picked-up by two soldiers and placed in a refrigeration truck like pieces of wood.

VNL: When selecting your route back to Dak To did you consider changing the route to avoid backtracking even though it would have taken more time? Or were you 'following orders?' Also, why did you want to keep your guys in the bush following the battle after being told to extract by chopper? What was your motivation and did your survivors share your thinking?

Milton: With regard to the route back, I was following orders. Without A Company staying in the field I asked the battalion commander for permission for me to spend the night with C Company -- my request was denied. I ordered the rest of A Company to board Hueys and return to base. I wanted to remain with C Company to be one of the first to get to my fallen soldiers still on the hill. I did not want to keep my guys in the field that night -- I was their CO and my place should be with my soldiers!!! Without A Company in base camp there was no battalion reserve. C and B Companies had already deployed.

VNL: You seem to find fault with the C Company leadership but don't question the commands from battalion or brigade. What do you think today given 44 years to reflect and also everything that has been written about Westmoreland and his methodology for fighting the Vietnam War?

Milton: No comment.

VNL: O.K. I'll share my thoughts with you over a glass of beer one day. When you hooked-up with Captain Leonard after the battle, what did you ask him and what was his response? Did he ever explain C Company's actions that day? Please answer both following the battle and also months later. What was your relationship?

Milton: I never questioned Captain Leonard that day, I am not sure I even saw him. This is hearsay, but I understand he was transferred to the 4th Battalion and given a new command. He was a real hero during the battle at Hill 875 just a few months later in November. I was glad for him.

VNL: If you were given the same orders today, what would you do differently?

Milton: You are right, we spent the last several months chasing VC. Be that as it was, and again doing the would of, could of, should of; 1: Requested more time to get back to base camp; 2: Made sure 3rd Platoon could support 2nd Platoon; 3: Not lifted artillery fire at all. Given the large number of NVA I am not sure anything I would have done could have saved those 76 brave men who gave their lives so gallantly for their country. God bless them and their families.

VNL: Dave, I first met you years ago at the 173d reunion in Texas, the one where we staged a 2/503d reception featuring our former battalion XO/CO Bob Carmichael, which you may recall. Following the event you were beside yourself with grief over the men lost on the Slopes. I also understand your grief continues to this day, and, as you're no doubt aware, some have placed blame at your feet for the terrible losses Alpha suffered that day. From what I've read about the Slopes, and taking in your first-hand report here, I would hope those same men might reconsider their views. Alpha was strung out in those hills with no immediate ground support; the planners of the operation knew the Company was being injected into a lion's den; as commander on the ground you knew better what air support was most effective, yet your request was not heeded; and, C Company, of course, arrived too late to save many.

We're not seeking to place blame here or to find a scapegoat. But, it appears a compilation of decisions, good or bad, and circumstances which could or should have been anticipated by those same planners, were the key ingredients which lead to the terrible results of that fateful day. Is that how you see it?

Milton: As I mentioned in my earlier note, I often play the would of, should of, could of, about that mission. If I would have fired more artillery, or better understood the size of the enemy force we were up against, or perhaps circled-up quicker; how could I have won that battle, etc, etc.

(continued....)



I often blame myself for the results of that day, I was the commander on the ground.

We can Monday-morning quarterback the outcome of the day, but regardless of what is thought, you must remember the BRAVE, BRAVE men of A Company 2/503, who against overwhelming odds, to include banzi type attacks, never once waived in their mission to close with and kill the enemy.

To those who died, to those who live: I was honored to have been one of you. To the men of C Company, the 319th Field Artillery, and the men who provided gunship support, you all gave a very heroic effort that day. Be proud of yourselves -- all involved were magnificent!

VNL: Final question, Dave. What was your career path after June 22? Also, please share any closing thoughts with us.

Milton: I was wounded 3 weeks after the battle. After several weeks in country hospitals I was transferred to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines. While lying in the ICU unit, I walks General Westmoreland with his wife. He said "*Dave, Dave is that you?*" I attempted to salute and told him what happened. He then leaned to the hospital commander and said, "*Take really good care of this one, he is a great soldier.*" He also whispered to his wife the same thing. Needless to say, I was well taken care of. I spent 7 months in the hospital.

I was then sent to the career course at the Amphibious Warfare School at Quantico, VA. From there I volunteered to go back to Vietnam. I was assigned as the S3, 2/8 Cav, then as the S2, 1st Brigade 1st Cav. After my tour was over I was assigned as an instructor at Infantry School.

Going to college at night I was able to earn my Bachelor's degree in 1973 at the University of Tampa; 1974 Command and General Staff College, 1975-1977, Dept. of Army IG Washington, DC, 1978-1979, Commander 15th Training Battalion at Fort Knox, KY. In 1980-1981 I served as Deputy Commander of the 194th Armor Brigade, Fort Knox, KY, and in 1982 was selected to attend the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, PA. In 1983 I was medically retired for wounds received on July 11, 1967.

VNL: Thank you Colonel Milton.



Note: We contacted Colonel Ron Leonard inviting his comments but didn't give him sufficient time to reply. Ron says he will consider sharing his thoughts on The Slopes in a future issue. Ed

On C Company Moving too Slow to the Aid of Alpha

It was a bad rap. We weren't ordered to advance for a couple of hours. When we did move, we were sure we had a good chance of running into the same enemy regiment. Everyone was keyed up and ready, both while we waited and listened to the fight over the radio (I think I was listening on Walter Bills' radio). And during the march to A Company I don't recall humping to them any slower than normally. I never had the impression that the company could have moved faster.

Sam Stewart

C/2/503d

Survivor of The Slopes



General John R. "Uncle Jack" Deane, Jr.
Commander, 173d Airborne Brigade
during Operation Greeley

Note: We twice invited General Deane to share with us his recollections of Operation Greeley and the Battle of the Slopes. We received no reply to our requests. In the event the General didn't receive our email requests and would later care to submit remarks, we'll publish them in a future edition of our newsletter. Ed



~ Another Perspective ~

All of us in the TOC at that time thought that Ron Leonard exercised extreme caution and moved too slow. One cannot, however, question his individual courage. He was later awarded a DSC as a member of 4th Battalion during the battles at Hill 875, again in Dak To.

His responsibility was to protect the men of his command and he carried out his duty as he saw it. His point was reporting signs of enemy presence. Later, the historical record would seem to indicate that his company's presence was probably not known by the enemy.



COL Ken Smith (L) and LTC Dave Milton at *The Wall* in Washington, DC touching their buddies from 6/22/67.

On the other hand, in my few months of command, I did a night movement once to relieve pressure on B Company when they were under attack (not really heavy attack but the Boss ordered me to go). I also one night had to get back to the Dak To base camp in an emergency (Boss wanted us there so that another company could deploy to a hot spot the next morning). I literally ran my company down a trail on a ridge for 2-3 miles. In either case, there could have been a disaster if we had hit an ambush.

It is easy to critique but hard to wear another man's shoes. We all have to live with ourselves.

Dave Milton did not make a tactical mistake nor was he hit by enemy fire. But the burden of command left a wound that took long to heal.

**Ken Smith, Col. (Ret)
A/D/2/503d**

~ A Postscript ~

Editor's Note

As a three-and-out civilian soldier I know little about military combat tactics; I do know dumb.

It was March 1966, when our entire 2nd Battalion was sent into the jungles of the "D" Zone to find and destroy forces of the Military Region 7 VC Headquarters complex, forces which were known to have included:

(After Action Report) *"In addition, the 800 and 900 Main Force Battalions were known to be subordinate to the Military Affairs Committee of MR-7, and had also been reported in or near the AO. It was believed that the Phuoc Bien Local Force Battalion and C-101 Local Force Company had the capability of defending this complex with a maximum force of three Main Force Regiments, two Main Force Battalions, one Local Force Battalion and Local Security elements."* (Emphasis added)

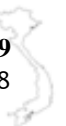
Only a twist of fate would save our battalion that day.

A Huey delivering hot "A's" for breakfast at LZ Zulu Zulu during *Operation Silver City*, delayed the battalion breaking-up into smaller units which, according to many, would have resulted in the complete annihilation of the 2/503d had we not kept our perimeter in place while the enemy initiated a premature attack against our fixed lines. Yet, and seemingly with similar intelligence available indicating superior forces were in the AO, an undersized unit of the battalion was again sent into harm's way on *The Slopes* of Dak To. Then, five months later our battalion was once again thrown-up against massive enemy forces at Hill 875 and suffered dearly for the decisions which led them there.

If there is a point to be made here, I suppose one might be, little is learned or understood from past actions – or are they simply ignored? Also, it's easy to sit behind a desk in Saigon or wherever, knowing the strength of enemy forces which may be encountered, and still commit an unequal number of troops to the gates of hell.

Troopers having contrary opinions or wishing to address the subject or anything pertaining to *The Slopes*, are invited to send their comments to rto173d@cfl.rr.com for inclusion in an upcoming issue of our newsletter.

Thanks to Roger Dick, C/2/503d, survivor of *The Slopes*, for providing background information helpful to the interview with LTC Milton, and thanks to all our guys who contributed to this report. Ed



~ Personal Recollections, Reports & News Articles ~

Steve 'Sgt. Rock' Vargo, C/2/503d

Like Edward R. Morrow said, "I was there."

I had been with the Herd and in country for about 3 months and was a Sgt. E-5 fire team leader. In the days leading up to the 22nd, all companies were chasing reports of a large NVA unit in the area. Up one huge mountain after another. At the bottom of one, the dogs went crazy. At the top of another, we walked right into an abandoned, freshly-cut base camp before we realized it.



Steve....SGT Rock

The day 'A' Company got hit, we were on the next mountain over and were ordered to dig in. We did and took small arms fire and mortar and rocket fire all night.

The position directly above my squad took a direct hit from a rocket or large mortar and vaporized everyone in the hole. A smoking boot was all that was left. They probed us all night and we exchanged fire.

I was not by a radio so I did not hear what was going on with Alpha but word quickly went down the line.

Charley was the first company in the next morning. In front of one of our machine guns was a river of blood. Hundreds of spent shells were by the gun. The gunner was slumped over his weapon.

The trees were shot to hell with AK and M-16 rounds. One trooper came running up to us clutching a single grenade and collapsed near us crying.

As we made our way around the area, probably 75% of the dead troopers we saw were executed with head shots where they lay.

Our squad went out on patrol and found a dead Chinese officer in full Chinese uniform in a shallow grave, dead. There were a lot more dead NVA found in shallow graves or underbrush as they left too quickly to bury them.

About a month later I transferred to the 51st Inf. LRP Company which was formed out of the 173d, and did the LURP thing until I was wounded in April 1968.

Rick "Koz" Koziara, C/4/503d, '67/'68

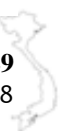
Funny how things come around again. You go to Dak To and the Battle of the Slopes, what do they do, send 2nd Bat and no real back up; you guys get hit again. We knew what was around; looks like some of the upper officers should have known better and provided more men but looking back, we were used on many occasions as bait, it happened on Hill 875, and again in June of '68 in a place called Bam Me Thout.

All the signs were there; heavy foot traffic on trails, perfect cover from the air, Dak To all over again. Like Dak To we knew it was something big there but they needed bait. I will never forgive some of the officers for letting us get in this position. If one would look at the daily records it probably happened many times, even a FSB we (C Company) had had a lot of movement thru our few days there. I was on an LP the nite before we were relieved; I didn't usually do the LP's being the squad leader but I did there, fearing something might happen to the batch of new guys, and we had a lot of probing going on.



Koz 'taking 5' near Tuy Hoa

The trip flares would go off, different ambushes hit small units but it was there, the signs were there. I remember throwing several frags that night -- so they move us out and the next night they relieve us with another unit of the same size, a company. So what happens, they almost get overrun and take many casualties. Our platoon leader advised his superiors of this so what do they do? Replace a company with a company. See any pattern yet? It just pisses me off that some men died for no reason, actually it was just plain incompetence. Sorry, but I get a little worked up when I think of this type of leadership.





This Skyraider was shot while supporting Alpha Company. It made an emergency landing at the Dak To airstrip.
 (Photo by Earle "Doc" Jackson, B Med)

Mike Anderson, Recon/2/503d

My account of the Battle of the Slopes, Hill 1338: I was the RTO in Recon Squad of HHC 2/503d, '67/'68. We were the first guys to recon the Hill. We walked into the middle of the NVA camp where there were steps carved into the hillside with rails on them, we also saw bunkers. To this day I do not know why they didn't take us all out of there. My CO had me call HHC. They told us to go back to the hill where they had originally dropped off -- they would 'send in choppers to pick us up'.

On the way down the hill we met A Company going up the hill. We told as many troopers as we could to look out for their asses. As we landed back at the Dak To airstrip all hell broke loose up there. We requested to go back up to help but they said no. The transgressions of the CO of A Company to this day haunt me.

Jim Baskin, Sgt., B/4/503d, '66-'68

My name is Jim Baskin and I was an arty Recon Sergeant for B Company 4/503d in 1966-1968. I remember being on the airstrip at Dak To in June of 1967 when the 2d Batt got hit. I was listening to the battle over my PRC25. I can't remember who it was, but word came down to the 4th Batt to saddle up and be ready to move out to 2d Batt's aid. This was the season of monsoons starting up, clouds were hanging in

the valleys and mountain tops all over II Corps. The slicks were grounded due to the clouds and not being able to get any support to 2d Batt. I know the 4th Batt guys were really anxious to get out there and help our sister battalion bad. When we learned of the atrocities the NVA had committed on the wounded everyone was so angry that if any Vietnamese had shown up I think we all would have shot them right there on the spot! And once the other infantry battalions got out into the Highlands, there was this silent oath that no prisoners would ever be taken. And none that I know of were taken alive.



Jim on Hill 875 in November '67





2/503d troopers waiting to join the Battle of the Slopes.
 (photo by Earle "Doc" Jackson, B Med)

Richard Head, Maj., Casper Platoon

My name is Richard Head (MAJ, USA Retired). I was there, as a pilot in the Casper Platoon (later CO). You can check my credentials with Ned Costa, CAPO. I can remember a lot of details, particularly the weather. The monsoon had begun, and the clouds were down on the mountain. We (the Caspers) had warned that close air support would be next to impossible, because the clouds/rain were below the tree line. The aircraft commanders stood around Brigade HQ and listened to the radio reports from the troops on the hill. I remember one because he said *"I've been hit five...no six times. They've got us surrounded."* Then silence. We could do nothing but wait for a break in the weather or the battle. And to recover the bodies. I do remember the next day when I was looking for the aid station to pick up morphine (aircraft commanders carried a pack) and made a wrong turn and came into a tent packed with body bags. Very sobering. I do remember that General Westmoreland paid us a visit in a few days. How nice. As an addition, I was CO at the battle of Hill 875, in which the 2/503d took another hit. If you need more information, contact me. Take care.

Abel "Doc" Candia, B Med, '66/'67

I served with Company B (Med) Support Battalion. I had been attached to A/2/503 on two different occasions.

During the Battle of the Slopes I listened to the radio chatter and cried for all the medics I knew. I could see the flashes as support units fired artillery throughout the night.

Several of my fellow medics volunteered to try to get to our men on the slopes. However, we were receiving wounded from all over the Dak To area and we were "needed" at the clearing station.

After the Battle B (Med) received the men of A/2/503, both wounded and dead. We had two Leg grave registration men that ensured that all our troopers were properly respected and cared for.

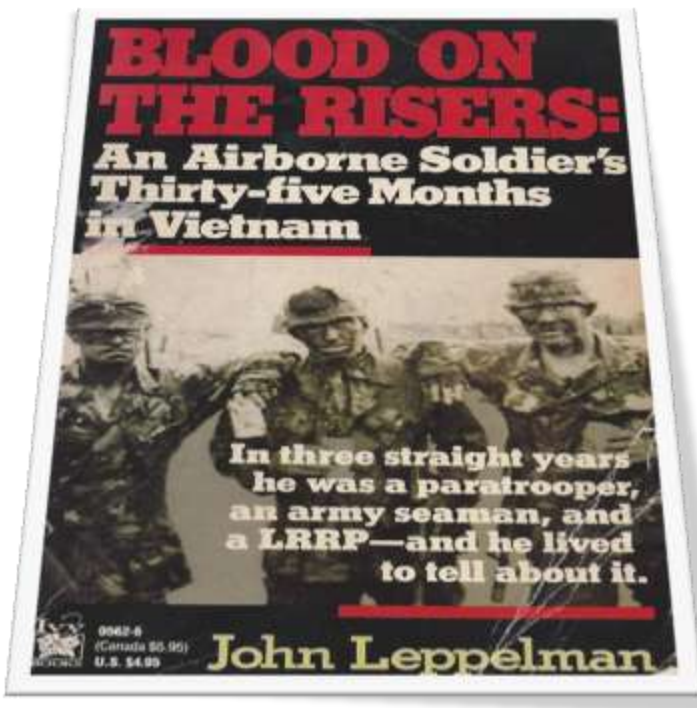
Everyone I knew in B (Med) felt cheated that we could not help the line medics.

We are forever in debt to the "Line Docs" of the 173d.

Terry "Nick" Sabree, SFC, C/2/503d

We begged our commanding officer to allow us to aid Alpha Company and were told there was nothing we could do. We listened to their PRC25 throughout the night breaking squelch, because they could not answer. I will always carry the guilt with me, when I cry at night. Sim Nicholson, C/2/503d 1st Platoon, a.k.a. Terry Sabree -- had to change my name in trying to run away and forget. It didn't work!





Lepp, C/2/503d, was kind enough to allow us to reprint any excerpts we cared to from his book for this special edition on *The Battle of the Slopes*. Thanks Lepp. Ed

CHAPTER SEVEN

Dak To

June 15 – June 30, 1967

For the next few days we humped the jungles of the Ia Drang Valley with no contacts worth mentioning. It was miserable. The rain continued to pour down. The leeches continued to be out in force, as were many types of vipers and other snakes that seemed to like the rain.

As the rotting continued, my feet were beginning to hurt badly. I pulled my boots off one evening to find blood in the bottoms of them. The doc told me they still were not bad enough to get me to a doctor in the rear....

It was well after dark when our LT told us to gather around. He told us that sometime that night a group of C-130 aircraft would take us to a small base camp called Dak To. Dak To was deeper into the Central Highlands, and we were going there for search-and-destroy operations against what intelligence estimated were several smaller NVA units. We would still be under the operational control of the 4th Division. Dak To was about eighty clicks north of Catecka, and the 2d Battalion was to be flown in to start the operations immediately...

Our main complaint was that once again the 2d Battalion would lead the way, without rest or break...

The word was that several CIDG camps with Special Forces personnel had been mortared and harassed in the Dak To area. We were to eliminate the troublesome NVA units. We were told that the enemy units were anywhere from squad to company in size...

The C-130 aircraft landed after midnight at the small strip located between two mountains that were over four thousand feet. We walked off the rear ramps of the aircraft into one of the worst rainstorms that I have ever seen...

At first light we got our first look at the surroundings. On both sides of the strip, mountains rose into the mist and clouds. They looked ominous and steep...

The mountain was covered with bamboo and clumps of brush. The mud was so bad that we had to pull ourselves from one bamboo stalk or clump of brush to the next. If we lost our grip, we slid fifty to one hundred feet down the slope. Ascending the mountain was backbreaking work, and when we crested the first one, we held up to wait for the other companies to make their way to us.

We consumed great amounts of water working our way to the top, then filled our canteens from muddy depressions we made with our boots.

At the top of the first peak, it was almost dark. We were in a triple-canopy jungle where very little sunlight ever reached the earth. There were many tall teak and hardwood trees, with large trunks and weird root formations that wrapped around the base of the trees before burying themselves in the damp earth. The forest floor was covered with decaying leaves and bark, and there was a strange odor. This definitely was not a good place...

As I saddled up, I noticed that we had a gook visitor. As he was also gearing up, I asked Welch who he was (he was Nguyen Phuc, see story Pages 43-44. Ed). Welch said that he was an ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) Special Forces advisor and that he would be going out with us. That gave us nine men total, which was better than eight, even if one was an ARVN...

Someone yelled, "Pull back!" I inserted another magazine and, along with the other, kept firing at the gooks as we backed off. We broke into a full run toward the perimeter, with several of the men yelling that we were friendlies at the top of their lungs. The ARVN, who had passed me, suddenly fell forward as though some unseen force had pushed him. He was on his feet immediately and still running, as bullets whipped over our heads and around our feet. The line didn't fire us up, and we made it back in. The ARVN grabbed his throat and sunk to the ground. Blood was seeping between his fingers, when someone yelled, "Medic...medic!"...While the LT and the medic were talking, the ARVN died...

After a few minutes, the CO told us to haul ass back to the company position. I could tell by his voice that something was wrong. I passed the word and we scrambled back up the hill to the rest of the company, who were standing and ready to move...

"Alpha Company is in deep shit and needs our help," Muir said excitedly...

We quickly moved to the rear of the company, facing the direction we had just come from, and waited as the rest of the company formed up behind. Over the horn, the CO told us to move out. I waved at Welch, who was four men up from me, and pointed to the bush. Welch moved out immediately at a fast walk, with us moving quickly behind him.

(continued...)



The rest of the company started to fall behind, so the CO radioed us to slow down. I started to relay the message, when the battalion commander, who was up in a C&C ship, came over the net and told the CO to move faster and not to slow down. I told Welch to move out. We took off at a run, equivalent to a fast double time. Before long the company fell way behind, but 2nd squad kept up the pace. As we got closer to Alpha Company's position, I heard an RTO pleading for someone to help them. I grabbed my horn and yelled, "*Hang on man, we're on the way!*"

Whoever it was came back on and yelled, "*Help us, please, somebody help us!*" Automatic weapons fire sounded in the background as he spoke. Not knowing what else to do, once again I yelled for him to hang on, then yelled at Welch to move faster. Welch nodded and speeded up. We ran on in a single line. Off and on as we ran, the man I had spoken with pleaded for reinforcements. He said there were only a few left and that they were dying. As I ran on, I prayed Boehm and the others (with Alpha) were okay, but already knew in my gut that it was almost over.

Suddenly Welch stopped, gagging and coughing, and yelled, "*Tear gas!*" My eyes were burning, and I started slobbering along with the rest of the men in the squad. I couldn't see anything except the powdered tear gas that lay on the ground like a frost line. The powder was white, and the more we stumbled around, the more we disrupted it, making it rise all around us...

I called back, asking where the company was. Muir said they were about forty minutes behind us. I told Welch what Muir had said. "*This is the shits,*" Welch muttered...

We continued to move on through the gas, and in minutes we were out of it. We unwrapped our faces and moved forward slower, as small arms fire was sounding directly up ahead. To our front a man was waving at us to hurry to his position. We ran that last one hundred fifty feet and entered the small perimeter. I ran past two Americans who lay face down and obviously were dead. The perimeter consisted of what was left of one platoon, with Alpha company's CO right in the middle of it. "*Where is the rest of your company?*" he said angrily.

"*They are behind us and will be here anytime,*" Frenchy said.

"*Shit. I got men down this hill that need help and need it now,*" the captain said.

I looked around. Many of the men were wounded.... We quickly spread out to reinforce the small perimeter until the rest of the company found their way to us. I fell in between two men from Alpha and sighted over my rifle, watching to the front. "*How the fuck did you guys get here to us?*" the man to my right asked, "*We are surrounded and getting ready to die, and you show up.*"

"*We must have moved between the gooks without being seen,*" I responded. "*Hey, where's the rest of your company?*"

"*Down the fuckin' mountain. I think they are all dead.*"

"*What did you guys run into?*"

"*We don't know, except we had dinks coming out of the jungle from every direction. There were just too many of them and we were split up, most of the men down the hill and us up here with the CO.*"

I wanted to ask why the CO wasn't down taking command of his men. But that question would be asked in the days to

come by many of us, and the officers and senior NCOs would either change the subject or tell us to shut up.

After about twenty minutes, the first group of men from Charlie Company staggered toward the line, coughing and spitting up phlegm from their run through the powdered CS. Soon the company was all in, and the perimeter was expanded. Some men were already working with machetes to clear a small LZ to get the wounded out...



Lepp with 173d, '67

I looked around at the rest of the squad. Our faces showed fear... We quickly unpacked our rucksacks and pulled out what we thought we would need. I stripped my ruck of everything but the radio and tied it in securely. I threw three bandoliers of ammo around my chest, twenty-one loaded magazines. I then hooked two frags into my ruck straps and two more on each of an ammo pouch which held four more loaded magazines. I then placed a CS canister in one button hole of my rotting fatigue jacket. None of the other men carried rucks, but they waited patiently as I adjusted mine, because the radio might become the most important piece of equipment we carried down the hill...

As Flynt and Welch looked down the slope, I looked back up. We were too far down to see the top or any of Charlie Company. "*Fuck me,*" whispered Flynt. I moved down to his side to see what they were viewing. I peered over the ridge and could see part of the valley floor below us. Several bodies were scattered around. None were moving...

As night descended, we waited on the perimeter for the arrival of Bravo Company. Bravo had run into dinks and was engaged in a series of running firefights as they tried to get to us. Most of us stayed awake all night, watching to our front...

In the early dawn, as first light started to seep through the canopy, the brush started moving directly in front of my position. Several of us took aim on the foliage as a man staggered out, yelling at us in English not to shoot him. It was a survivor from the disaster below. As he made his way through our line, we saw that a large chunk of his skull was missing, and we could actually see his brain. He told us that after the NVA had overrun Alpha's position, they started executing all the survivors by shooting them in the head. Many men had begged for mercy but were executed. He had lain in a pile of American bodies while a gook had placed a rifle barrel against his head and pulled the trigger...

We were furious, and the word quickly was passed around among the enlisted men that we would take no prisoners. The gooks had executed Americans who were wounded and out of ammunition...

Nothing good came out of the contact, and it was evident in the months to come that the brass hadn't learned a thing about their tactics or intelligence. They would continue to have us operate in the same manner. It was depressing.



Lester Daughtridge, Jr., C/2/503d

I was there on June 22nd, with Charlie Company. I remember that morning; we were laagered on the side of a hill almost like a road going up the hill. I am almost sure we lost a new trooper the night before from friendly fire, don't know his name. We also had, I want to say a Montagnard, that was killed (vague). I know we had to hump two bodies back to Alpha's Laager. I do know that the morning was interrupted by the sound of fire coming from the location of Alpha Company. We knew it was bad.



Les, a trooper in Vietnam

Captain Leonard told everyone to *'pack-up we are moving back to Alpha,'* -- he was the top of the line in my book. We humped as fast as we could under the circumstances to get back. It wasn't a slow movement as depicted in some books I've read. Hell, Sky Soldiers were in trouble behind us. Captain Leonard was the very best there was.

I am almost sure I carried one of the bodies for a short time, we took turns. I just remember the weight was kicking my butt, and I want you to know I was a seasoned Vietnam Vet. When we got to Alpha's location we had to pass through CS. We tried our masks but they didn't work after months of monsoons and being wet. I do know someone dropped one of the bodies. I saw it as we ran through the CS.

When we got to the top of the hill, we were dispatched down the finger to provide security. I can't tell you how many bodies were down there. I pray to this day they were already dead before the bastards did their worst. It was a long day just sitting and staring in disbelief, the carnage that lay before me; I won't go into details but it will be with me till the day I die.

Lastly, I vaguely remember one trooper survived the ambush, I can't confirm, but I think it was Alpha's point man. After that there were the body bags stacked on the LZ. That's all I remember.

Wambi Cook and others went through hell at Dak To. I can only imagine how they have survived the memories of Alpha Company. Just one loud *"Airborne"* to one of the Second Battalion's Best and one condolatory *"Airborne"* for those we lost on that Slopes, "June 22, 1967". **WE TRY HARDER**

Randall Tenney, FO, A/2/503d

The U.S. Air Force C-130, four engine turbo-prop was parked on the runway at Pleiku. Its tailgate open, ready to receive the wounded. The C-130 was rigged so it could bear stretchers along both inboard and outboard sides, four rows in all, stretchers piled five high. Once inside the plane, my stretcher strapped and fastened, I thought of the Vietnamese boy at the hospital. The nurse had told me before my departure that the army was trying to have the boy flown to the States for a special operation that may prevent blindness. Without the operation he would surely go blind. I silently prayed that he would make the trip.

The forward section of the aircraft was rigged to handle ambulatory patients who now began boarding the aircraft. There were no indications of some of the patients being wounded from their physical appearance.



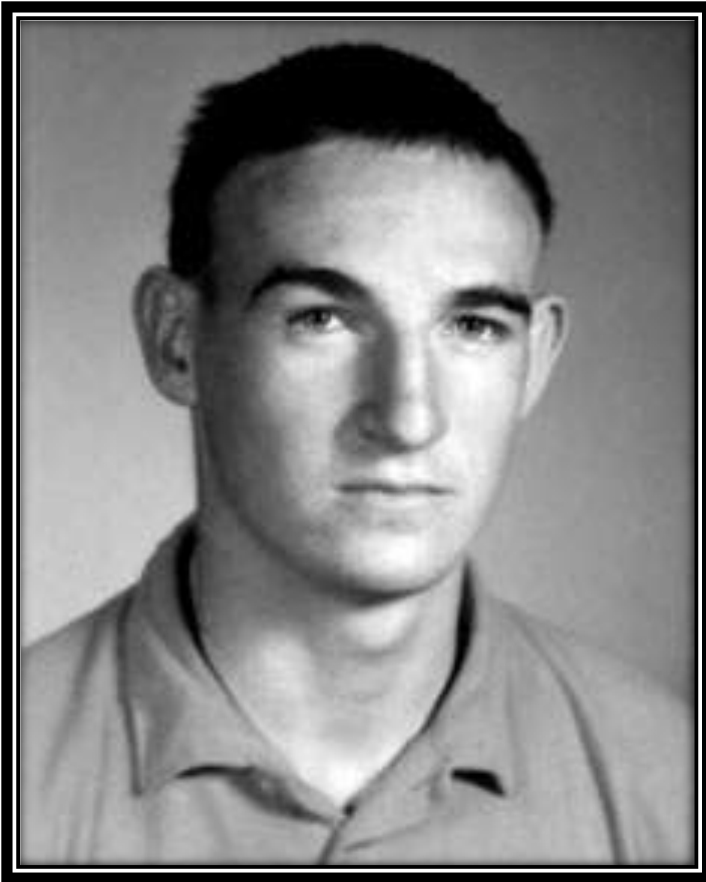
From left: Two unnamed RTOs from C & B Company, Battery Clerk 'Smitty', and on right is Randy Tenney.

(Photo from Paul Dinardo, 3/319th)

If you looked hard enough and long enough at their faces and eyes, one could detect an inner wound. Those wounds were complex and would take many months longer to heal than mere physical wounds. They were the wounded no one talks about, no purple hearts for these men, they were the psychological wounded. Now remnants of their former selves. Most were silent, sedated, and escorted by the corpsman or nurses who strapped them in their seats.

(continued...)





**David Junior Heller, HHC/2/503
KIA 6/22/67**

We're off – a journey that would take its cargo to Yokota AFB, Japan. I remained asleep during the flight. After landing at Yokota, we are carried to waiting army ambulance buses that will transport us to the 106th General Hospital in Yokohama.

As we pass through the congested traffic of the large city's streets, I see Japanese businessmen, commuters, pedestrians, and storekeepers, not unlike any large city back home. As I look out the bus window, we pass a Coca-Cola plant. Is this the same country we were at war with 22 years ago?

I wonder what the Japanese people think as our wounded pass them, contained in large green buses bearing U.S. Army and displaying large red crosses on their sides.

The Japanese have in ways become our benefactors, we become their guests. We now approach the gate guards and the entrance to the 106th. As we pull through the gates I see the hospital as a large complex – looks more like a base than a hospital. We are soon unloaded, the air feels cool. It's in the 70's but 40 or so degrees cooler than where we came from. They carry us to different wards and different buildings as the nature of our wounds dictate.

I'm placed on an orthopedic ward which, from my view, is filled to capacity. The patients on the ward range

from the critical to the hopeful and the near well. The men look different from the ones at the field hospital in Vietnam. Most are talking, some laughing, others are playing dominos and cards. They are noticeably much more full of life, most with the expectation of returning home.

I'm placed into a real hospital bed, unlike the Army cot at Pleiku M.A.S.H. The floors are even waxed and shining. For a brief moment I almost feel I'm home.

Soon a corpsman comes to my bed carrying a tray of tubes, some empty, some full of blood. No explanation was needed, I offered my good arm and he drew the blood. A nurse approaches and tells me I'll be transported to the pre-op ward in the morning, from there I'll go to surgery, recovery, and be taken back to this ward a new man. She then administers some shots, pulls the covers up, says, "*See ya later.*"

As I wake up, a corpsman arrives with a gurney; he parks it next to my bed. I'm instructed to roll onto it and away we go.

Reaching the pre-op ward, they wheel me in and place me on another bed. The pre-op ward or portion thereof appears to be fully occupied. There are approximately 20 of us there – ten or so beds along each wall. The nurse's station is at the end of the ward and is enclosed except for a large picture window that faces us. As I look toward the nurse's station, I realize I'm about five beds away from the window and halfway from the door I just entered.

Suddenly, someone touches me from behind. As I turn and look I'm taken by surprise. It's Sgt. Hostack! There he stands holding an IV pole with two IV's running, bandaged face and chest, in his hospital gown. Sgt. Hostack looks even shorter than I remember him as he is bent over at the waist where the top of his black crew cut shows more than his face. Sgt. Hostack is as glad to see me as I am to see him.

Sgt. Hostack and I are both chain smokers, both of whom have not had a cigarette in a long, long time. Without hesitation, Sgt. Hostack asks if I have a smoke. I inform Sgt. Hostack I do not have any cigarettes, that I am dressed as he and my gown has no pockets to contain cigarettes – surely a government conspiracy.

The suggestion of nicotine has aroused our senses. Normal, rational men now become irrational. Sgt. Hostack's nature has changed from bad to worse. He complains about the conditions of the pre-op ward.

(continued....)



He tells me it's too clean, too sterile, no coffee, no smoking – grown men should not be treated this way. The staff is insensitive to smokers, the ward looks like a nursery for children. The on-duty nurse is compared to a correctional officer. At this time, I look at the warden's windows. She is heavily engaged in paperwork. Sgt Hostack also observes and suggests we make a break for it! I can't believe what I hear. *"Hostack, you've got to be kidding?" "What's the matter, are you chicken?"*



A 173d trooper armed and ready.

Now anyone knows from their school days, when someone calls you chicken, you're going to do it. Sgt. Hostack returns to his bed, disconnects his IV's looks toward the warden and makes his break. I'm thinking the old man will collapse without me, and I do the same. Once outside, I catch up to Hostack.

He looks strange in his hospital gown tied in back, bent at the waist, holding his belly and shuffling along. I grab him with my left arm, now free of its IV, supporting him as we negotiate unfamiliar territory. It was quite cool, this breeze that crept up our backsides. Still don't believe I'm doing this. Shit, it's cold out here.

About this time we are met by two NCOs, apparently assigned to the 106th. I want to run but remain loyal to Hostack, Goddamn him. He asks these NCOs if they have a smoke. They each offer us one. Once lit, the cigarette changes Hostack's disposition, he's almost human again. He carries on a conversation as if nothing has happened and asks the two if they could direct us to the NCO club. Shit, I've got to be dreaming this, what are they shooting us up with anyway?

NCOs are NCOs. Medics or patients, they're the same fraternalistic bunch. They'll cover for each other, lie for each other, and in this case, even harbor escaped fugitives from the pre-op ward. Through fate I was a member of this fraternity.

As we entered the NCO club, Hostack acted like a kid in a candy shop. A few eyebrows were raised, however no one had us removed. They more than likely thought Hostack and myself shell-shocked and didn't want the hassle.

The NCOs who escorted us sat at our same table, with Hostack's consent, of course. We were broke; Hostack tells them of the slopes, they begin to buy the drinks. Two Japanese waitresses carry the assorted drinks to the table. One waitress can carry four drinks; the other accompanies her friend out of curiosity's sake. They are quite taken by our appearance. As they sit on our laps I realize Hostack has a leg wound through his expression and vocabulary. My legs feel fine but I have a tilt in my kilt, so to speak, as the Japanese girl begins to laugh.

The night rolls on. Time is no longer of any importance.

Drink after drink, my speech becomes impaired, my mouth turns to cotton, my thoughts are a mixture of 881 and the Japanese girl who sat in my lap. I can see Hostack's lips move but no longer hear him speak. I order one last, fatalistic drink.



**A/2/503 Trooper "Scoop" Billingslea,
survivor of the battle on 6/22.**

(continued....)



A waitress approaches cautiously and sets the special mixture of seven exotic layers of straight alcohol contained in a 16 ounce glass. I consume this volcanic delight in seconds. I am no longer a patient, no longer a non-commissioned officer; I am a cross between the Hunchback of Notre Dame and Rocky Marciano.



**Johnson Augustus Steidler, A/2/503
KIA 6/22/67**

I do not remember arriving at my ward, I don't remember hitting the Captain, or was it a Major? I do remember waking up, my only good arm tied to the bed, my feet attached to the footboard with leather restraints. The patient next to me remarks that I put up one hell of a fight. I'm not proud, only ashamed, confused, hung-over and hurt. My head is killing me, my shoulder just barely intact.

My guardian angel Hostack arrives, nurse at his side. They tell me not to worry; the alcohol had caused a flashback of the Slopes. Not much consolation to the Captain? Major? Whose condition I did not know. As things go, I was pretty lucky. The Major/Captain was okay; I got an Article 15 disciplinary action, small fine, Sergeant stripes still intact. The surgery was well done at a future date and the Army felt by September I'd be well enough to continue my second tour in Vietnam.

As I had the rest of July and August to attain the physical condition required for further combat, I divided my time between Japanese girls, Japanese spas, Japanese bath houses, Japanese hotels, Japanese bars, and intermittently, the 106th General Hospital.

Sgt. Hostack has been flown off to the states and I suddenly feel alone. I'm lying in bed feeling depressed when a corpsman comes up to me and asks if I know a certain machine gunner that told him he was with A Company at the Battle of the Slopes. The corpsman tells me what ward he's on and I go to visit him.

As I approached his bed, this Mexican-American and good friend looks my way. He has a turban bandage of gauze around his head. He tells me he was hit early in the battle. A bullet had penetrated the front of his helmet. The bullet had circumnavigated his helmet and liner, opened up his scalp, otherwise leaving his skull intact. He lost consciousness and apparently was hit by several more bullets as he lay there. One of the bullets struck his left arm. When he awoke, only the dead were his company, that is except one other wounded GI and hoards of North Vietnamese soldiers, most of whom were apparently drugged. The NVA began to shoot single shots through the heads of A Company men that showed the remotest sign of life. As this did not satisfy their hunger, they began to strip the dead and remove testicles. He lay there numb, bleeding, in horror of what he saw.

He expected the worst. The NVA approached him; he lay still, afraid to let his chest rise or fall. He felt his left arm being raised, there was no pain, his arm and hand swollen, infected. He felt them tug on his wedding band. They couldn't pull it off. He heard what reminded him of chicken bone breaking during preparation for cooking. He felt the wedding band come off, his finger with it.

He doesn't remember how long they stayed, he just remembers waking up and they were gone. He says he thought no one would find him; he'd bleed to death slowly. As he's telling me I look at his left arm and hand bandaged, draining blood. He continues and says he did not know there were still men of A Company left and that C Company were just out of reach a couple of hundred meters up the hill.

As dawn broke, he heard brush breaking, his M-16 rifle had been left, the NVA preferring their AK's left it behind. He grabs his M-16; he feels they have come back. He resigns to the fact he'll die, he'll take a few with him.

(continued....)





A/2/503d trooper Harris, survivor of The Slopes.

A figure steps toward him, he sees an oriental wearing a tiger suit, this oriental wears a GI-type helmet. People speak English behind him; the oriental is the Vietnamese interpreter for Charlie Company. He tells me he started to cry uncontrollably. As he tells me I see tears in his eyes, I have to leave. I go back to my ward.

When I get back, it's time for supper. I don't feel like eating. I think of my friends (76) now gone on those slopes. The 40 or so wounded stateside, the others somewhere at Dak To. This is my second tour; I haven't let things get to me until now. I become bitter, angry, resentful, and most of all revengeful. I eagerly await my return.

Another day arrives, the doctors have not removed the wire, staple-type, paper clip-sized sutures from my shoulder. I go to the latrine, look in the mirror, and remove them with scissors acquired while the nurse isn't looking. I feel as a boxer preparing for a championship fight. I no longer talk to anyone at the hospital, just the Japanese at Yokohama.

Weeks of physical therapy, I enjoy it, my shoulder growing stronger every day. I'll soon be ready. It's late August now, I'm informed I'll need all my overseas immunizations again as the army has no proof I'd had them before. I make my way through the hospital to the clinic. Before arriving, a nurse runs into me screaming, crying, she has just run off the burn ward. A young man, burnt over 80% of his body from napalm has died. The nurse, an RN, was comforting him during his agony and death. She swears his spirit departed in her presence as a haze and floated from his body to parts unknown. I hold her for a minute, her head on my shoulder, and call for help. Soldiers are not wars, only casualties.

Upon completion of my injections, I receive my new shot record card. I'm told not to lose it.

Another week passes. The anticipation of returning rises to new heights. Not only have I withdrawn from people, I have doubt about my religious beliefs. I see the men go to chapel and have an urge to go. Approaching the chapel, I stop short of entering. An uneasiness comes over me. I know what I must do when I return to Vietnam. I feel out of place at the chapel.

Sunday passes, I feel empty, drained from thoughts.

Early Monday morning a corpsman wakes me. He tells me to get my gear together, I'm leaving today. Mixed emotions of fear and revenge. Inside the turmoil tells me this time I won't be going home. I'm not afraid anymore, my mind and body seem ready for death, perhaps even desiring it.



**Larry Burns Turner, A/2/503
KIA 6/22/67**



Battle 6/22 NX

By Virgil Kret
United Press International

Dak To, Vietnam (UPI) -- The Padre knelt before the piles of blood-stained American uniforms and boots and prayed for the souls of the men who once worn them.

But the survivors of Alpha Company of the 173rd Airborne Brigade fingered their weapons today and watched the obscene ridgeline to their front.

Alpha lost 80 men over there Thursday in seven hours. Seventy-five of the dead came from two units now called the Lost Platoons. The Chaplain dealt with God. The survivors burned to deal with the communists who did it.

"There isn't much to say. We met a bunch of gooks and got into a firefight. We'll go back and fight them again," said Sgt. Rickey Sanchez, 22, of Chico, Calif.

By their reckoning, Alpha killed about 475 of the 800 elite North Vietnamese troops who threw themselves, screaming, at the American lines on that ridgeline Thursday. Today they had counted only 106 bodies, but the communists had 27 hours to carry away their dead.

On the military reports, those seven hours ticked off simply. The 200 Americans were strung out along the ridgeline and below. The two doomed platoons at the base of the steep slope. The four or five communists they thought they had run into turned out to be two battalions. The Americans had 500 rounds of ammunition per man. Down below, at the base of the slope, that wasn't enough, and the jungle there was too thick; it absorbed U.S. mortar fire like a sponge.

The survivors tell it differently.

"My men were on top of the hill and we kept sending down ammo and bringing up the wounded. I guess I went down six or seven times," said Sgt. William Farrow, 22, of Rock Hill, SC. *"Everybody wanted to fight. I would tell my men to take ammo down and they'd get right down there. Even the wounded wanted to keep fighting. Some of them had very painful wounds, but they didn't let them bother them. They were proud as hell. Their morale was too good to let the wounds bother them,"* Sgt. Farrow said.

At one point, Sgt. Ronald Palmer, 20, of Ambler, PA, fought off about 100 communists as he took ammunition down the slope and wounded back up.

"After the point element came into contact, the word came back that they needed smoke for cover. A couple of us went down with it but halfway down the Viet Cong (later identified as North Vietnamese) had a crossfire on the trail and the forward position told us not to pass. I told them to fire down on the two gun emplacements...they did and we made it through.

When I got down, I got a bullet through my tin pot (helmet). I saw the Viet Cong who had shot at me and I shot at him," Palmer said.

Forced finally to pull back with this squad, Palmer said, *"I covered our movement with a machine gun. The men who were with me got hit and I was by myself.*

There were five Viet Cong in a nest firing at me. One stood up and I got him... We had pulled seven (wounded Americans) up and had one more to go when 50 to 100 Viet Cong came out of nowhere.

We had a better position and piled them up at the bottom of the hill. While we were firing, other guys got the last wounded man – a medic – to the top."

Capt. David A. Milton, 28, of Dallas, Texas, Alpha's commander, said the ordeal came in Vietnam's toughest jungle.

"Initially we thought we had run into five or six Viet Cong... You have no idea of the fights that took place... Those men took three Banzi-type attacks of the first perimeter (at the bottom of the slope), and we took one on the hill. They (communists) screamed bloody murder when they attacked.

The men were excellent and there was always somebody in command down there. At one point, I was talking to three PFC's on three radios. They had apparently taken over the platoon.

There is no way to convey to the folks back home what they did there. They took on 800 fresh, brand new North Vietnamese troops and killed over half of them."

Down at the bottom of the slope the scene was *"horrificing,"* said PFC John Steer, 18, of Minneapolis, Minn., who pulled wounded men up the hill. *"I never dreamed anything like that could be possible,"* he said.

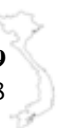
"They'd charge and we'd kill enough of them to make them fall back, and they'd hit us again. I think they were all high on pot or dope or something," Steer said.

I looked at the helmets taken from the dead of the Lost Platoons. There were tell-tale small, nasty holes in them. The communists executed the American wounded they found.

Five men survived the two platoons at the bottom of the hill. All wounded, they crawled into dense brush and waited until the communists had shot the wounded lying in the open and stripped off the food and weapons from the dead and moved off.

When the reinforcements came, they found the bodies of the lost units clustered in the defensive position they fought from until death ended the ordeal at the bottom of the slope.

"As soon as the replacements get here, we're going to go back up there and get them," said PFC Kenneth Maynard, 18, of Jacksonville, Fla.



Stephen Welch, C/2/503d, '67/'68

I remember the battle of the slopes, being part of Company C, 2nd Battalion we were called to help A Company. I remember it was late in the afternoon when we reached A Company's command post, after going through the tear gas I remember my eyes were burning. Upon entering the command post I remember seeing 4 dead paratroopers laying on ponchos.

My squad was taken to the side and our Lt. said to us, "*I know I'm asking you to go on a suicide mission but we have to know what's going on down the slope.*" I remember Jerry French stepped up and said he would pull point down the slope. It was starting to get late in the day -- as we started down the slope it was getting dark and very hard to see. We came down the slope and suddenly automatic gunfire erupted and since we couldn't see who or what we were firing on we headed back up the hill.

That night artillery was firing all around the slope and I remember one of A Company men came into our perimeter. All night long we could hear small arms fire as the wounded of A Company's men were being executed.

The next morning I was elected to be point man down the slope to A Company or what was left of them. About half way down we finally found one soldier who was still alive and had a medic treat him. Just before we reached the bottom of the slope we were told to recon by fire. A few minutes later I was told to move out and as I continued down the slope I saw bamboo in an archway in the jungle which made me feel really uneasy. As I entered the archway to my left there was the remaining men of A Company stacked up in a semi circle and as I approached a trooper stood up from under the dead men and said, "*I want to go home.*" I almost shot him because it took me a second to recognize him as American. I couldn't believe how many men were dead in such a small area. I thought to myself this isn't war but slaughter of men who couldn't fight back.

I will always remember the sights and sounds of what I experienced that night and day.

I remembered some more of what happened.....while listening to the tapes (audio of the battle). It was pretty intense.....the one thing I remember is Alpha 6 left in a helicopter shortly after we arrived on the top of the slope.....probably for debriefing.....I guess....but I don't know or at least that's what I remember of that day. We did see quite a few dead troopers as I descended the hill the day after, but at least I came across one lying on the ground and one in the group of dead soldiers who were still alive. I still remember the grenades with the white spots on the bottom littering the ground around the dead soldiers.



Steve Welch on left with buddy Jerry French

The more I think about it the more I remember -- like the higher-ups telling us to get under our ponchos while they dropped some kind of white powder, this was the next day after reaching the bottom, perhaps it was to take the stench of death away (?). I also remember a service for those who died while we were down at the site of the dead soldiers. I also remember rifles being stacked like a tee pee. It was a very depressing time for all involved.



PFC David Junior Heller

South Boone, Colorado

Born 4/19/47

MOS 91A1P Medical Corpsman

HHC 2nd Battalion, 173d Airborne

Start Tour 4/8/67

Casualty Date 6/22/67



David Junior Heller saved my life. I state this unequivocally. Over the course of my 12 month tour with Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, there were several explicit occasions that were it not for the heroic efforts of my comrades-in-arms, I would not be contributing to this issue. I'm certain that Heller, without firing a shot, not only saved my desolate soul, but those of innumerable others during a latter phase of The Battle of the Slopes .

It was late morning on June 22. The last of three horrific NVA human wave assaults had finally ended. I and a couple others somehow managed to extricate ourselves from ground zero to the safe haven of our lines soon after. A momentary air of guarded tranquility and relief was evident by all as soon as we arrived. What was left of Alpha closed ranks into a small perimeter at the crest of Hill 1338. Even though the NVA had temporarily

ceased their relentless aggression, we remained vigilant. Over a period of an hour or so, another handful of fortunate, but seriously wounded survivors, were able to break away from the bloody battleground and link back with our main body. We were not about to let our guards down as Charlie, a formidable and cunning tactician, was sure to benefit from any display of our overconfidence. We chose to err on the side of caution and prepare for the worse.

Three and four man observation posts were deployed 15-20 meters to our immediate front, nearest the one and only trail to and from the battle site. Adjacent to the trail, I quickly manned a vacated M 60 position, and positioned a half-dozen frags within arm's reach. Sure, I was an RTO up until then, and I had not fired a 60 since AIT, but I also wanted as much firepower at my disposal as possible.

No sooner had I adjusted to my circumstances, when word came down that a wounded medic had made it out of the *killing field*. He'd suffered multiple bullet and fragment wounds, but had incredibly freed himself, then clawed his way within a mere 20 meters of our lines. Apparently, he could progress no farther, so volunteers were solicited to assist him the rest of the way. As I recall, Mortars FO Bill Reynolds and I "volunteered" for what we expected would be a routine recovery.

Seconds before heading down, we were blocked by platoon sergeants Sanchez and Alston. They ordered us to drop our M16s in order to better facilitate the medic's rescue. Their reasoning appeared sound at the time, but in hindsight, it was the worse decision we could have made. Three two-man teams were deployed some 15 - 20 meters to our front (Deloach and Levart, as I recall) right (unknown) left (Paul Perkins) flanks. We hastily reached the company medic, Rick Patterson. We decided each would take hold of Rick's feet and shoulders, and then take the most practical route up the same trail.

Just as we were about to proceed, Deloach cried out, "*Here they come!*" I at once caught sight of the enemy's shadowy images breaking through the sunlit bamboo thicket. Levart and Deloach opened up instantaneously. Bill, Rick and I sat powerless as the fierce exchange ensued. Just as much incoming fire was visible as that of all three OP's outgoing torrent. It became obvious that the front pair could soon be overrun if help was not immediate.

(continued....)



Deloach's M16 probably jammed as he called out again appealing to Bill or me to either bring him a replacement rifle or get to them at once. We looked straight at one another with disgust. We had absolutely nothing to utilize toward their predicament. We began screaming that "Help is on the way!" I exclaimed to whoever was within earshot that our dilemma was perilous, and if we didn't get reinforcements at once, we're dead men.

Deloach and Levart's location became abruptly stilled. The flanks continued to cover us with barrage after barrage of automatic fire. Where was our help? At least five minutes had passed and still no help was discernible. Just when it seemed all hope was lost, someone from atop informed us that grenades were on the way. What they failed to tell us was the grenades would not be *hand-delivered*, but by way of rolling or pitching them individually down the trail. I pondered why a GI wasn't accompanying this ordnance?

I then accepted the obvious, that to do so, was suicidal, moreover, under the same circumstances, I might have done the same. We could only recover a portion of the couple dozen thrown. However, once they were in our hands, we were two hellacious, grenade heaving SOB's, make no mistake about it. Our efforts temporarily quelled the attack. We awaited our fate.

Just when we thought all was lost, there came a welcomed sight: A hard-charging M60 toting grunt came lumbering down the trail directly towards us. I recognized Heller instantly. He'd only been in-country a couple months, and his happy-go-lucky attitude about life in general had been a welcome relief for many of us seasoned soldiers. But wait! Heller was a medic! Why wasn't an 11B assigned this mission? I remember thinking I'd have a stinging piece of sarcastic humor awaiting his arrival.

He'd gotten within a body length of us, when he took a lethal burst of AK 47 across his entire forehead. His body contorted 180 degrees, landing face up across the bodies of both Bill and Rick. Our demise was certainly next.

Heller never got off a single shot. No one can convince me otherwise, that without his selfless heroics of diverting the NVA's attack, our destiny was all but sealed. His actions confirmed to the enemy that those of us still alive were an awesome force, set to resist whatever they threw at us. Charlie had better think twice before continuing on with this brawl. Now, it was their turn to err on the side of caution.

We were able to eventually rescue Rick, but elected to leave Heller's body until we were certain of our outcome. For all intents and purposes, *The Battle of the Slopes* had come to a vainglorious end. Relief finally

arrived late that afternoon. I knew I personally had to be a party to the detail assigned the duty of retrieving Heller's body.

A squad escorted me back to his body where I insisted on hauling my friend's body without any assistance. It was the least I could for the man who saved my life.

Dave Heller's statistics and photo were extracted from the *Virtual Wall* website. Anyone knowing of his surviving family members, please contact me at: WambiCook@aol.com or 626-664-0219

Over the years, I'd searched but could never determine what became of Michael Levart. His name was not listed on the ranks of the KIA, but there was no way he could have survived the onslaught of that encounter. Luckily I persisted, and after an exhaustive internet search, I finally made contact with Mike's family in the spring of 2009. Mike's account, as told to his family; He was shot several times on the 22nd. Too critically wounded, Mike could hear the enemy all about, and elected to take his chances, and spent the night sheltered by Deloach's body. The next morning he began his escape when he was shot again and left for dead by a still present NVA contingent. Mike fully recovered and eventually returned for a second tour. He died of heart failure in January 2009.

Wambi Cook
A/2/503d
Survivor of The Slopes



A/2/503 RTO, Wambi Cook

