



# WELCOME TO "A WALK WITH THE 35TH"



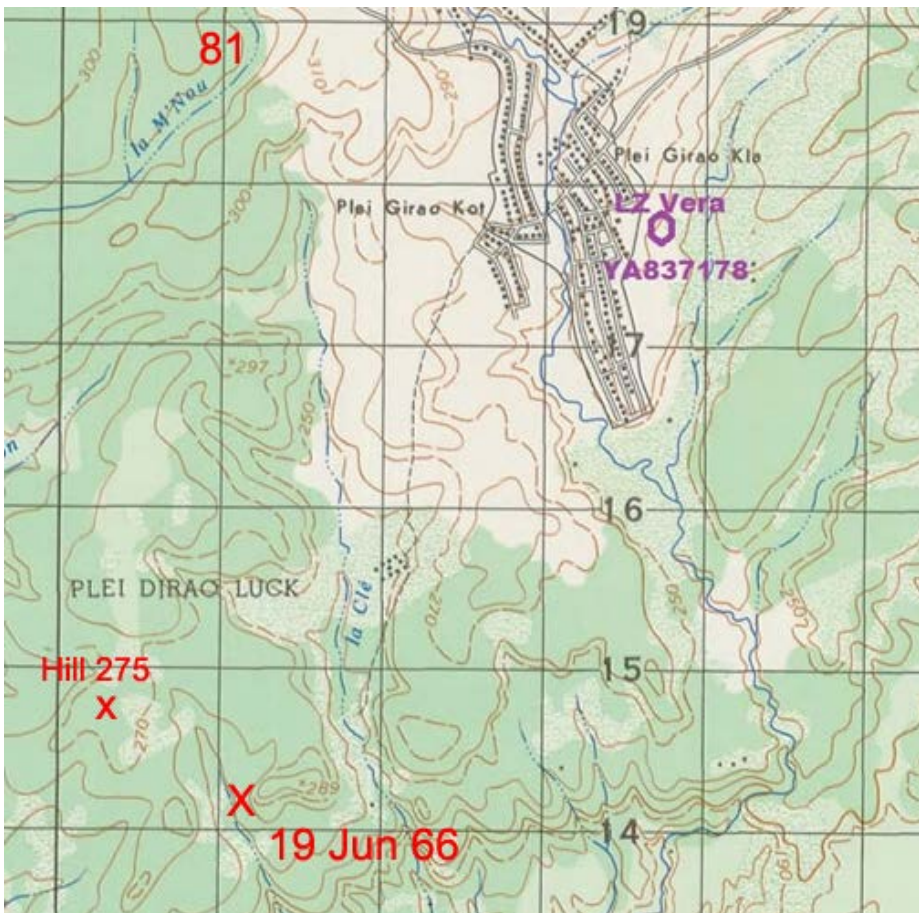
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## Ronald Eric Ray - A Co 2/35th

*By Dick Arnold*

19 June 1966 - *Ron Ray's Medal of Honor citation is included below. This article will add context and background to that incident and will hopefully result in a more accurate historical accounting.*

The 2/35 was involved with operation Paul Revere I, attempting to interdict NVA entering Vietnam from Cambodia. In an effort to adequately cover this large AO, the company commander decided to split his company into two parts leaving Lt. Ron Ray with his platoon, plus a mortar squad, to cover the northern AO. This put the bulk of the company south of the Ia Drang where, similar to the 1965 fights against the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav, it was thought the main NVA effort would be.



Lt. Ray was thus faced with a dilemma that often plagued platoon leaders in Vietnam—how to protect his men in such an AO with a unit too large to hide in such an area but too small to defend itself against a large force.

His solution was two-fold. Reconnoitering the AO, Lt. Ray determined three likely enemy avenues of approach and set-up LPs to monitor them. He also located a knoll, steep with clear terrain on three sides, and used that as a base of operations. From this Base a patrol walked the AO each morning and checked the various LPs'. Lt. Ray normally accompanied this patrol.

A few days prior to June 19, such a patrol discovered a fresh-cut trail near Hill 275, which was one of the areas earlier highlighted as being a likely avenue of approach for the NVA. Hill 275 was at approximately YA 810142 and within three kilometers of Cambodia. The trail was followed and a small NVA patrol was surprised, resulting in one enemy killed and another captured. Both NVA had fresh haircuts, were well fed, and well-armed. Coupled with earlier indications of enemy activity, Lt. Ray came to the conclusion that a large NVA movement could be anticipated in the area around Hill 275. The prisoner was sent to the rear and the CO was informed of the lieutenant's suspicions.

On the morning of June 19, a patrol was instructed to recon near the Cambodian border and then to link-up with the most northern LP. That LP was established near a stream that crossed a main trail near Hill 275. The link-up was successfully made resulting in approximately ten men at the site. Around early afternoon the LP detected movement in the area. Lt. Ray reported this development to the CO and instructed the LP to be prepared to pull back to Base. Almost immediately the LP came under intense small arms fire. Lt. Ray instructed the LP to blow all claymores, disengage, move back toward the Base, and he would head in their direction. Convinced that a major enemy unit was present, Lt. Ray updated the CO. and asked for additional manpower. He was told that there was no other unit close enough to reinforce in any reasonable time frame and also that consensus was this was a minor probe and not major enemy movement.

The LP then reported receiving withering fire from all sides with the RTO badly wounded. Lt. Ray instructed them to stay put and he would come to them. Due to the need to move fast, Lt. Ray decided to leave the Mortar squad at the Base under SSG William H. Byrd Jr. Forming the remainder of his men under Squad leaders SSG David A. Bynum and Sgt. John C. Birdine Jr., Lt. Ray moved toward the embattled LP. This decision was driven both by the certain precariousness of the LP's situation and the fact that there were only a few hours of daylight left.



Due to the previous patrols, the area was fairly well known to Lt. Ray. He reasoned they could take the main trail directly to Hill 275, then west to the contact point; or take a straight line approach which was shorter (about 2 Km) but would necessitate his men breaking bush the whole way and thus might actually take longer. Reasoning that the enemy would be expecting reinforcement along the main trail, Lt. Ray opted to go through the heavy terrain.

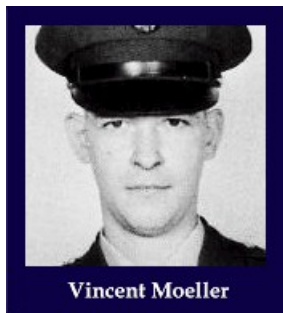
The men of this rescue team, realizing time was of the essence, sacrificed their bodies while rapidly breaking a human trail toward the beleaguered LP. Upon nearing the surrounded men, Lt. Ray led the way up the slope and told his men to use grenades and numerous small arms bursts in hopes of deceiving the NVA into thinking they were a large force. The ruse was successful as the enemy pulled back from the area of penetration and the rescue patrol was able to close with the LP. A quick assessment by Lt. Ray found the LP intact, with only the RTO hit with a severe head wound.

Shortly thereafter the NVA regrouped and directed heavy fire at the group from two different locations. Lt. Ray directed a squad to envelop and silence one of the enemy positions, but they were

quickly pinned down near that position. Fearing their annihilation, Lt. Ray moved on the enemy position and silenced it using his shotgun and hand grenades. Aware of an opening up hill from which no fire was being received, Lt. Ray then instructed the Medic to prepare the RTO for evacuation and called for a Medevac. As the Medic plus two men moved toward the anticipated LZ, they became pinned down by heavy fire. Lt. Ray then realized the NVA were moving to surround his force but still thought they were unaware of the exact size of that force.

Another squad maneuver was attempted to rescue the Medic and RTO, but they too came under heavy fire and were unable to move. In an attempt to cover the withdrawal of the Medic and RTO, Lt. Ray moved past them, again using grenades and his shotgun to silence the NVA while killing several. An enemy grenade was then thrown into the Medic's and RTO's position. Lt. Ray shouted a warning to them, but not seeing a reaction he dove over them and shielded them from the blast—taking considerable shrapnel. Turning toward the enemy position from where the grenade had been launched, Lt. Ray was then hit in both legs by small arms fire but managed, with his last grenade, to also silence this enemy position.

His wounds had now paralyzed his lower body and the Medic managed to help Lt. Ray back to the perimeter. Aware of a lull in the fighting, Lt. Ray ordered SSG Bynum to prepare a withdrawal in the direction from where the rescue patrol had come—reasoning that the enemy may not have yet reinforced that sector. Lt. Ray offered to stay behind and cover the withdrawal if needed. At that point Sgt. Burdine stepped forward and volunteered to carry Lt. Ray, those two being the last to leave. The Americans met only minor resistance going back down the slope and eventually reached a suitable LZ about two clicks to the northeast; Sgt. Burdine carried Lt. Ray the entire journey.



Lt. Ray and the RTO, PFC Vincent Moeller, were both evacuated a short time later with Pfc. Moeller dying during the Medevac. Lt. Ray was initially operated on at Pleiku and later was sent back to Womack Army Hospital at Ft. Bragg for further treatment.

Lt. Ray certainly exhibited in spades all the traits needed in a junior officer; leadership, sound judgment while under fire, a mastery of small unit tactics, and lastly; deep, selfless concern for the welfare of his men.

His thoughts on the direction of the main enemy thrust also proved accurate as the remainder of A, 2/35 went back to the general location of Hill 275 the next day and suffered heavy casualties.

*Admittedly untrained in the art and theory of war, the Editor still would like to render an opinion. This business of operating in platoon size units, in this area, is difficult to understand. You must remember that this Chu Pong Massif/la Drang area is exactly where the 1~ Cav had their huge multi-battalions fights in November of 1965. I understand the thought to cover more area by operating in smaller units; but in that terrain and without the helicopter assets the Cav had to enable quick reinforcement—it sure was tempting fate. Just two weeks after the above fight, B 1/35 had a platoon cut-off and destroyed at YA 819192, only about 5 clicks NE of Hill 275, while operating under similar conditions. As I said— really tempting fate.*





### Cpt. Ronald E Ray Medal of Honor Citation



Rank and organization: Captain (then 1st Lt.), U.S. Army, Company A, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division. Place and date: Ia Drang Valley, Republic of Vietnam, 19 June 1966. Entered service at: Atlanta, Ga. Born: 7 December 1941, Cordelle, Ga.

Citation: For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty. Capt. Ray distinguished himself while serving as a platoon leader with Company A. When 1 of his ambush patrols was attacked by an estimated reinforced Viet Cong company, Capt. Ray organized a reaction force and quickly moved through 2 kilometers of mountainous jungle terrain to the contact area. After breaking through the hostile lines to reach the beleaguered patrol, Capt. Ray began directing the

reinforcement of the site. When an enemy position pinned down 3 of his men with a heavy volume of automatic weapons fire, he silenced the emplacement with a grenade and killed 4 Viet Cong with his rifle fire. As medics were moving a casualty toward a sheltered position, they began receiving intense hostile fire. While directing suppressive fire on the enemy position, Capt. Ray moved close enough to silence the enemy with a grenade. A few moments later Capt. Ray saw an enemy grenade land, unnoticed, near 2 of his men. Without hesitation or regard for his safety he dove between the grenade and the men, thus shielding them from the explosion while receiving wounds in his exposed feet and legs. He immediately sustained additional wounds in his legs from an enemy machinegun, but nevertheless he silenced the emplacement with another grenade. Although suffering great pain from his wounds, Capt. Ray continued to direct his men, providing the outstanding courage and leadership they vitally needed, and prevented their annihilation by successfully leading them from their surrounded position. Only after assuring that his platoon was no longer in immediate danger did he allow himself to be evacuated for medical treatment. By his gallantry at the risk of his life in the highest traditions of the military service, Capt. Ray has reflected great credit on himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.