

1968 News Escape and Evasion

ESCAPE AND EVASION

None of these guys were 35th Infantry but nevertheless, pretty interesting!

SUBJECT: Operational Report of the 4th Infantry Division for Period Ending 31 October 1968, RCS CSFOR-65 (R1)

Section 3 (C) Department of the Army; Survey Information Escape and Evasion.

1. (C) SGT E-5 Buddy Wright

SGT E-5 Buddy Wright, RA #, squad leader, Company D, 1st Battalion, 22d Infantry, was the rear security man for his squad on a company sweep in the vicinity of YU 791681 on. 22 September 1968. Sometime between 1400H and 1430H, the squad took a break. Wright remained to the rear of the squad during the break. After approximately ten minutes Wright moved forward and discovered that his squad had moved out without notifying him. Wright tried to follow his units trail, but encountered a group of 25 to 30 NVA who captured him. The NVA took his weapon and ammunition, wallet, maps and squad leader's notebook. They then tied Wright's elbows behind his back and moved west toward Cambodia, using Wright as their point man. An NVA soldier with a rifle walked immediately behind Wright.

The platoon moved until approximately 1900H, when they arrived at a small camp just inside Cambodia at approximate coordinates YU 763700. There the soldiers fed Wright three bowls of rice and a bowl of hot water. After Wright had eaten, the NVA used commo wire to bind his wrists and ankles and tie his elbows together behind his back. They placed Wright in a two man underground bunker where he stayed until the next morning. The bunker was approximately four feet under ground and the opening was covered with logs and leaves. Wright did not see any other bunkers in the area but guessed that many others were located there. The NVA in the camp camouflaged themselves with leaves. They hid close to the ground each time they heard airplanes.

At sunrise on 23 September, the NVA woke Wright and fed him three bowls of rice and a bowl of hot water. After Wright had eaten, the NVA tied a leash to him and tied his elbows behind his back with commo wire. During their stay at the small camp the NVA did not mistreat or question Wright.

One or two hours after sunrise, the platoon headed north-northwest. An unidentified English-speaking member of the platoon approached Wright and asked him his name, rank, service number and unit. Wright gave his name, rank and service number. The NVA already knew the answers to these questions. In Wright's wallet they had found a pay voucher and other papers. The English-speaking soldier told Wright that he was being taken to a prisoner compound. Wright guessed that this Individual was either an officer or senior NCO because the only weapon he carried was a pistol.

Sometime around 1200H the platoon took a 45 to 60 minute break for lunch. Wright ate three bowls of rice and a bowl of brown sweet-tasting crystals that he thought to be sugar. After Wright had eaten, the NVA again bound his elbows with commo wire. Again the platoon

moved north-northwest. SGT Wright judged that he was in Cambodia; there were no bomb craters and discipline was easy.

At about 1530H the platoon passed through a training area. Classes, apparently dealing with rifle grenades, were in progress. Wright observed bulletin boards and weapon identification charts. The camp was about the size of a city block. It had no perimeter. Sometime between 1500H and 1600H, the platoon stopped for a five minute break. A soldier offered Wright a cigarette which he smoked and found it to be marijuana.

At approximately 1900H the platoon arrived at a compound situated on the east side of a mountain at YU 754829. Wright saw four huts, seven feet by seven feet, with roofs made of bamboo and ponchos. The huts had bamboo floors but no walls. He saw two other huts with straw walls and straw roofs. Although NVA were carrying large rolls of commo wire, SGT Wright saw no power or communication facilities while he was in the compound. There was a double canopy of tall trees overhead; the camp is probably invisible from the air. Wright heard no aircraft fly over the camp. He judged, however, that helicopters might be capable of landing in an area southeast of the mountain. Wright could not estimate the number of troops guarding the compound or determine what security arrangements the camp had. There was no fence or perimeter.

Two English-speaking NVA interrogated Wright as soon as he arrived at the compound. One, about 19 to 20 years old, asked questions. The other, between 45 and 50 years old, took notes. The first interrogation lasted 10 to 15 minutes. The young interrogator said, "You are now a prisoner of the National Liberation Front. You will be treated humanely and will not be shot as long as you answer our questions." He asked Wright his name, rank, service number, unit, and size of unit. Wright gave only his name, rank and service number.

The NVA took Wright to one of the open sided bamboo huts. There they fed him three bowls of rice, a bowl of the brown, sweet, sugar like substance, and a bowl of hot water. When Wright had finished eating, the NVA bound his elbows, ankles and wrists with commo wire and took his boots. Two guards were stationed at the hut, one at Wright's head, the other at his feet. Both were armed with AK-47's. The guards changed at 0800 hours and served 24 hour shifts. None of the guards fell asleep while on duty. That night Wright managed to get six hours sleep.

The following morning, 24 September, 1968, the guards woke Wright approximately one or two hours after sunrise, and fed him three bowls of rice with a meat that tasted like pork. The guards then took Wright to the two interrogators. Wright sat on the ground in front of a table. One guard was on each side of the table and two guards were behind Wright. Throughout the interrogation the guards kept their AK-47's pointed at him. The young interrogator asked Wright what unit he was from, the strength of his unit, his division, the location of his division, his brigade, the number of brigades in the division, his battalion and his battalion commander's name. He asked about the weapons, radio equipment and frequencies of US units. SGT Wright gave only his name, rank and service number. The interrogator answered many of his own questions. Because SGT Wright kept refusing to answer questions, the interrogator called him a "stupid NCO." The interrogator asked about the morale of US units. SGT Wright told him that it was high. The interrogator replied that SGT Wright was a liar. He then asked about casualties and contacts. He asked Wright if he had heard about the American artillery battery that had been overrun. (Apparently he was referring to the sapper attack on TASK FORCE LANCE, 7 September 1968. He asked Wright if he had heard about DAK SAK (apparently the A239 Special Forces Camp at DUC LAP) SGT Wright refused to answer.. The interrogator asked Wright if his parents were living. Wright lied; he said they were both

dead. Wright then asked the interrogator how long he would be a prisoner. The interrogator answered, "For the Duration." This ended the session. The young interrogator wanted Wright to bow as a sign of military courtesy. Wright saluted instead.

The guards took Wright back to his hut and fed him three bowls of rice, a bowl of greens, and a bowl of hot water. The guards did not bother Wright again until one or two hours after sunrise on 25 September. During the night Wright slept without any cover. On the morning of the 25th the NVA fed Wright the usual three bowls of rice and one bowl of hot water plus a white-colored vegetable and a meat that tasted like pork. They then brought him before the two interrogators. The young one repeated the same questions that he had asked the day before. Wright again gave only his name, rank and service number. The session ended at approximately 1200H. Wright ate another meal of three bowls of rice, a white-colored vegetable and a bowl of hot water. He remained in the hut until approximately 2000H, when the guards took him back to the interrogators. The NVA held the session by torchlight, apparently with the intention of scaring Wright. The young interrogator asked the same questions as he had before. Wright again refused to answer. At approximately 260100, the guards returned SGT Wright to his hut. As usual, they tied his elbows, wrists and ankles with commo wire and took away his boots.

Wright's breakfast on 28 September again consisted of three bowls of rice, a white colored vegetable, meat that tasted like pork and a bowl of hot water. The guards who came on duty at 0800H seemed to feel sympathy for Wright. Rather than tie him with commo wire, they used a rope about 1/4 of an inch thick. Wright spent the day in the hut and smoked marijuana cigarettes given to him by the guards. At 1200H and 1730H, the guards fed him rice, hot water and pork flavored meat. After the evening meal the guards bound Wright loosely with the rope and gave him a blanket to cover himself.

Shortly after dark, Wright began to untie himself under the cover of the blanket. At approximately 30 minute intervals, or whenever there was a noise, the guards shined a flashlight on him. After untying himself, Wright remained quiet for approximately two hours, hoping that the guards might fall asleep. This did not occur. Wright therefore waited for the periodic flashlight check and then crawled off of the bamboo floor. He had moved about three feet away from one of the guards when he snapped a twig. The other guard shined his light into Wright's sleeping position. Instantly, Wright dashed away from the hut and into the brush. He was without boots. The guards fired at him but their shots were all high. Wright headed toward a river approximately 200 to 250 meters east of the hut. He crossed the river, approximately 20 feet wide, by jumping from rock to rock.

Wright had the impression that three or four NVA soldiers were chasing him. He headed over a mountain and ran through brush for approximately two hours. He then stopped to rest. The NVA were no longer pursuing him. During the morning of September 27 SGT Wright continued moving east. While crossing an open field he spotted NVA soldiers moving along a trail. Thinking that he had been seen, Wright hid in the brush. NVA guards were stationed along the trail. Wright was afraid that if he moved he would be heard. After four to six hours it began to rain. Knowing that the rain would muffle sounds, Wright crawled approximately 250 meters away from the trail. He then walked another 500 to 600 meters, stopped and slept until sunrise on 28 September.

Wright returned to the trail and found it still guarded. Many NVA were moving along the trail. Wright low-crawled up to the edge of the trail and waited. Finally, at 1400 or 1500 he jumped up, ran across the trail and continued running for about ten minutes. He then continued

eastward. At sunset Wright passed through an abandoned NVA camp. He continued on until he came to a river about 50 meters wide. There he spent the night

Wright awoke at sunrise, 29 September, crossed the river and continued, east. He made no more contact with humans until 5 October. Although water was abundant, SGT Wright had nothing to eat except some fruit that he found growing on trees.

On 5 October Wright heard artillery and helicopters to the southwest of his location. He headed southwestward and found a trail with US type boot marks. Wright followed the trail until sunset. Rain fell during the night. Wright feared that the trail would be erased. Instead, on the morning of 6 October he found fresh boot marks. As Wright continued along the trail he smelled smoke and heard voices. Wright moved up to where he could observe individuals in the open ahead of him. He thought they were NVA. While Wright was moving away from them, jets flew over the area. Wright wondered why the jets did not bomb the supposed NVA. He returned to observe the strangers more closely. He saw that they were wearing US style helmets and fatigues and carrying M-16 rifles. SGT Wright approached them yelling "chop chop." and pointing at his stomach. The VIETNAMESE were members of the 4th Battalion, 45th Regiment, 3d ARVN Division. They took SGT Wright to their patrol base, YU 887793. There an ARVN medic cleaned and treated Wright's cuts. A dustoff helicopter flew SGT Wright to the 2d Brigade Forward CP at LZ MACE.

Wright saw no other US prisoners during his captivity, nor did he see any other prisoner of war camps. At no time during Wright's captivity did the NVA pressure, mistreat or torture him. Wright stated that he asked numerous questions about the NVA, American prisoners, and his location, but received no answers.

Wright does not believe that smoking marijuana on the day of 26 September influenced his decision to escape. He stated that while a captive the thought of escape was always with him. He added, though, that the marijuana was helpful because it dulled the pain from the cuts in his legs and feet.

2. (C) CPT David M Foye.

Company A, 3d Battalion, 12th Infantry moved out of the 1-22 Infantry FSB on 28 April 1968 at 1551H. Traveling in single file because of the thickness of the vegetation, Company A followed the general trace YA 868888, YA 870886, YA 871885, YA 871882, YA 870880. The company commander, CPT David M. Foye, (service #), told his lead element to push forward; they had a long way to go. While checking his map, CPT Foye noticed that a soldier to his front had become entangled in brush. He spoke to the soldier and told him to move out. CPT Foye approached the brush and began pushing branches aside with his CAR-15. Suddenly he looked up and saw someone pointing an AK-47 in his face. He screamed and dropped his map and weapon. While the armed man held his weapon pointed at CPT Foye, a second man pinned the Captains arms behind his back. The two men moved CPT Foye off the trail about ten feet to the right. There they lay still for approximately 30 minutes. During this time CPT Foye heard no one pass by their location. He believes that just beyond the heavy brush there was a fork in the trail and that his unit had moved to the left, away from the kidnapping site.

CPT Foye could not explain why his RTO, who was ten feet to his rear, did not see the kidnapping or hear his scream. CPT Foye estimated the time of his capture at 1600 and the place as YA 870880.

The two enemy soldiers wore green fatigues and carried packs. One had a radio resembling an AN/PRC-25 in his pack. At no time did CPT Foye see this man use the radio. The man, with the AK-47 was the only one who was armed. The soldiers were apparently inexperienced; they failed to search CPT Foye or take his ammunition. The two enemy soldiers took CPT Foye along the general trace YA 870880, YA 875883, YA 878875. The first part of the journey was a backtrack of his company's direction of movement. About 1000 meters from the kidnapping site a third individual joined the first two. He had no weapon or pack. At about 2000H the group stopped in the vicinity of YA 878875 and ate supper. The enemy soldiers offered CPT Foye some of their rice, but he ate C rations instead.

After the meal one of the enemy soldiers gave CPT Foye a white capsule to swallow. Fifteen minutes after taking the capsule, CPT Foye fell asleep. He woke up at about 0300H. Artillery was impacting in the area. The incoming fire wounded CPT Foye and two of the enemy. As the third individual, who was standing guard, approached, CPT Foye hit him in the head with a C ration can. CPT Foye grabbed the man's weapon and hit him again.

CPT Foye grabbed his pack and ran out of the area. He heard someone chasing him. He ran about 300 meters, until he had avoided his pursuer. Then he stopped and rested. He moved a little farther that night, then stopped and waited for dawn. On the morning of 29 April CPT Foye moved west until he reached a river at YA 859873. Then he moved north towards the 1-22 Infantry FSB. He reached the FSB at approximately 291600H.

3. (C) SGT E-5 John D. Liberman and PFC Stanley Ziarko

On 23 October, while in position about three kilometers from their patrol base, two SRP from Company A, 3d Battalion, 8th Infantry made contact with an enemy force. Not knowing the enemy's strength, the teams attempted to withdraw. Two members of one SRP team were wounded and had to remain in place. The others broke into groups of two and moved to a rallying point. There they planned the rescue of the two wounded men. While one team supported from covered positions, the other returned to the point of contact. They found that the enemy had departed. The team recovered the two wounded men and destroyed equipment that they had abandoned during the contact and could no longer carry while transporting the wounded. The two teams then set out for their company's patrol base. En route, SGT E-5 John D. Liberman, US #, and PFC Stanley Ziarko, US #, became separated from their team. The rest came upon a clearing. They radioed for a dustoff helicopter to evacuate the wounded and another helicopter to lift the remainder of the men back to the patrol base. Liberman and Ziarko had no map or compass, yet found their way back to the patrol base by remembering the terrain and using the setting of the sun to determine direction.

4. (C) WOI David H. Reid.

WOI David H. Reid, Service #, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 3d Brigade Aviation Section, was flying a critical resupply mission late in the day of 12 August 1968. He became disoriented in the heavy fog and darkness, expended all his fuel and made an emergency landing. Because of the darkness and fog other helicopters could not come to his assistance. WO Reid moved out of the area of the downed helicopter and spent the night hiding in the best concealment he could find. In the morning, when search craft found his

helicopter, WO Reid came out of hiding. With the resupply of fuel brought by the rescue party, WO Reid was able to fly his helicopter back to LZ OASIS.

5. (C) 124th Signal Battalion Personnel.

During CLEANSWEEP III, three men from the 124th Signal Battalion became separated from the maneuver forces. They spent the night in the jungle and were found the next day unharmed.

SP/4 Randolph Sweet and SP/4 Timothy G. Mowdy were separated soon after their units left the assigned jump-off point. They spent the night in a well-hidden location from where they could observe the trail leading back to the jump-off point. In the morning they followed the trail back through a village to a high way where they were picked up by Military Police patrolling the road.

A third man, SP/4 Ronnie E. Wood, became separated about half-way through the operation. Because the terrain was unfamiliar, he could not find his way to any rallying point. When he attempted to attract the attention of a helicopter by firing his M-16, the helicopter returned fire with its M-60 machine guns. SP/4 Wood then found a secluded area near a field and spent the night. The next morning he waited until a search helicopter came near his location, he tied his white T-shirt on the end of a pole and waved it. The helicopter spotted him immediately and picked him up.