

1969 News March

IVY LEAF

9 March 1969 Ivy Leaf

'Cacti Green' Give NVA Wild Valentine's Day

By SP4 Craig MacGowan

OASIS — A lightning fast combat assault by the Famous 4th Division's Company B, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, netted one NVA killed and discovery of a 100 bunker NVA complex, loaded with munitions and more than 2,700 pounds of rice.

Minutes after a 3rd Brigade Light Observation Helicopter (LOH) had been hit by enemy ground to air fire, Company B was airborne and then on the ground in the exact location where the enemy fire had originated, west of Firebase Lillie.

"It was a wild Valentine's Day for all of us," exclaimed Private First Class Lannie Spaninger of Hilltown, Pa.

Crossed Rice Paddy

"We were crossing a rice paddy after we had combat assaulted to the suspected enemy area. Seven of us from the 2nd Platoon reconned the wooded area near the rice paddy and came under heavy automatic weapons fire almost immediately.

"We were pinned down, on and off, for almost four hours. The 1st and 3rd Platoons tried to help us, but were also taken under heavy enemy fire."

During the initial attack, one of the 2nd Platoon members was pinned down by the enemy fire. Private First Class Spaninger, accompanied by two others, low crawled to the top of a small hill. While the others crawled to safety, PFC Spaninger remained atop the hill, laying down a blazing volume of covering fire.

"We could not see the enemy automatic weapons position ahead of us until we were almost on top of it," recalled PFC Spaninger.

"We were almost there when they ambushed us," recalled Sergeant Wright.

Specialist 4 Archie Sanders of Seadrift, Tex., was the first man to see the enemy and yelled out to the others to get down. As he did, the NVA opened up on the Ivy squad.

"Immediately we hit the ground and threw our rucksacks up against some small trees for cover," said Sergeant Wright.

"Then we heard mortar tubes start popping in front of us about 50 meters away, with heavy machine gun fire coming at us from about 25 meters to our front."

The squad was pinned down and separated from the rest of their unit, which was about 10 to 15 meters to their right rear flank.

Knowing that they would have to gain fire superiority in order to move to a better position, Sergeant Wright fired 30 rounds from his grenade launcher at the tops of trees, spraying shrapnel and limbs down on the enemy 60mm mortar position. That stopped the tubes from firing.

1st Platoon Stops

Two machine gunners and the remainder of the 1st Platoon were then deployed to stop the remaining NVA small arms and automatic weapons fire.

Private First Class John Fritchen of Racine, Wjs., in the similarly pinned down 3rd Platoon, killed an NVA who ran past his position.

"The guy was wearing dark fatigues and pack," said PFC Fritchen. "We put a lot of firepower on the enemy and they finally backed out."

The following morning, Bravo Company further reconned enemy positions and uncovered approximately 100 bunkers and a company-size mess hall area with a total of some 2,700 pounds of rice.

According to Captain Jonathan R. Tower of Essex, Conn., company commander, captured enemy equipment included nine B40 rockets with boosters and detonators. 40 pounds of TNT, 30 small cans packed with explosives, Chicom grenades and three 60mm mortar rounds. Miscellaneous letters and documents were also found in the 18 NVA rucksacks captured in the two-day action.

Impact awards were presented by Assistant Division Commander Brigadier General Albin F. Irzyk, in ceremonies at Firebase Lillie.

The Bronze Star with "V" device was awarded to PFC Fritchen, while the Army Commendation Medal with "V" device was awarded to Sergeant Wright, Specialist Sanders, and PFC Spaninger

Warrant Officer Francis J. Martin, of Fairfield, Conn., the pilot of the 3rd Brigade reconnaissance helicopter, was awarded the Air Medal with "V" device for his actions.

IVY LEAF

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Cacti Blue Net Huge Ammo Pile

BAN ME THUOT — The Reconnaissance Platoon of the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry routed enemy troops from a bunker complex and captured a quantity of ammunition and medical supplies.

A scout dog leading the platoon was shot by the enemy as the Ivymen followed a trail into the NVA bunker complex.

"We had all grown attached to that dog and hated to lose him, but he probably saved a bunch of us," said Specialist 4 Thomas M. Helton of Kingston, Tenn.

"We formed a skirmish line and started to move into the bunker complex," reported First Lieutenant Charles R. Winn of Anaheim, Calif. "As we moved into it, a B40 went off right over us in the trees. We fell back and let air and artillery hit them."

Return Next Morning

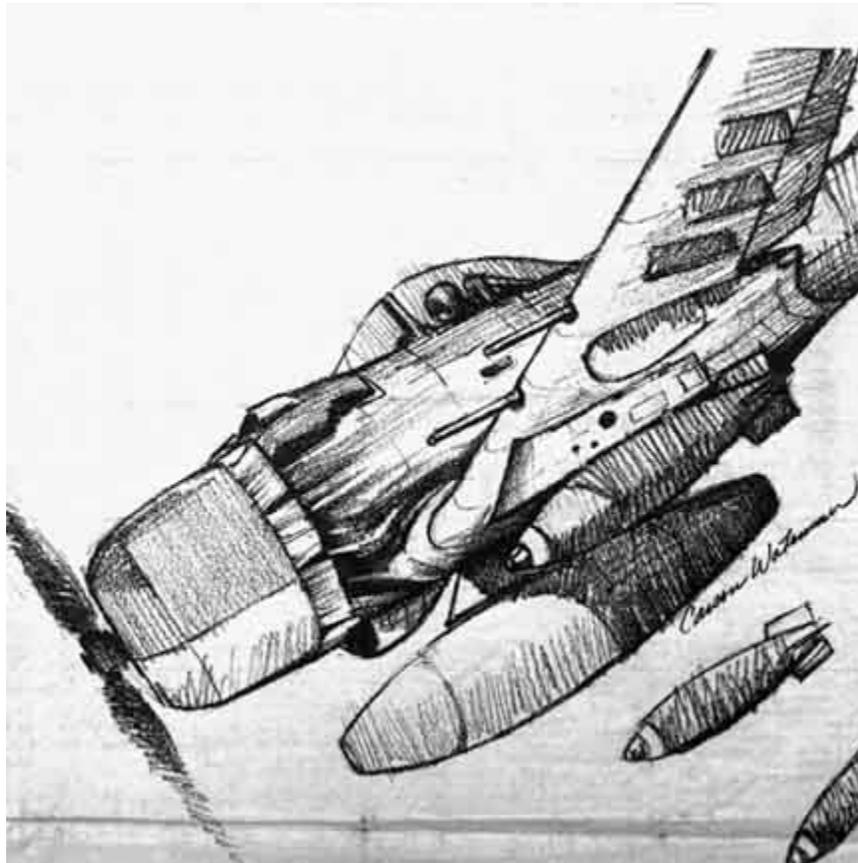
The Recon Platoon, along with Alpha Company, returned to the bunker complex the following morning where they found enemy equipment.

"Everything was packed and ready to go. I think we only got part of the stuff. I imagine they took a lot with them," said Lieutenant Winn. "The vegetation was not too thick so they could get out fast. Unfortunately we could not stick around to make a thorough search for bodies."

The captured enemy equipment included one RPG machine gun, over 11,000 rounds of 7.62 mm ammunition, nine B40 rockets, four 82 mm CS mortar rounds, sixty 60 mm mortar rounds, 9 75 mm recoilless rifle rounds, 300 rounds of 7.62 mm long (SKS) and five drums for Chicom DPM machine guns with ammunition.

Also found was a quantity of medical supplies. In addition, the enemy in their flight abandoned 180 pounds of salt and 40 pounds of rice.

IVY LEAF



World War II Skyraider 'Jack Of All Trades'

Story By SP4 David C. Drew

IN AN AGE of jet propelled machinery, an airplane called the A-1 Skyraider could be imagined as one of the fastest of the new jets.

However, the Skyraider is far from a supersonic plane of the sixties. The A-1 is an old propeller driven fighter that was first flown by the U.S. Navy in 1945 and used for electronic surveillance and reconnaissance.

Based at the Pleiku Air Base, the 6th Special Operations Squadron (6th SOS) Is the only American-manned Skyraider squadron stationed in Vietnam. The Ivymen of the 4th Division can be thankful that the Central Highlands is the "Home of the Spads".

The A-1 Skyraider appeared in Vietnam in the Spring of 1964 and moved Into Pleiku in 1966. Their duty since arrival has been to fly every conceivable mission, day and night air strikes for interdiction and close support; leaflet drops for the psychological warfare effort, air cover for helicopter assaults and rescue operations; forward air controlling; escort for defoliation and road convoys and limited aerial resupply.

Go Wherever Needed

Although the 6th SOS's area of responsibility is concentrated in the II Corps area and its main support is for The 4th Division, they have been sent wherever needed and have worked missions in every corps in Vietnam.



The Skyraider has been referred to as slow, ugly, hot and uncomfortable and is usually covered with oil and dirt; they are nevertheless, versatile and effective.

Because of its lower speed, a maximum of 400 knots, the aircraft has lower flying capabilities, which allows it pinpoint accuracy in delivering its ordnance in jungle terrain. Its big 2700 horsepower engine, the same engine that powered B-29s, enables the machine to carry heavy ordnance and fly combat configurations for a longer period of time. This is a valuable asset to the ground unit which often needs close air support for a considerable length of time.

A large percentage of Skyraider pilots are older, more experienced flyers with backgrounds and experience in jets, bombers and cargo planes.

The majority of the Skyraider's missions are flown in support of ground troops. In these operations there are two ways in which the planes can be called into action.

A normal mission is a preplanned strike set up in conjunction with the 4th Division for action in pre-selected areas. These areas are picked by the Famous Fourth on advance information they receive in relation to the operations they have planned.

Estimates Air Support

The 4th Division estimates the air support needed, notifies the 7th Air Force which channels the information to the 6th SOS. The pilots are then given a ground briefing as to the unit in the field, time for the strike, the target to be hit and ordnance required.

The second type of mission comes under an alert commitment when a unit in the field calls for air support. As soon as the 6th SOS is notified, the planes are scrambled into the air within 15 minutes. Skyraider missions are always flown in pairs and four aircraft are on alert at all times.

Maintenance hasn't been a problem for the squadron. The highly skilled crews keep the planes in highly operational condition. The planes are used often and hard, but respond well under the strain.

Eighteen Skyraiders make up the 6th Squadron, manned by 220 airmen. The unit has 24 front line pilots who fly the missions in support of 4th Division soldiers.

IVY LEAF

SP4 Named Soldier Of Month

CAMP ENARI—Demonstrating a high degree of professional competence, grasp of military knowledge and exemplary personal appearance, Specialist 4 David M. Mara was named the 4th Division Soldier of the Month.

First chosen to represent Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry, Specialist Mara then went on to demonstrate more qualities than his five opponents at the battalion semi-finals and the nine competitors at the division finals.



The 21 year-old Lincoln, Neb., native was presented two \$25 Savings Bonds. The first for capturing the battalion honor, and the other for his selection in the division.

An eight-month veteran in Vietnam, Specialist Mara is presently serving as a team leader for Charlie Company.

Prior to entering the Army, Specialist Mara was a student at the University of Nebraska. Upon completion of his military commitment he plans to return to the university for his degree in Mechanical Engineering.

Top Ivyman - SP4 David M Mara is presented a \$25 Savings Bond by Major General Donn R Pepki, commander. Specialist Mara was awarded the bond after being chosen Soldier of the Month in the 4th Division (USA Photo)

IVY LEAF

Cacti Green Kills Six In Late Night Contact

SP4 CRAIG MACGOWAN

Contributor Roger Stitt was also in this battle

OASIS — "I lived ten lifetimes in about five minutes" was the way Private First Class Joe C. Crowley of Upton, Mass., described the late-night contact with a company-sized NVA Rocket Transportation group by the Famous 4th's Company B, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry.

The action near Firebase Lily netted the "Fighting Gypsies" one detainee, six enemy dead, four 122mm rocket warheads and other miscellaneous enemy equipment including rucksacks and an AK47.

"We were, going to move to the west from our night location when a helicopter flew over and received some ground fire," explained 3rd Platoon Leader, First Lieutenant John C. Kelly of Bayside, N.Y.

"That evening, instead of closing on the rest of the company, we were to set up three individual platoon-sized look-outs.

"I set up furthest away from a village to the east on a trail running into the village."

That set the stage for the triangular-shaped contact by Bravo Company, with the 3rd Platoon facing the trail.

Private First Class Joe Crowley, the man who initiated the action, was concealed in a bamboo thicket.

"I was on guard. I looked down at my watch — 11 p.m. I looked back up and there they were — NVA passing by my position about six feet away, moving in column down the trail.

"At first I thought It was only a squad, but after a few minutes I had counted 40... then 62.

"I lived ten lifetimes 'in about five minutes."

When he was certain all the enemy had passed, PFC Crowley sprung the trap by throwing hand grenades at the tail of the enemy column.

Further up the line Sergeant Stanley Synstenlien of Ashby, Mass., was alerted by the noise of the passing enemy. They were heavily loaded, carrying rucksacks, small arms — mostly AK-47s slung over their shoulders.

"You could hear the water sloshing in their canteens," recalled the Ivy sergeant.

"They were carrying 122mm rocket warheads and every third man was carrying a rocket

booster or an 82mm mortar tube."



" looked back up and there they were – NVA passing my position..."

Sergeant Synstenlien started throwing grenades at the same time as PFC Crowley.

At the end of the Ivy Unit was Private First Class Charles L. Neal of Montgomery, La., who detonated two claymore mines at the passing column.

As he squeezed the detonators at precisely the right moment, the NVA scattered into the dense bamboo near the trailside and the night was to be a long one for Bravo Company.

"There was a lot of movement around us most of the night," said Lieutenant Kelly—"they were trying to recover their people and the equipment they had dropped.

"When they started coming back about a half hour after the initial contact, we engaged them with M79 grenade launchers."

Again, at about 3 a.m. approximately ten NVA came back out of the bushes and were engaged, this time by small arms fire.

"I think it really shook them up when the 2nd Squad opened up," stated Lieutenant Kelly. "They thought they had something small, came up to see what it was, and found they were up against something pretty big."

At daybreak the next morning the Ivymen were in for another surprise: Four enemy 122mm rocket warheads were discovered near the sight.

A total of six enemy were killed in the action, in addition to the detainee who later revealed significant information about the NVA Rocket Transportation Company.

"It didn't matter to me if they were an infantry or a rocket company. "They were out to get us," recalled PFC Crowley. "But we just played it cool all night and did a good job."

IVY LEAF

'Fire Mission!' 9th Arty Is Ready

OASIS—"Fire Mission!" The alert broke the stillness of the night with the impact of an incoming round.

Ivymen of the Famous Fourth's "Mighty Ninth," 2nd Battalion, 9th Artillery, came boiling out of their bunkers and began swarming the howitzers. Dust covers flew from muzzles and sights and wheels spun in a blur of men and motion as the tubes reared back and swung in unison to the east.

A battery fire mission in the middle of the night always produces a sense of urgency, but with this one you could almost taste it.

Moments earlier Sergeant Richard Scheier, section chief on gun number three, the hot gun, had seen a flash of light in the direction of Pleiku City.

FROM LZ LILLIE, Pleiku appeared as a string of lights in the distance. The LZ, high above the central plain, offered a commanding view of the surrounding highlands. The 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry had occupied the fire bases only a few days before in anticipation of an offensive against sprawling Pleiku.



Only two days before an attack set up by the Fighting Gypsies had taken a company size NVA force by surprise during the night.

The enemy was moving down a trail, every third man carrying a cylindrical object similar to

a mortar tube.

During the contact six NVA were killed and one was detained. Four 122mm rocket war heads were found along with several rocket casings.

From that time on the men on LZ Lillie had been alert for any signs of a rocket attack.

Sergeant Scheier knew immediately that the flashes he saw were proof of their expectations. Without hesitation he alerted the battery fire direction control center (FDC), who in turn alerted the counter battery radar.

In a matter of minutes the exact location of the suspected enemy rockets had been pinpointed.

"WE COULD SEE the long orange trail of the rockets as they went toward Pleiku," commented Charlie Battery Commander, Captain John C. Rose. "The radar had spotted the fourth round as it left the pad. We fired our first volley and got a large orange fireball that hung over the impact area.

Radar confirmed the secondary explosion with scope sightings of shrapnel after the initial shell burst.

"I had a ringside seat," commented Captain Rose. "I grabbed my binoculars and continued the fire mission, playing the role of forward observer as well as battery commander."

In all, approximately 200 rounds were poured into the area of the suspected launch location.

IVY LEAF

NVA Die, Arsenal Captured

By SP4 John Rowe

OASIS — Five days of fighting in the Chu Prong Mountain Range by the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry, accounted for 25 enemy deaths and the uncovering of a large enemy weapons cache by the battalion's Reconnaissance Platoon.

Three of the battalion's companies — Alpha, Bravo and Delta plus the Recon Platoon were engaged in heated contacts with NVA elements in the area northwest of Pleiku.

Locate The Enemy

Major Frank Adams of Brisbee, Ariz, battalion S-3, explained that the missions were "to locate the enemy with NVA elements in Chu Prong who have been harassing traffic along Highway 14. There is something up there they want to protect," said Major Adams.

He added that the Cacti Blue forces believe the enemy resistance has been coming from the 24th NVA regiment, the force which had earlier taken heavy losses in fighting on Chu Pa Mountain against elements of the Famous 4th Division's 3rd Brigade.

Kill Ten

Alpha and Bravo companies credited with six kills each, while the Recon Platoon killed four enemy without a friendly casualty.

More than 100 enemy bunker complexes were found by the probing Ivymen and as a result were destroyed by gunships and artillery fire from B Battery, 2nd Battalion, 9th Artillery.

The enemy caches and materials recovered indicated the presence of at least a battalion size enemy force in the area.

IVY LEAF

Weapons Cache In Cacti Blue Hands

OASIS — A soldier's search to find the easiest way down a ridge netted a large enemy weapons cache in the Chu Prong Mountain area.

Specialist 4 John D. Grindle of La Mesa, Calif, was a member of a search patrol sent to scout an outlying area by the Reconnaissance Platoon of the 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry, when the patrol was told to come down from the ridge to a stream bed.

On the descent, Specialist Grindle spotted an unnatural looking, partially covered hole. An examination of the hole, which was covered by logs, found a cave filled with enemy weapons and resulted in the uncovering of the first of four enemy weapons caches in the area.

Included in the caches were 300,000 AK47 rounds, 43 B40 rocket fuses, 78 60mm mortar rounds, 103 Chicom grenades and four SKS rifles.

Also part of the caches were four RPG7 rockets, 126 ignition cartridges for 60mm mortars, an NVA claymore mine, 164 mortar fuses, 11 AT grenades, an M16 rifle and 440 M16 rounds.

In discovering another cache one member of the Famous Fourth Division's recon patrol was able to make a first-hand observation of the enemy's camouflage.

Private First Class David Peterson of Allendale, NJ., said he "saw two logs that had been cut and attached to a third log so they were shaped like an arrow pointing right toward the cache."

The discovery of the enemy caches came on the second day of the recon platoon's mission and shortly after a contact which resulted in the death of one NVA.

Sergeant First Class J.F. Tibbit of Leesville, La., observed a group of 20 NVA soldiers walking near the Recon Platoon's LZ and opened fire with his M16.

One enemy troop was killed instantly, and the remainder fled the area.

After guarding the weapons cache overnight in a rice paddy, the Recon Platoon needed the assistance of four helicopters to transport the cache to LZ Valentine, the battalion firebase.

Even with the cache out of the way the action wasn't over for the Recon Platoon. The platoon accounted for three additional enemy deaths in a contact the following day.

"We saw about 10 NVA coming down the hill toward the blue line," said First Lieutenant Charles R. Winn of Anaheim, Calif., Recon Platoon leader.

"We were hoping they would keep coming into the open but they were suspicious and began going back up the hill."

As the NVA started back up the hill, the security element of the Recon Platoon opened fire.

The platoon stood fast the next day as artillery fire detonated seven secondary explosions on nearby Hill 881. The recon team then drove to the peak of the hill to become the first friendly force to accomplish the mission without enemy resistance.

The discovery of the weapons caches were the second of a sizable amount the Recon platoon has discovered this year.