

Radioman Gets His Outfit Out of a Jam

By SP4 DAN STROEBEL
CHU LAI, Vietnam (IO) —
While a monsoon rain raged through the jungles and a platoon of 101st Airborne paratroopers were cut off, a radio-telephone operator (RTO) remained calm and radioed for assistance.

Spec. 4 Terry L. Wren was credited with saving many lives when he directed a relief element to the fighting, pointed out enemy positions and led to the wounded, including his company commander.

The 2nd Platoon of A Co., 2nd Bn (Abu), 327th Inf., had been cut off from other elements of the company by two NVA companies. Bitter fighting ensued as the paratrooper command element,

fought its way to the encircled platoon.

Sixty NVA bodies were found after the contact in which 17 paratroopers were killed. Wren called in the help that forced the NVA to break contact.

"We felt like a big battle was coming," said Wren. "I don't know why, but you could feel it in the air. We had been mortared the night before, so they knew we were in the area."

"We knew they were in the area too," he recalled. One look at the almost new weapons we captured the day before told us we were up against NVA."

"That morning the 'Old Man' waited a moment in a hut to radio the day's plans

to the platoon leaders." "That's where we first got hit."

A sniper opened fire on the command element and the 2nd Platoon quickly deployed to silence the enemy. Wren and the rest of the command group followed them in the search.

The first sweep was fruitless and the platoon moved through the thorny vines and trees a second time, firing on enemy positions.

Wren and the command group moved to a nearby hamlet, hoping to glean information from the villagers.

"The people wouldn't look at us," said Wren. "We knew they were frightened and their eyes flitted around the area."

"Suddenly, the 2nd Platoon began firing on full automatic," said Wren.

A mortar round scored a direct hit on a hut near Wren and the command element. Quickly they moved toward the 2nd Platoon and the sounds of fighting.

Wren, sensing the magnitude of the situation, quickly called a nearby company for assistance. The relief element killed three NVA in camouflaged uniforms. When the paratroopers arrived, Wren briefed them. They quickly maneuvered and the enemy broke contact.

"I called a medic for the captain, and we patched him up the best we could," said Wren.

"Then we found the artillery forward observer and he was hurt badly too."

After the wounded were evacuated, Wren mopped the rain from his face, noticing it for the first time in five hours. It was the same rain that kept helicopter gunships grounded.

"I'm lucky to be alive," he said. "Everything happened so fast."

The rescuers counted 60 enemy dead, 2nd Platoon suffered 17 killed.

"No one would have survived if Wren hadn't called for help," said Sgt. Ronald G. Nixon. "The NVA had us outnumbered and they knew it. But our boys made them pay dearly."