

Tigers Kill 7 NVA in Ambush, Crossing

By SGT. Bob Chambers
CHU LAI (1/317-10) — Three NVA walked along a dense jungle trail west of here during Operation Wheeler. Each was armed with a Chinese-Communist automatic rifle. They moved slowly. Their eyes searched for signs of American activity.

A few feet away, an element of Tiger Force, 1st Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf. lay in ambush. Their camouflaged fatigue uniforms blended into the brush.

Sgt. Ervin Lee, Anniston, Ala., moved his hand slightly to alert his forces.

The jungle seemed to hold its

breath — then a burst of fire from paratrooper weapons shattered the silence.

A second later the silence rushed back.

Three NVA lay motionless on the trail. Moments later the Tigers leaped from their concealed positions, retrieved the three enemy weapons and moved out quietly.

The Tigers saw a stream in the distance and approached it with caution. The pointman signaled signs of enemy activity. The Tigers melted into the brush. Each man carefully studied the opposite shore.

Ten minutes later, the point-

man eased the safety of his M-16 to automatic, slipped into the water and started across.

Suddenly, sniper fire broke out from the far side. The pointman lunged for the shore, his weapon blazing.

Spec. 4 Sam Ybarra, Globa, Ark., leaped from his concealment and dashed into the waist-deep stream to aid the pointman.

Other Tigers followed in small numbers and moved to flank the enemy. Only the medic and radio operator remained behind.

"Medic," someone yelled from the enemy side of the stream.

Pfc. Harold Fisher, San

Antonio, splashed into the water to answer the plea. Enemy bullets cut the air and water around him.

"Who is it?" yelled Fisher.

A groan answered.

Fisher crawled toward the sound and found the pointman bleeding from the hip. The seasoned medic ripped away the cloth around the wound and applied a dressing. "You're going to be all right, you're going to be O.K.," Fisher repeated to the wounded Tiger.

As Fisher spoke, the wounded man's rifle fired. Startled, Fisher reeled back from his patient to see an NVA soldier fall to the ground behind him.

Ybarra crawled up to the two men. "Let's get him out of here, Doc," he said. "This place is swarming with 'Charlie'."

Ybarra and Fisher carried the wounded Tiger to safety through a hail of enemy automatic weapons fire.

When the firing stopped, Fisher checked his patient.

He was dead.

"I was trying to save his life," Fisher said softly. "Instead, he saved mine."

Other Tigers had routed the enemy. Four NVA were dead — seven for the day. The price of victory was bitter.

A Tiger died.

The Screaming Eagle



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Dash for Cover

Paratroopers of the 2nd Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf., bustle from a 178th Aviation Co. helicopter during Operation Wheeler. Sniper fire hurried the men and the helicopter quickly lifted away.

(Photo by Spec. 4 Dick McLaughlin)

'Fire and Maneuver' Still Important

CHU LAI — The importance of fire and maneuver was emphasized by a 101st Airborne squad during Operation Wheeler west of here when the paratrooper element killed three NVA and drove off four who tried to thwart a water resupply mission.

"Our platoon had moved into a deserted village where we hoped to find a well," said Staff Sgt. James Miller, Savannah, Ga. "When we couldn't find water, my squad was

picked to reconnoiter for a stream."

The squad moved along a trail adjacent to a rice paddy when a burst from enemy automatic weapons forced the paratroopers of A Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf. to hit the dirt.

As the Americans returned the fire, Miller radioed for assistance, but during the transmission static jammed the frequency. Realizing the sound of enemy automatic weapons would alert the rest of the

platoon, Miller decided to engage the enemy with his squad.

"The NVA were firing from a woodline to our front," he said. "The only way to eliminate them was to use fire and maneuver."

Miller picked five of his 18-man squad to accompany him in a flanking action while Pfc. James Meyers, New Roads, La., and others scurried across the rice paddy. When the enemy shifted to fire on Meyers, Miller's team dashed through the brush and opened fire on

seven khaki-clad NVA.

"My element unloaded everything they had to take the pressure off Meyers," said the squad leader. "Then, while the enemy tried to engage us, Meyers maneuvered his team to within 25-yards of the enemy and heaved a grenade."

The exploding grenade killed one, the others jumped and ran. Two were cut down by a burst from an M-60 machine gun; four escaped.

Miller regrouped his squad; no one was hurt. Two AK-47's were captured.

Sudden Meeting Shocking

PHAN BANG — Pfc. Reginald Jackson, Baltimore, knows what coming face-to-face with the enemy means.

"It's as big a shock to you as it is him," says Jackson, a 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne paratrooper with A Co. of the 3rd Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf. conducting Operation Rose south of here.

Jackson and his squad of the 1st Platoon had paused on a trail waiting for the rest of the company to catch up when three enemy appeared from behind a big boulder.

"We were watching for snipers," said Jackson. "Then these three guys came from behind a boulder near the bend of the trail. All three had weapons."

"I guess we saw each other at the same time," Jackson continued. "They didn't have enough time to draw a bead on us, but I swung my M-16 around and opened fire. I knocked one down, but he jumped up and followed the other two into the brush. Later we couldn't find any blood trails."

Two of the enemy were larger than local VC, dressed in Khaki uniforms and equipped with load bearing equipment similar to American issues.

NVA Dud 'Ignored' By Troop

CHU LAI — An NVA mortar round fell nine inches from a sleeping 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne paratrooper near here recently without disturbing his sleep. It was a dud.

Spec. 4 Martin Bongiorno, Bound Brook, N.J., crawled under his poncho shelter and closed his eyes.

"I was almost asleep when I heard a loud 'whoosh' and a 'thud,'" said the A Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 502nd Inf. paratrooper. "Nothing else happened so I went to sleep."

Three hours later exploding claymores and grenades startled the night. A Co. was being attacked by an estimated company of NVA.

"We fought till dawn," Bongiorno said. "I went back to my shelter and was scared at what I saw."

The paratrooper discovered a gaping hole in his poncho and nine inches from where he had rested his head in earlier sleep lay a 60mm mortar shell.

Bongiorno's only comment was: "Whew!"

Detainees Receive Special Treatment

CHU LAI — At 10 a.m. each morning a 101st Airborne MP opens the gate to the detainee center here and welcomes two persons—a paratrooper medic and an ARVN interpreter: "Morning, Doc. You've got 10 today."

Spec. 4 Ernest S. Jones, Issaquah, Wash., and interpreter Staff Sgt. An Than Dug, Saigon, care for detainees who are processed by interrogation teams. Each visit lasts about two hours as the medic sees each person and treats his or her ailments. "The majority of detainees I treat have some sort of infection or skin disease," Jones said. "Minor wounds are treated by the combat medics in the field before they reach the rear."

Jones has found detainees fairly easy to care for once the communication barrier is breached. Sgt. An quickly establishes a rapport and treatment begins. "The children who come with their mother are sometimes reluctant to be treated, but grown-ups cooperate very well and often express their appreciation for medical treatment," Jones said.

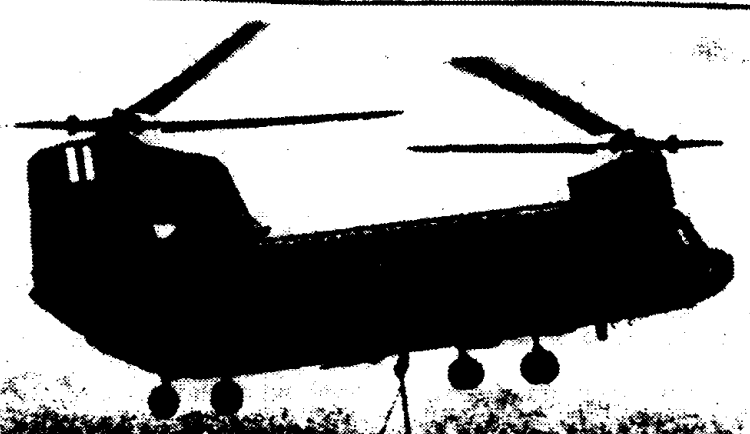
There are times when 'hard-

core' insurgents are unmoved by Jones' desire to help them. "Sometimes they act like they couldn't care less whether a running sore is cleaned or not," he said.

Quite often the relief from pain experienced by one prompts all detainees to seek the same treatment. "Once I gave a man eye drops and he apparently told the others he felt so much better, the others came up and wanted eye drops in their eyes, too," Jones recalled.

"Being a medic for paratroopers and detainees is both frustrating and satisfying," he says. "We care for them not only because the Geneva Convention requires it, but because they are human beings in need and that's a medic's job," said Jones.

Sometimes when an exceptionally belligerent detainee scorns the medic as he cleans and treats a running sore or jungle rot, Jones grits his teeth and goes about his job. "I can't think like an infantryman when I treat them," he said. "I'm a medic and my duty is to help people who need me."



Sling Load

A Chinook CH-47 helicopter of the 178th Assault Helicopter Co. delivers its critical cargo—a 140mm howitzer and its ammunition—to the battlefield during Operation Wheeler. The artillery piece was sling-lifted to the 2nd Bn. (Abn), 329th Arty. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Art Campbell)

2 NVA Blown from Sandals

CHU LAI — Two NVA soldiers were literally blown out of their sandals by a 101st Airborne paratrooper during the recent Operation Wheeler west of here.

Pfc. Arthur Kottke, Minneapolis, heard movement outside the perimeter of C Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf. He strained to see what it was and found himself face-to-face with an NVA soldier who appeared as startled as Kottke.

"We just stared at each other for a second, then I cut loose with my M-16," said Kottke.

As the paratrooper fired, the enemy hit the dirt. Then, another enemy appeared and Kottke heaved a grenade into the brush. An instant before his grenade exploded, a Chinese-Communist grenade sailed out of the jungle and fell short. Both grenades exploded almost in unison.

Tension marked the night for the paratroopers, but it passed without further incident. At daybreak, Kottke walked out to retrieve his defensive flares and claymores. Next to his trip flare

wire he saw the prongs of a mine.

"I turned around and retraced my steps," he said. "We searched the area carefully and found two more."

With the mines eliminated, Pfc. Buddy Jones, Springfield, Mo., and Kottke examined the area where Kottke had thrown the grenade. They found a heavy blood trail, an NVA helmet and two pair of sandals.

"Kottke," said Jones, "it looks like you scared old 'Charlie' right out of his shoes."



Stream Crossing

Spec. 4 Michael E. Goshorn, Muncie, Ind., holds his M-16 rifle at high port as he wades a stream during Operation Wheeler. Goshorn is a paratrooper in A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf. (Photo by Spec. 4 Ben Croxson)

Hill Saves Sergeant

CHU LAI — A paratrooper medic in the 101st Airborne fought death for 48 minutes during Operation Wheeler recently to save a sergeant's life.

Elements of A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf. were conducting search and destroy operations west of here when Staff Sgt. Arthur D. Sowers, Columbus Ga., collapsed. His hands clutched his chest as he gasped for air.

"I thought it was a heart attack," said medic Pfc. Wesley D. Hill, Fort Mill, S.C. "He had all the symptoms."

Hill began immediate mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

"He had seizures at intervals and stopped breathing five times," Hill said. "It took six troopers to hold him down when the seizures came."

The struggle against death continued as Hill and others fought to keep him alive.

"I kept him talking as much as I could," the medic recalled. "I knew that as long as he was talking he was breathing."

Sowers responded to the medic's treatment and was slightly improved when the medevac chopper circled for the landing.

"Sowers told the guys to take his chow and water," said Hill. "Then he told me if the medevac didn't hurry up and land he was going to get up and walk back."

Minutes later the sergeant was resting comfortably in the hospital here.



Moment's Rest

Pfc. Eugene Williams, St. Louis, leans his body and heavy pack against a stone wall during a hill in Operation Wheeler. Williams is a member of A Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 102nd Inf. (Photo by Pfc. Robert Mosey)



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'Hawks' Ambush Enemy

CHU LAI — An NVA squad was taken as prey in night ambush by the Hawk Platoon of the 101st Airborne during Operation Wheeler northwest of here.

The platoon, a reconnaissance element of 2nd Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf., waited until dusk enveloped the rice paddy. Moving with practiced stealth, the paratroopers crept into positions on a four-foot rice paddy dike overlooking a well-worn trail.

Pfc. Michael R. Wolverton, Los Angeles, was positioned on one end of the ambush when he was alerted by noises on the trail.

"I heard people talking in Vietnamese as they approached our ambush," he said. "There were no civilians in the area, so I knew they had to be enemy."

Wolverton nudged the man next to him and word of the approaching enemy was passed down the line.

"As they came closer we could hear them splashing in the rice paddy," Wolverton recalled. "Only three were actually on the trail."

As the enemy passed about ten feet from Wolverton's position, he opened fire. The night was illuminated by streaking tracers and exploding grenades.

One of the enemy fired a few quick rounds, but was countered with overpowering fire. Another threw a grenade which exploded near Wolverton and inflicted a slight shrapnel wound in his neck.

The token NVA resistance was quelled quickly by the Hawks. Silence fell again on the rice paddy. Three NVA lay dead on the trail.

"We decided to check for other bodies and leaped over the hedge which lay between us and the rice paddy," said Wolverton.

Three NVA soldiers lay dead in the rice paddy in addition to the three that died on the trail. A seventh enemy was hit as he ran but the paratroopers were unable to capture him in the dark. Two sets of web gear and four Chinese-Cam grenades were taken from the dead NVA.

Can't Get 'Careless'

CHU LAI (1/327-10)—A quick eye and a swift kick saved a 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne paratrooper's life during Operation Wheeler west of here recently.

An element of A Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf., was moving down a jungle trail when three NVA crossing a rice paddy were sighted. The paratroopers opened fire and then hit the dirt as the enemy fired back.

Pfc. William Bennett, Cicero, Ill., crawled to a clump of bushes and took careful aim with his M-79 grenade launcher. Firing the first round, Bennett stood up to see where his round hit. "I was a little high, so I adjusted and fired again," Bennett said.

Again, the grenadier stood up to watch the flight of the round. Suddenly he was knocked flat. Enemy bullets cut the air where Bennett had been standing.

"You trying to make your wife a widow?" growled Spec. 4 Thomas Bateman, Detroit, who had knocked Bennett down.



Cover, Concealment

A trooper of the 1st Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf. takes advantage of the dense jungle foliage to hide himself from the enemy during a recent operation. Screaming Eagle paratroopers slashed their way through miles of dense jungle in search of insurgents. (Photo by Sp4 Ron Crexton)

Run in All Directions

Three NVA Fail at Evasion

CHU LAI — Evasive tactics born of confusion failed to save three NVA soldiers when they met paratroopers of the 101st Airborne during a recent Operation Wheeler action near here.

Paratroopers of B Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf. were moving along a dry stream bed toward a nearby objective. Walls of vine-covered earth rose on both sides of the twisting, turning path. Spec. 4 Eddie L. Williams, Rocky Mount, N.C.,

walked point followed by Spec. 4 Lawrence E. Pope, Knoxville, Tenn. Both were alert for signs of enemy activity.

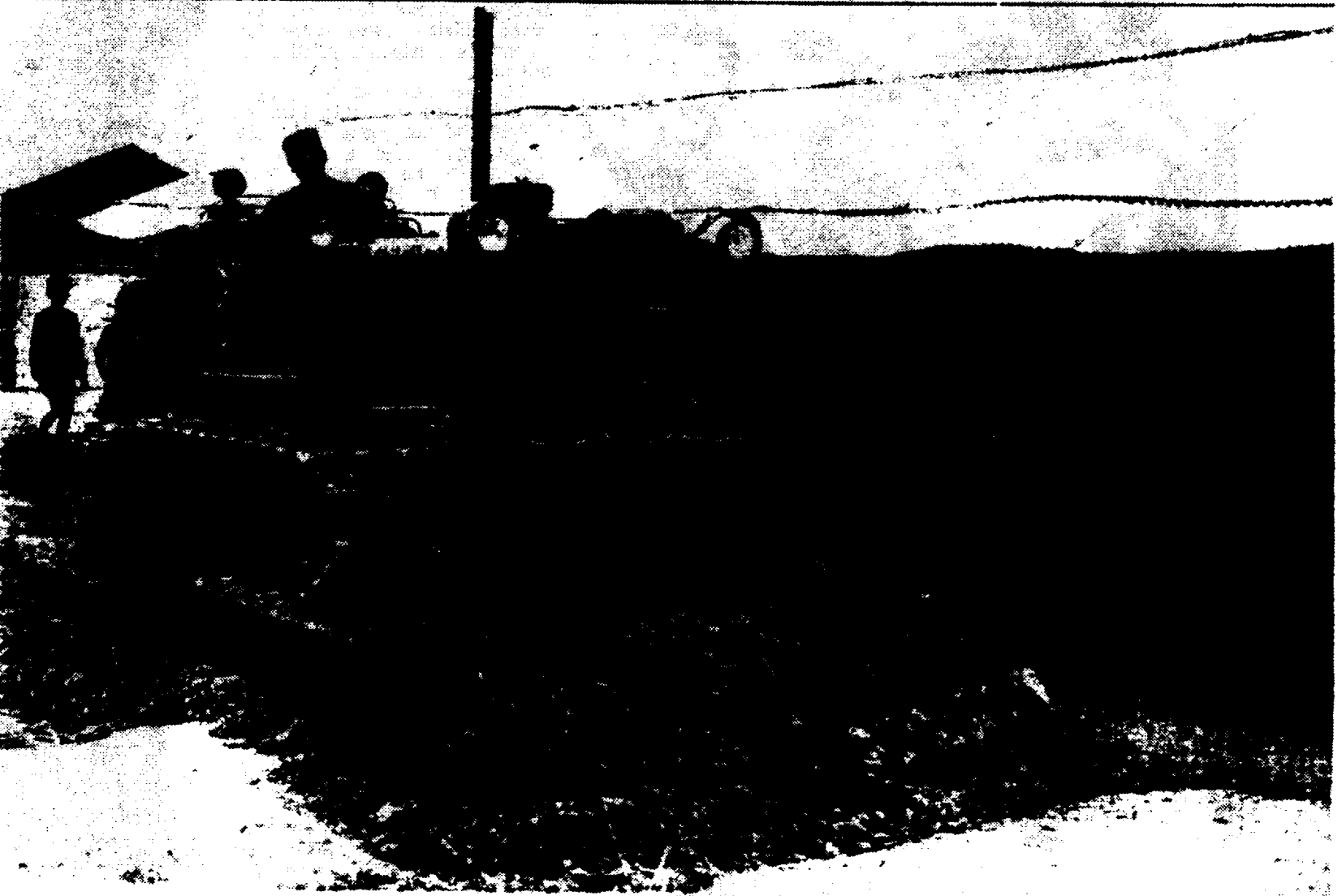
As Williams neared a bend in the stream bed he heard sounds of movement. "It sounded like someone walking and mumbling," said Williams.

Both paratroopers dropped to the ground in anticipation of contact. Pope pushed the safety of his M-16 rifle to full automatic.

Three uniformed NVA walked into view and were startled at the sight of the two paratroopers crouching in front of them.

"They tried to go three different directions," recalled Williams. "The first two leaped to the left and right while the third tried to run back up the stream bed."

Two enemy fell dead and the third left a heavy blood trail in the brush. Williams and Pope recovered grenades and a medical aid kit from the bodies.



Building Roads

Paratroopers of A Co., 326th (Abn) Engineers graded roads for villagers of Ly Tra as part of a civil affairs project of the brigade. Here an engineer employs his bulldozer to cut roads where only narrow footpaths once existed. (Photo by Spec. 4 James Lehr)

Dubisar Wounded 1st Day

CHU LAI — It started out to be a very short war for 101st Airborne Platoon Sgt. Wesley T. Dubisar, Elba, Ala. He was wounded during Operation Wheeler west of here on his first day in combat. Dubisar had just joined A Co., 2nd Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf. and taken over the 3rd Platoon.

"We were being resupplied when word came late in the afternoon that one of our platoons in C Co. was pinned down," said Dubisar. "We got the mission of conducting a combat assault to help them. I was on the last lift going into the LZ." As the helicopters approached the landing zone, enemy ground fire was heavy. "The ship on our right took a hit and then our bird got one," Dubisar recalled. "It wasn't anything serious, so we went on in."

The relief company quickly organized and began moving toward C Co. "It started raining as we moved out," Dubisar said.

Once the situation was controlled by the paratroopers, A Co. gave their food to the sister company and returned to their original position. "We got back about 6:30 a.m.," said Dubisar. "We sacked out to wait for resupply." Mortar shells began falling on the American position as they rested.

"We started dispersing when the rounds began coming in," Dubisar said. "Some of them landed within 50-meters of our position. I was moving as fast as I could when I heard this round coming in. I hit the ground and all of a sudden it felt like a swift kick in the seat of my pants. The concussion carried me about 15-feet. The medics patched me up and I was evacuated to the hospital."

Dubisar's first day in combat ended.

Brotheron Shunning 'Charms'

CHU LAI—Pfc. Larry B. Brotheron, North Kingston, R.I., a machine gunner with the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne is shunning rabbits' feet, four-leaf clovers and lucky charms.

He doesn't think he needs them. He escaped death twice while fighting in Operation Wheeler near here.

Moving across an open field with the 2nd Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf., Brotheron got a faceful of mud diving from enemy sniper fire. When the sniper was located and his squad prepared to assault, the paratrooper lunged to his knees only to be driven back on his seat.

"I didn't know what hit me until I swung my M-16 around to fire," he said. "Then I noticed the two holes in my rifle's hand guard. The rifle was the only thing between those bullets and my chest."

Brotheron's second brush with disaster occurred as his squad moved past an NVA hidden in the brush. The paratrooper spotted the enemy, but was looking down the barrel of an AK-47 rifle. I moved toward him and grabbed his arm," Brotheron said. "He never did fire. He was too high on dope or something. All he did was grin at me."

Brotheron's buddies marvel over his continued good fortune. "Just lucky, I guess," he says.

Jumpers All

Paratroopers of the 1st Brigade are eligible to become members of the 101st Airborne Division Association. A quick check with your 1st Sergeant will give you all the details.



Oscar at Chow

Oscar, a Vietnamese dog that has gained the favor of Brig. Gen. S. H. Matheson, brigade commander, investigates a can of C-rations near the tactical operations center (TOC). Oscar, in reality a lady, is expecting a litter of pups soon. (USA Photo)

Old Man, Boy Protected

Endangered Villagers Saved By Paratroopers Who Care

CHU LAI — Five paratroopers of the 101st Airborne saved the lives of two Vietnamese civilians recently when the Americans responded to NVA sniper fire during an action west of here.

A Co. of the 1st Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf., established its perimeter on a hilltop commanding the surrounding area. At the base of the hill was a small cluster of native huts.

Earlier in the day the paratroopers had checked the huts and found an old man and little boy. They left them alone.

As darkness fell sniper fire began peppering the paratrooper position.

The sniper was pinpointed somewhere within the cluster of huts. Rather than kill innocent people and miss the chance to take a prisoner, five men volunteered to get the sniper.

Led by Lt. Thomas J. Lowrie, Sturgeon Bay, Wis., the paratroopers moved down the tar-raced hillside, using dikes for cover. Rain helped conceal their advance.

"A man ran into the jungle as we closed in," said Lowrie.

They did not chase him. "He might have been a decoy to lead us to an ambush," said Pfc. John E. Starr, Columbus, Ohio.

The paratroopers first re-

moved the old man and little boy. Then they searched the hut — two men went on one side, three on the other.

An NVA soldier tried hiding in a bunker under the floor of a hut. When he refused to surrender they grenaded him.

"We brought the old man and little boy back," said Lowrie. "They might have gotten hurt down there."

They Lead Harsh Life

CHU LAI — A small group of Vietnamese villagers sat huddled in the corner of a dingy, mud-walled hut west of here. Their faces mirrored the harsh life they lived under Communist control. Even small children stared with empty faces.

Capt. Harold McCaha, Frank- lin, N.C., surveyed the pitiful scene. "These people are so pathetic," he whispered to Platoon Sgt. Camillo Gonzalez, Sacramento, Calif. Gonzalez, a veteran of nearly four years in Vietnam, shook his head slowly and said: "Yes sir."

McCaha radioed for a helicopter to evacuate the people to the South Vietnamese refugee center at Tam Ky. As he made his request, the members of Tiger Force, 1st Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf., searched their rucksacks for food they would give the hungry. Spec. 4 David Brocki, Muncie, Ind., dug out his coveted peaches and pound cake. "They look hungry," he said simply.

Old Advice Still Sound For Battle

CHU LAI — Eighteenth century soldier Maj. Robert Rogers didn't know it, but his wise counsel to Rangers in 1750 was effective in fighting insurgent forces 18 miles west of here where the 101st Airborne's Operation Wheeler inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

Capt. Edgar F. Burch, Boulder, Colo., read rule 15 to his paratroopers of B Co., 1st Bn. (Abn), 327th Inf.: "Don't sleep beyond dawn. Dawn's when the French and Indians attack." Burch added: "... and Victor Charlie."

With this guidance, B Co. moved out before dawn, hoping to catch the enemy asleep.

As one patrol led by Spec. 4 George Welch, Los Angeles, entered a village, a khaki-clad figure darted from a hut. "He saw me as he rounded the corner of the hut," said Welch. "I cut him down before he realized who I was." Welch's kill was number 327 for the battalion.

Burch's forces also discovered a rucksack containing grenades, ammunition and NVA documents.

A Vietnamese family in the area said the dead enemy was the squad leader of a sniper group operating in the valley. One of the women led the paratroopers to the base camp used by the insurgent element where the Screaming Eagles found ammunition and remnant G.I. clothing.



Laughter Everywhere

When boys get together, laughs generally abound. These Vietnamese youngsters were guests at a recent party thrown by paratroopers of the Support Battalion in Phan Rang. Smiles promise much for the future. (Photo by Spec. 4 Robert Lloyd)



Up a Tree

Radio-telephone operator, Pfc. Wade D. Hansen, Foxboro, Minn., gets good reception with his radio during Operation Wheeler. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Mike Mangiameli)