

## Two Streams (continued from last newsletter)

At the end of Part One of this story (see last newsletter), the intrepid troopers of Delta Recon platoon were in a world of hurt. One squad and the command CP on the North side of a stream bed had all but five people wounded or KIA. On the South side of the stream bed, SSG Rubio's squad also suffered casualties. The NVA were well positioned but were under indirect fire forcing them to stay in their many spider holes. LT. Carpenter requested the one remaining Recon squad come from the LZ, three clicks away, to provide reinforcements. He was also attempting to get SSG Rubio's squad to cross the stream bed and join him on the North side of the stream.

By this time the shooting on both sides became more disciplined. The mad minute like firing for the first few minutes of the firefight would have depleted ammunition much too fast. So both sides were carefully looking for targets and then shooting. The NVA still had snipers in the trees. Recon had no machine guns but the NVA did and they used them to sweep Recon positions systematically, chewing away the ant hills used for cover by some of Recon. LT. Carpenter, PFC March and PFC Rockwell (the RTOs) were behind some very thin dried up bushes which provided sparse concealment. The branches of the bush were being chopped away by incoming rounds.

Radio communication with SSG Rubio's squad was interrupted. This was a serious situation as they were needed on the north side of the stream bed. March and Rockwell were yelling at each other about radio settings. Shooting and explosions were so loud that they had to yell face to face, less than a foot away from each other. As PFC Rockwell turned his head towards March, a bullet went right across the front of his face, through the bridge of his nose, blowing his glasses off. Lots of blood was flowing and "Rocky", as he was called, was in bad shape, unable to either see or function. LT. Carpenter directed PFC March to remove PFC Rockwell's radio. Rockwell was rolling around on the ground, moaning and holding his face, making it difficult to get his web gear and radio removed. Another trooper, who had been wounded himself, helped Rocky low crawl to the rear where they both were medevac'd by helicopter.

Meanwhile, SGT Cheney, the FO started bringing in 105 mm Artillery on the NVA. Recon was so glad to see the shells right on target, even though the shrapnel, dirt and foliage were landing around them. The shells whistled in and the NVA stopped shooting, as they scurried into their protective holes with each incoming barrage. The artillery gave much needed relief, allowing Recon to maneuver and get more wounded out.

At this point a spotter chopper from the 1/9<sup>th</sup> Cav saw some NVA fleeing their positions heading southwest along the stream bed. Battalion S-3 was notified and one platoon of A Company 1/12<sup>th</sup>, who had already been put on standby, were immediately lifted into a blocking position a few clicks southwest of Recon.

SGT Webb's squad arrived from the LZ, breathing hard from their dangerous run toward the fighting. They followed the same route as the earlier Recon members. PSG Mclaurin (Mac), the platoon Sargent, was with SGT Webb's

squad. When Webb arrived at the CP he asked where SGT Lute was and March pointed towards his body about 25 meters in front. PSG Mclaurin and LT Carpenter conferred briefly and deployed SGT Webb's squad, under cover of an artillery barrage, on the right flank of the Recon platoon. There they faced directly what was becoming the most formidable part of the NVA line.

SSG Rubio's squad got the word to move back across the stream bed. Although some of the NVA had moved away towards the two streams junction, many still remained. PFC Carl Colarusso was the first to attempt to cross the dried up stream bed and climb up the northwest face. The wall of the stream bed was about eight feet high, and steep enough that one had to use hands to help climb. Carl crossed, and then leveraged himself up the wall. As he edged himself over the top, at least one NVA opened up on him full auto. Dirt and debris were kicked up all around Carl until he was completely enveloped in a cloud. He then tumbled back down the wall of the stream bed in a heap. Others who saw this thought he must have been killed, but incredibly all the bullets missed him. He got up, ready to try it again. (It is said that this is where Carl was nick named "Combat Colarusso") It took almost an hour for SSG Rubio's squad to root out the nearby NVA and make it to the other side of the stream bed, where they joined up with the few remaining members of SGT Lute's squad. Recon was consolidated and the real fun began.

SGT Cheney (the FO) received authorization to bring in some "fast movers" to drop napalm on the NVA. A spotter plane fired a marker into the tree line in which the NVA were located. The jets screamed in at amazing speed and lobbed napalm canisters at the smoke filtering up through the trees. The tree canopy was huge, overshadowing the Delta troopers. The napalm canisters drifted end over end after the jets passed and exploded in the tops of the trees. Instantly the troopers found themselves in what felt like a high temperature oven. Even before the napalm gel splashed through the tree canopy towards them and the NVA, the searing temperature from the radiated heat singed their hair. Although the trees absorbed much of the gel, chunks were landing on and around the troopers. PFC Donald Freed was hit directly on the hands and back. Burning painfully, he got up and ran. Another nearby trooper tackled him and rolled him in the dirt. SSG Rubio had a large chunk of what appeared to be inflamed cherry jello land on his back. PFC March used his shirt sleeve to quickly knock it off him. Amazingly, it fell in one piece to the ground. But the Napalm damage to the NVA was greater. The NVA snipers in the trees became crispy critters, and the NVA stayed in their holes a little longer than usual.

The search for targets and shooting continued on both sides. Ammunition was being conserved. The firefight already had lasted about five hours.

Delta received radio info that elements of Alpha Company were sweeping towards them from their blocking position to the south.

SGT Cheney, in coordination with the spotter plane, brought in A1E Sky Hawks with 250 pound bombs. LT Carpenter moved everyone back about 100 feet to put more distance between Recon and the target, a lesson well learned from the Napalm. Again artillery helped break contact long enough to move back and take cover. The Recon troopers lay prone on the ground with their mouths

open and ears covered, as the planes dove in and delivered their ordinance right on target. The blast from the 250 pound bombs was still close to the Recon troopers and the shock wave lifted everyone right off the ground. Suddenly the sounds of small arms fire seemed diminished. The radio volume was just not enough. One trooper's ear was bleeding. It's no wonder as Recon was still well within the blast radius of a 250 pound bomb.

Still somewhat dazed, the troopers immediately returned to their original tenuous positions relative to the NVA tree line. Shooting continued and Recon was unable to maneuver towards the NVA because of the suppressive fire from a well concealed NVA machine gun, which had been positioned to sweep Recon's positions on the right flank. Back and forth it went, wounding three more troopers. One of them was Kirby Cleveland who was shot through the left hip. The bullet exited his right hip. Once again medevac helicopters were brought in and troopers carried their buddies to the rear for evacuation. This is when PFC Frank Crary, a team leader in SGT Webb's squad, spotted the NVA machine gun and made his move.....

To be continued in final installment (Part III)