

# **The Trapezoid, November 21-28, 1967**

## **10 Clicks Southeast of Dau Tieng**

**The following is the account by Bill Allison, the Company Commander of Charlie Company.**

On Thanksgiving Day, November 23, 1967, the 2 nd Battalion (Mech) 22 nd Infantry was conducting search and destroy operations approximately 10,000 yards or 5 ½ miles southeast of Dau Tieng. Since November 21, 1967 Bravo Company, under the command of Captain Mike Mitchell, had been operating in a VC base camp that was located six hundred yards north of the clearing that Charlie Company had occupied after dark the night before.

Each day that Bravo Company had been in the base camp they uncovered more bunkers and trench systems. Each day they came under fire, with the 3 rd Platoon Bravo Company coming under heavy fire on November 22, 1967. Air strikes that were called in on the unfolding VC complex, revealed one of the most elaborate base camps that I remember the battalion ever finding. The camp was, among other things, an ammunition and fuse factory.

On Thanksgiving Day, November 23, 1967, Charlie and Bravo Companies were given the mission to go into the VC base camp. When the 3 rd Platoon of Bravo Company receives a heavy volume of fire, both Companies are ordered to fall back to the laager position. Artillery and air strikes are called in for the rest of the day, and the Battalion enjoys a Thanksgiving meal.

At 0300 hours, the following morning (11/24/67) the company was hit with a mortar attack. We took 29 hits within the company perimeter. We had nine men wounded, none critically. The VC mortar team had prepared their firing positions less than 500 yards south of our location.

As soon as they fired their mortars, the team picked up their equipment and started running down a trail that lead off to the west. The lead man was carrying a flashlight as he led the team away. The mortar team stopped running and gathered in front of the Second Platoon's nine-man ambush patrol that was in position at a fork in a trail. It was 700 yards south west of the company laager.

I was told that one of the men in the ambush patrol called out "HALT" just before the ambush patrol opened fire and killed seven members of the mortar team. The man carrying the base plate must have been lagging behind because the base plate was not recovered. The patrol reported what had happened and wanted to know what they should do. They were instructed to check to see if all the members of the mortar team were dead. A few minutes later, there was another heavy burst of automatic weapons fire in the vicinity of the patrol. When they were asked to explain what was going on, they responded, "you wanted us to see if they were all dead. We just wanted to make sure they were dead before we checked to see if they were dead." Soon after daylight the VC mortar team was buried by our troops in the foxholes that the VC had dug near their firing positions.

Later that morning the VC made it very evident that they were very close by and knew where we were. The mortar team that was buried in their original foxholes was not completely buried. A hand was left sticking out of one of the graves. I'm sure there was some joking as my men put the team in their resting-place. I found it humorous as I passed the gravesite on a sweep south and west in search of the

mortar team's base camp. As we were returning to our laager, two or three hours later, we again passed the gravesite. This time no hand was visible. In fact, all the graves had been neatly mounded and the area around the graves had been raked. That gave me an uneasy feeling. I felt as if I could reach out and touch someone and that eyes were on us. That was a feeling that stayed with me for the rest of my tour.

On November 24, Charlie and Bravo returned to the VC base camp and to destroy bunkers. Air strikes had cleared 10 to 15 acres of jungle that had concealed the camp. At least 75 to 100 bunkers and tunnels had been located and destroyed. I accompanied the third platoon lead by their seasoned combat leader, Platoon Sergeant Sammy Kay, who understood better than anyone else in the company the possible danger we were facing. All that hot and humid day we crawled into bunkers and through trench systems; we uncovered more of the factory complex and blew equipment and bunkers. Fortunately, we walked completely through the bombed area without receiving any enemy fire. We returned to the laager site around 1700 hours. We would later realize that we had only uncovered the tip of an enormous complex. While we were blowing bunkers, Jim Nelson from the third platoon made a sketch of the base camp. He did such a good job that his sketch landed him a job as the 3rd Brigade's draftsman. Also, in that camp, some tubes of watercolors were found. Later, Jim Nelson would use the VC's watercolors to paint himself into the position as the 25th Infantry Divisions combat artist. There was a lot of very talented men wandering around in the Viet Nam jungle.

We were not able to complete the destruction of all the uncovered bunkers, so we were given the mission to go back into the area on the 25th of November. Charlie and Bravo Companies had operated in the camp day before without a single round being fired. However, things would be different that day. I have often questioned if we had let our guard down because we had moved freely on the last day.

The First and Second Platoons left the company laager at 0800 hours with the mission of completing the destruction of the base camp. The first Platoon moved to an area on six hundred yards north of the company laager. They laagered their tracks and sent out an eight-man demolition team to start blowing the bunkers. They were proceeding north when SGT Harrington and PFC Cross, who were providing security, located a trail leading out of the bombed area. They proceeded down the trail where they receive the first burst of fire. Both men were wounded. PFC Cross moved back to the location of the demolition team where he explained the situation to LT Mlynarski. PFC Cross stated that SGT Harrington was unable to move. Before the entire Company could be assembled. Lt. Mlynarski, accompanied by five men, linked up with the Second Platoon on his right and moved forward.

Lt. Mlynarski got ahead of the Second Platoon and apparently walked down the same trail that his me had found. As he stepped out of the jungle, he walked into a clearing that was covered by three VC bunkers and an elaborate trench system. Lt. Mlynarski was shot immediately along with his RTO, PFC Burlson. Both men went down, and the men accompanying LT. Mlynarski took up positions along the wood line of the bombed area.

After a five-minute lull in the fire, the Second Platoon and the remainder of the First Platoon came up on line with the forward element of the First. The first platoon then attempted to recover Lt. Mlynarski, but they became pinned down.

1Lt Robert Van Patten, the company's artillery forward observer, arrived with the Second Platoon. He could see where Lt. Mlynarski had fallen. Lt. Van Patten turned to Sergeant Arnie Pellern, his Recon sergeant, handed him his map and said, "Arnie you are a good man." Those were Van Paten's last words. Then before suppressive fires had been established, Van Patten crawled twenty feet forward and tried to retrieve LT. Mlynarski. While attempting to pull Lt. Mlynarki's body from off the log that he

had fallen across, Lt. Van Patten was shot in the head from the bunker to his front. The First Platoon's personnel carriers arrived. While one carrier evacuated the wounded, the other two tracks set up a base of fire with their 50 caliber weapons.

At this time, PFC Burleson and SGT Harrington were able to get back to their platoon's position. SGT Harrington, a sharp, model soldier, had a sucking chest wound that Arnie Pellerin and two other men quickly covered with a text-book bandage; then they quickly moved him back to the Battalion Surgeon who accompanied the battalion in the field.

The VC opened up with rifle grenades and claymore mines, claiming three more casualties. Those wounded were PFC Nishikubo, SP4 Gryster, and SP4 Farrington. The tracks came under fire and took a casualty from small arms fire; PFC Estes, a fifty gunner. An attempt was made to move the second platoon in position to lay down a base of fire so the first platoon could break contact. However, the second platoon became pinned down. It took over an hour to reestablish communications with the first platoon and extract the wounded. The VC started moving along the trenches and the company was starting to receive fire from the flanks. We were finally able to break contact and withdraw so we could regroup and evacuate the wounded. As we pulled back 50 yards, we left behind Lt.'s Van Patten and Mlynarski.

was not wounded or killed. The Second Platoon leader, Jeffery Meriam from Riverside, California and his platoon sergeant were also wounded. LTC Norris, FULLBACK 6, our tall and always on the scene battalion commander walks up in the middle of the fire fight and wanted to know when he could do to help. Lt. Kelly, who only moments earlier had cleared a nearby trench of VC who were trying to encircle our position, attempted to tell FULLBACK 6 that he was in danger where he was standing. Suddenly, a tree limb just over his head was shot down. He got the message.

I requested the Bravo Company be moved up behind us to hold open a route of withdrawal. Also, I requested that a platoon from Bravo Company be attached to Charlie Company. Then, with the Third Platoon led by PSG Sammy Kay on the right and the 3rd Platoon from Bravo Company led by LT Skip Fahel on the left, we moved forward to try to recover Van Patten and Mlynarski.

The Third Platoon's men and personnel carriers came up on line. Then with all weapons firing on automatic, they disappeared into the jungle growth. At time vegetation was so thick that we could see no more than 2 or 3 yards to the front. The VC had cleared narrow firing lanes through the jungle so they could see when our men entered their killing zones. As we advanced, the VC detonated their claymore mines that cut limbs and leaves off the heavy foliage. Large trees and termite mounds provided some cover as those brave men worked their way forward. When the platoon entered an area where the undergrowth was thinner, they could see an occupied, fortified trench running parallel to their front. An RPG round hit the side of a personnel carrier from an angle; the blast glanced off the carrier and penetrated the helmet of PFC John Allen Gibson, who was advancing close to the carrier. PFC Gibson was mortally wounded. Jim Nelson and Jim Frost were slightly wounded by the same round. The platoon hit the ground and started putting deadly accurate fire on the trench line to their front. The VC replied with a large volume of fire that passed just over the head of the men as they crawled forward. They said that they could feel the heat from the rounds as they flew by. Some men crawled over deep holes that were covered with webbed bamboo; the holes were most likely air vents for a tunnel system or underground headquarters. The trench to the front of the third platoon became silent; several VC bodies were visible.

The 3rd Platoon Bravo Company to the left came under intense fire and was only able to advance just

short of the spot were Lt. Mlynarski had fallen. During the two hours of fighting, Lt. Van Patten's body was recovered, but every attempt to recover Lt. Mlynarski resulted in accurate fire being placed on the 3rd Platoon Bravo Company location.

My RTO, George Hopper, and I were on the ground and moving behind the third platoon. My Driver and fifty gunner maneuvered my command track forward and joined the attack. An RPG hit the track. Luckily, the round exploded when it hit some brush a few feet away from the side of the track. The RPG's gas stream was broken up and splattered against the side of the track. Instead of one hole, several holes cut through the track and sent molten aluminum into the map board on the opposite interior wall of the track.

It became apparent that we were facing a well dug-in a determined force and that if we continued to assault the fortified positions we would sacrifice too many men. Contact was too close to use our superior firepower. Therefore, we requested permission to break contact so that we could pull back far enough to call in artillery and air on the located positions. FULLBACK 6 approved, but the division commander hesitated. He was reluctant to permit us to withdraw before Lt. Mlynarki's body was recovered.

At 1430hrs we broke contact and pulled back south. Actually, had we not been permitted to withdraw, circumstances would have put us in grave danger. The third platoon had consumed all their ammunition, and Bravo's 3rd Platoon was receiving a lot of sniper fire and was in danger of being flanked, but was able to cover our withdrawal.

Artillery and air strikes were called in that afternoon, all day Sunday, and on Monday morning to neutralize the area. Alpha and Bravo companies moved back into the VC base camp when the last air strike was finished. Several bodies that had been pulled into bunkers were located. After the air strikes, many large bunkers were located along with the trench system that the VC were trying to use to move around our flanks.

On the 28th, the 3rd Platoon, B Company was given the mission to recon the jungle to the north of the contact area. After about an hour, the Platoon was hit with automatic weapons, and takes one KIA, SP4 James Meek. After this contact, the Battalion moved out of the area, the base camp received a visit from B52's.

The Company suffered 25 casualties.

**Killed in Action: Lt. Robert Mlynarski, Lt. Robert Van Patten, PFC Dennis Estes and PFC John Gibson**