

Steve Pipes

Subject: FW: 1st Cav, B- 2/5

From: CHARLES PORTER

Sent: Tuesday, June 05, 2012 7:52 PM

To: Steve Pipes

Subject: Re: 1st Cav, B- 2/5

----- Original Message

Steve:

As promised, here is the narrative I promised. I have also included some pictures. On the morning of December 2, 1968 Companies A and B 2/5 Cav, 1st Air Cavalry Division airlifted out of the Dong Xoai Special Forces base north of Saigon. Earlier the entire battalion had established a fire base there to support operations [\(Please Scroll Down\)](#)

[\(Please Scroll Down\)](#)





Captain Mace commanded A company, call sign Lean Apache I commanded B Company, call sign Ridge Runner. We were to be landed close to the Cambodian border and then move back towards Dong Xoai on a search and destroy mission. Normally we did not operate outside of the range of our direct support artillery (105mm). On this day we were landed about 2 kilometers beyond the range of those guns located at Dong Xoai. This was necessitated by the thick, triple canopy jungle which covered the flat landscape. We landed at the only clearing available. Normally you could only hope to cover a little over a kilometer a day moving through that stuff. But we moved as rapidly as possible to come under the umbrella of our artillery. We accomplished that without incident.

By mid afternoon A and B company were moving south along parallel routes about 500 meters apart. My point element came in contact with a couple of NVA regulars killing one. As we moved forward through the thick jungle we encountered a couple of occupied bunkers. A brief, sharp firefight ensued in which Lt. Guy was killed while assaulting the bunkers. We finally cleared the bunkers and then heard that A company had found a major trail a few hundred yards from us. We joined up with A Company and began building a two company FOB (Forward Operating Base) on that trail. We dug holes, put out trip flares and claymore mines, cut out a one ship helicopter landing pad and got ready for the evening's festivities. I requested a tactical emergency airlift of my mortars and mortar ammunition. The chopper with them on board arrived well after dark. As it hovered down through the trees onto the pad, a burst of machine gun fire from just outside our perimeter hit it right in the transmission. The pilot was able to pull it back above the tree tops and then dump it tail first on the edge of our position. The tail boom and the rotor blades slowed its descent through the trees and it landed (rather roughly) and rolled over. The hot exhaust stack came in contact with one of the claymore mines which exploded. The good news was the only injury was a broken wrist suffered by one of the door gunners. The mortars were ok also.



The next morning, Dec 3, 1968 we waited until the log birds had taken out the chopper crew and dropped off supplies. About mid morning Cpt Mace and two platoons headed off down the trail. Within a few minutes of his departure I took two platoons and part of my mortar squad armed with LAWs (Light Anti-Tank Weapons) and headed off to recon the area where we had the contact the day before. The remaining troops stayed back to guard the FOB.

We moved through the jungle in 4 parallel columns, each in sight of the other. A compact formation. We had found that when contact was made it was easy to "form square" from that formation and defend from a circle. We had only moved about 250 yards from the FOB and were taken under automatic weapons fire from the bunkers we had previously cleared. Henry Szor and Marion Hughes were killed in the first few seconds of the fight. "Doc" Morgan went down wounded shortly thereafter. The firing continued and we were effectively pinned down.

The NVA had placed snipers in the trees above us. Whenever we tried to move we would take rounds from that direction. I was laying flat on my back, talking on the radio, trying to get some help from A company, when I saw a long green tracer come down from a bushy area in a tree about 30 yards away. I emptied 5 rounds of 12 ga. 00 buck into that area and we received no more fire from there. Probably didn't hit him but scared the hell out of him.

The guys up front kept up the fire but the NVA did not slack on theirs and we were unable to achieve fire superiority. We continued to take wounded. I ordered the LAWS to move forward and to lay down fire. We then got our own mortars on line and started to drop rounds on their position. That coupled with almost continuous artillery fire, allowed us to break contact and return to the relative safety of the FOB.

A Company tried to come to our aid but ran into the other side of the bunker complex and was forced to bounce off and rejoin us at the FOB. That afternoon and night we continued to pound the enemy location with all sorts of artillery, The next morning both companies pushed out in the same direction that I had taken the day before. Again we ran into the

same defense. This time it was Mace's turn. They walked into some command detonated claymore mines and automatic weapons fire. I tried to maneuver my company on a flanking attack but we got hit by some friendly aerial rocket artillery which wounded a couple of my guys. That really took the fight out of us. Once again we pulled back to rejoin A Co at the FOB. This time we got a flight of F-100's who dropped napalm and 750 lb bombs "danger close". We continued to pound with arty.

By this time B Company had taken 20% casualties (killed and wounded) and A Company had taken 22% casualties. We implored the Battalion Commander to request a B-52 strike on the target. Long story short, we got it. We had to haul ass out of the area and take refuge about 4 kilometers away in the Don Luan rubber plantation. The B-52's missed the target area but were close enough and scary enough that the NVA had abandoned the bunker complex. After the strike we went back and found that we had been engaged with a reinforced NVA rifle company in that bunker complex. It also housed an ammunition storage depot. That's why we could not achieve fire superiority. We airlifted stuff out of there and blew up bunkers for 3 days





That ended that fight and we continued towards Dong Xoai. Per battalion's orders A&B companies, separated by over a kilometer headed south. Mace ran into an NVA heavy weapons company. We were not in a position to come to his aid until it was all over. We secured an LZ for him and what was left of his company was lifted out back to Dong Xoai.

Shortly thereafter, just days before my 29th birthday and after being the CO of B company for over 7 months, I was rotated back to a staff job.



I am now 72 years old and have held various jobs since I was 16 years old. I spent 25 years as an Infantry officer and 16 years as a courts administrator for a major city. With out doubt, commanding B Company in combat was the greatest job I have ever had.I will try to answer any questions you may have on this action.

From: [Steve Pipes](#)

To: '[CHARLES PORTER](#)'

Sent: Monday, June 04, 2012 11:18 AM

Subject: RE: 1st Cav, B- 2/5

Thanks, Wayne.

I don't have too many specific questions, yet. That December would have been a little shy of the middle of my uncle, Howard K Settles, tour with B 2/5, so am interested in learning all I can for our family history. Also, having located and interviewed 200-300 of the B-2/5 guy's over the last 10 years, I have a deep personal interest in understanding what happened that day.

To obtain info from the Archives, they need to know as much logistical info as possible. Date(s), location, operation nick-names, etc., all would all be useful.

In my brief dealings with military records I have heard of three types reports: "After Action Reports," "Morning After Reports" and "Daily Journals." Are these all the same thing, or were they issued from different levels of command? – Do you know of any other reports that might possibly recount what happed? – While I'm dealing with the archives, I don't want to leave any stone unturned.

I think I've asked before, but if not, do you remember "Howie" Settles? The best I can cipher is he transferred out of 3rd Pltn soon after Angel's Wing, to Trans, as Supply Sgt. Here are a couple of picts of my uncle, sent to me by a buddy of his: <http://www.penandsaber.com/1stCavB25/JerryCoreySlideshow/index.htm#2>

Thanks, again!

Steve
Nashville, TN
615-300-3262

From: CHARLES PORTER [<mailto:cporter@satx.rr.com>]

Sent: Tuesday, May 29, 2012 2:39 PM

To: Steve Pipes

Subject: Re: 1st Cav, B- 2/5

Steve:

Yep, we got in a major firefight on 3 Dec 68. I have refought that fight a million times. Doc Morgan was wounded there and will also have some insight.

I have to go out of town tomorrow through the weekend. When I get back I will write you a narrative of what happened. If there are any specific questions you have email them to me and I will try to answer them.

I was very sorry to miss the Santa Fe reunion. It is the first one I have missed. No major reasons just a whold bunch of little issues . Kinda like being nibbled to death by ducks.

Wayne

----- Original Message -----

From: [Steve Pipes](#)

To: [Wayne Porter](#)

Sent: Tuesday, May 29, 2012 11:53 AM

Subject: 1st Cav, B- 2/5

Hi Wayne,

Sorry you couldn't make it to Santa Fe for the reunion. The guy's all think a lot of you. Would have been a pleasure to meet you.

Several of the men have been looking for information on a battle that took place on, or around Dec 3, 1968. I believe my uncle, Howard Keith Settles (3rd Plt), may have also been in this battle, so I am going to dig around to see what I can find. Mike "Doc" Morgan, said you'd likely be the best source for the basic info on this engagement, so I am writing to see if you can recall any details. Information like date(s), location, other companies involved, etc., would all be useful.

I'd also like to see if you can shed light on what types of reports might have been used to chronicle the event. In my brief dealings with military records I have heard of three types reports: "After Action Reports," "Morning After Reports" and "Daily Journals." Are these all the same thing, or were they issued from different levels of command? – Do you know of any other reports that might possibly recount what happed?

Thanks for your time!

Steve Pipes
Nashville, TN

615-300-3262

<http://www.penandsaber.com/a.pdf> - (How I got involved w/ B-2-5)

<http://www.penandsaber.com/1stCavB25/>

PS: Reunion photo attached