

The Fight in Graveyard Center (The Hook)
Joe Tiscia, 2nd Bn 5th Marines

I was a little further to the south and west from Dace's Ontos, about seven vehicles down the road. It was the heart of the graveyard, right at the sharp ninety degree turn. I was fighting from Vietnamese grave (built like a concrete open top bunker) with a group of Marines, located a short distance from the road on the inside of the turn. I decided that I could be more effective and deliver more accurate fire if I worked my way toward the disabled vehicles jammed up on the road. We were receiving very heavy fire from the NVA infantry dug in across the road. Also there was an NVA machine gun position within about 20 to 30 meters across the road.



In among the trucks I had some cover and concealment and could deliver more effective grenade and rifle fire against the NVA positions, in some cases just on the other side of the trucks. I attacked the NVA machine gun position, then I saw our M-60 machine gun team go down (I actually saw a bullet hit the A gunner, the gunner, then exit and kick up the dirt). The gun team was located in a shallow ditch at the edge of the road beside a duce and half, a very exposed position. Wounded, they desperately needed help, I was able to get to them and assist them back to a more secure position in one of the bunker style Vietnamese Graves.

Moving back to the trucks, I took their place and started firing at the NVA automatic weapon team. I threw all the grenades that I had, shouted for more, Cpl Morgan from 2/5 threw me one and it rolled under the Duce and Half. That is when I saw the NVA sandals on the other side of the vehicle. Switching my M-16 to full auto, I prayed and took them under full automatic fire, killing or wounding all. I made a final grenade throw at the NVA Machine Gun team and got lucky. This time it landed perfectly, dispatching the team and silencing the gun. It was then that an NVA soldier (a survivor of my previous attack on the "sandals") tossed a grenade from the rear of the duce and half. I heard the fuse go off, but I barely had time to look and then I was airborne. Tossed over the truck and onto the road by the explosion, I was confronted with several enemy soldiers coming out of the woods across the road. My friend Morgan, back



Note: this photo taken about 3 weeks after ambush

in the graveyard delivered covering fire and yelled at me to get back to the cemetery. I crawled as fast as I could and with bullets whistling about me, terrified, I made it back to the cemetery. I dived into a grave where two marines were fighting. A marine from Texarkana AR, applied a tourniquet to help stop the bleeding from my leg wound. We were still taking enemy fire. Bullets and grenades were bouncing off the Burial Mound. A black Marine from Hotel Company 2/5 was out of ammo. I threw him a bandoleer, he raised up to reach for it and was shot in the head, instantly dropped.

Cpl Morgan was our NCOIC that day and our radio man was PFC Martinez. We did get artillery supporting fire from the Rock Crusher, but the NVA were much too close, PFC Martinez had to call in a check fire. A piston driven Skyraider with South Vietnamese markings made a pass at the NVA, with some effect. Also an Army Helicopter tried to help, but ground fire was so intense that it left smoking.

When the Reaction Force from Phu Bai came with the Army Quad Fifties they were shooting at everything that moved. My burial mound became a Target of one of the Quad Fifties. I looked over the mound, only to see 4 barrels turned directly to my position. That is when I got as low as I could, I was peppered with concrete and debris as the stone masonry pagoda was just turned into a mound of sand. From that prospective I gained a deep respect for that weapon. Under the intense pressure from the Quad Fiftys and the Reaction Force Marines, the NVA turned tail and ran, breaking contact.

Guess they learned something about the Quad Fifties also!

The Reaction Force Marines picked up all of the bodies, anything of value and placed them in two vehicles. Those of us that were wounded were placed on top of our dead Marine comrades. I can still feel the dry coolness of those dead warriors. The Reaction Force burned what was left of Capt Browns Radio Jeep to destroy the bolted on AN/PRC radio, they didn't want it to get into NVA hands.

Our convoy then headed to Phu Bai. Just before we got to QL 1, NVA snipers hit us once more. The vehicles stopped. I remember that I was so full of adrenalin, bleeding wounds and all, I jumped out of the Duce and Half, grabbed a loose M-16 and returned fire. I was a mess, my clothing was ragged and covered with dried and fresh blood. I remember someone in charge of the Reaction Force ordering a Marine to help me back in the truck. Again the convoy resumed it's slow trek back to Phu Bai, with the Reaction Force Marines walking along beside our vehicles. At one point the trucks carrying the dead and wounded were ordered to speed up and quickly get to "Charlie" Med at Phu Bai. The Reaction Force Marines would walk back with no further encounters with the enemy that night.

At Phu Bai our trucks were ordered to stop by the gate guards. We yelled “we have dead and wounded Marines on board”. They finally let us through. We made it to “Charlie” Med. A Catholic priest gave us all the last rites and absolved us of our sins. Since I looked salvageable I was lucky to make it into surgery. Alcohol was poured over my body. I was asked if I had any ammo or grenades still on me. I was X-Rayed and into surgery I went. There I was told that they were low on morphine and that I would just have to bear the pain. After surgery I was put into a holding area. Our Regimental Adjutant came in, saw me and was surprised to see me wounded. He wanted to know what I doing there? I told him my story and he left to inform my section leaders Capt. Ray Stoner and Sgt. John Hodges. The holding area was very noisy, young men crying in pain and asking for help. I had pulled the sheets over my head to block out the light and the awful sounds of moaning. When Capt Stoner saw me covered up, he naturally thought that I had passed on. He removed the sheets, to his surprise, only to find me still alive. He asked if I needed anything. I said yes “please let my wife know that I am OK. Also something to eat, I have not eaten in two days”. He found me a tough brisket sandwich and a carton of milk. That night the tough meat tasted like choice filet mignon. The next day to DaNang...Clark AFB.....Yokuska Naval Hospital and three months later to Millington Naval Hospital in TN. I was home, only 12 miles from my wife and family. Life is good. Some days are more vivid than others....today is a vivid day.

Semper Fi Joe Tiscia