

The following excerpt is from Ivan Katzenmeier's weblog AMBUSH AT AP NHI, and based on his experiences as Sr. Medic for company C. 3/22<sup>nd</sup>. The link to Ivan's weblog with the complete story and pictures is below.

## **Charlie Company Assaults the Enemy**

25 August 68

At 1:00 PM Company C 3/22<sup>nd</sup> is ordered to join other assault units engaged in the battle at Ap Nhi. Our unit is flown by helicopter to Tay Ninh, waits an hour and then flown to the sight of the ambushed convoy. We land on a road outside of the village. A mechanized armored unit leads our assault troops towards the village as we follow on foot.

There are many wounded. The medics are busy treating the casualties. Our Captain, James B. Hansard, walks in the center of the road with his RTO (radio telephone operator) at his side. A model of courage, he shows no sign of fear. He is intent on doing his job and taking care of the men in Charlie Company. I am walking with him, but near the ditch trying to keep a low profile.

Death and Destruction. Bodies of civilians are lying along the road. Parts of their bodies blown away. The ambushed convoy's trucks sit on the road, their drivers dead in the cabs. Bullet holes in the thick metal rims of the trucks, bear witness to the fact that my fragile body is no match for the penetrating power of a machine gun round. The reality of the situation slowly soaks into my mind. I am in a life and death situation. I might be the next dead medic!

The tragedy of the situation intensifies as I see terrified villagers, walking and running towards us, screaming and crying in anguish, with children in tow along with a few meager possessions in their hands. It is the most awful scene I have ever seen. I feel their terror, and know I can not help them.

A lieutenant and an infantryman come towards me and ask me to treat their head wounds. They have been hit with shrapnel in the face. I stopped their bleeding and continued on into the village. I see a man on a motorcycle race out of the Buddhist temple onto the street. Someone calls, 'Doc over here.' I am close to the village now, and a trooper leads me to his buddy, with a bullet wound in the neck. There is little I can do to save him from bleeding to death. 'Am I going to be O.K. Doc?' 'Yes,' I reply, but know deep in my heart, his chances of survival are not good without a surgeon. He is bleeding and spitting blood. I start an IV and hope he can be evacuated soon. Next a man is hit by a falling limb, shot off a tree by an enemy rocket propelled grenade (RPG). Four more wounded come to me for help, I treat them and send them on their way to be evacuated to a med-evac helicopter. An armored vehicle roars up next to me with another wounded soldier. He has bullet holes through his leg and hand. I climb aboard the vehicle, an armored personnel carrier, and start treating his wounds.

Dan Orozco, a new medic, is with me now. I ask the driver to head down the road toward the evacuation area where the wounded can be picked up by helicopter. We arrive at an ARVN (Army of the Republic of South Viet Nam) compound where I jump off the vehicle and begin treating wounded lying

in a ditch. My supplies of bandages are running out. A soldier runs to me and asks for help. A soldier is on the ground. It is obvious from his pale face and shallow breathing he is going into shock. I begin CPR.

The enemy begins firing mortars at us from the tree line. We move the man into a ditch to provide a little more protection and continue CPR. Our goal is to keep him alive until a helicopter can transport him to a hospital. Even though we thought he had died several times but we keep up the CPR.

Evacuating Wounded Under Fire. In an instant, I feel red hot metal shrapnel hit my back, head and elbow, and then several loud bangs. The shrapnel travels faster than the sound waves! Several enemy mortar rounds have found their targets - us! They are trying to kill us! I assess my wounds. Am I OK? Am I mortally wounded? My right elbow feels as if someone hit my 'funny bone' with a hammer. I have pain in my right forearm. I am not sure if I need to be bandaged, or how bad I am losing blood. The wounds seem to be not life threatening. The tissue around the shrapnel in my elbow is swollen, causing pressure on the ulnar nerve, and numbness and pain, making my right hand and arm difficult to use. I must move these wounded to safety. They are wounded, not able to fight. In a panic, I look around for help.

Parked near us is an Armored Personnel Carrier (APC). I yell at the wounded "get on the APC. No one can help you, you have to get off the ground and climb up to the top of the APC. We have to get out of here before more mortar rounds find us.' Regretfully, we leave the dying man in the ditch. We are unable to help him due to our wounds. I climb on the Armored Personnel Carrier with difficulty, as do the others. 'Take us to the med-evac,' I yell at the driver. My right arm is useless, but with my left arm, I am able fire repeated short bursts from my M-16 rifle at the tree line. The tree line is far enough away, it is impossible to see the enemy mortar crew. My rifle jams and the APC crew hands me another rifle from inside. The APC's 50 caliber machine gun mounted on top, is useless. All the wounded soldiers on top of the vehicle are blocking its use.

At the helicopter landing area, we wait for a helicopter to evacuate the wounded. Although I am wounded I am undecided whether I should evacuate myself or stay and assist the other medics. I am wounded, in pain and nearly out of supplies. I also have a new medic with me, and that makes the choice even more difficult. In a few hours it will be night, the clouds are heavy with rain. The battle is not over, it will go on through the night.

Do I stay and face the terror of battle, certain death for many, wounds for others, lack of supplies, and a cold lonely night in this hell of a battle, or do I leave for the safety of the hospital? Those not wounded, have no options but to stay and fight. I have an option, but with a price! I leave a new medic on his own, to face the terrors of battle I no longer want to face. I think of my family, and my wife. I recall being told by a seasoned warrior, 'it is better being a live coward than a dead hero. A hero's medal won't buy a cup of coffee in the States.' I rationalize, I am wounded, I need medical treatment, I should leave with the other wounded.

There is no one in authority to ask permission to leave, except myself. Sometimes we are harder on ourselves, than others are on us. I make my decision and climb aboard the helicopter, with intense mixed emotions of guilt, and relief.

Upon my return to Charlie Company, I am welcomed by several soldiers from my unit. 'We put you in for a Silver Star, Doc.' I am at a lost for words! My deepest fear is that they would label me a coward for leaving the battle. Instead, they tell me I am a hero! I was not awarded the Silver Star, but was awarded a Purple Heart for my wounds and a Bronze Star for heroism in the Battle of Ap Nhi. I don't consider my actions heroic. It meant a lot to me that day to have the respect of my combat unit. Their kind words were better than any bronze or silver medal! Long after my physical wounds have healed, I will be haunted by 'survivor's guilt,' that only another who has survived the trauma of intense combat can understand.

25 August 1968 has been the worst day of my life!

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For the complete story, use the link below for Ivan Katzenmeier's weblog.

<http://katzenmeier.wordpress.com/2008/11/02/ambush-at-ap-nhi-stories-of-valor-and-heroism/>