



CAP

3-3-3

A Change In Plans

Submitted by: GySgt. Ritch Ray

A tour with the Combined Action Group was undoubtedly the highlight of a 20 year Marine Corps career. I'd had a previous tour in Nam, but it didn't compare with the enjoyment and fulfillment of a CAG tour.

Combined Action Company 3-3 headquarters was situated in a perfect location. At our backs was a non-descript river. On our left flank a Popular Forces platoon, and on our right flank, some ARVNs. To our immediate front approximately 150 yards of flat, open terrain, divided by a two lane dirt road and surrounded by a tree line.

The evening had started like so many others before it, quiet and serene. Corporal William "Budda" Biller planned the night act and submitted his op plan to the ARVNs as required. Budda would take the squad out a couple of clicks, set in for the night hoping to catch Charlie out on the prowl, and then come on in well before light. This was the routine we followed night after night, sometimes successfully, and other times, well.....

Ever since we'd moved into the A.O., some two months before, a curious pattern had developed. It seemed that no matter how we varied our night patrols, Charlie always seemed to hit at the opposite end of the A.O. It was becoming a frustrating experience for the men. It was then that Budda took matters into his own hands in a rather unorthodox way.

That evening, Budda decided to exit the compound heading south to his objective, and indicated that he would sweep to the east and return about 3:00 A.M. However, he decided to come back a different route, making a 180 and coming in the back door and down the dirt road. This would bring him across the front of all three compounds.

It was about 2:30 A.M. on a cloud covered night when Budda and the rest of the squad ambled down the long, dusty, and somewhat elevated road. They were dead tired and ready to hit the rack. For some reason Budda had taken the point. About half way down the road he noticed movement in a culvert that ran across and under the road. Two VC were in the process of loading a B-40 rocket launcher, aiming directly at the tent we all shared. Not missing a step, Budda immediately opened fire, cutting the two down....and then all hell broke loose.

There was a company of VC operating in the A.O., and they'd decided that this night would be the one they'd eliminate a thorn in their side, the CAP Marines. Starting an hour after dark, sappers had begun working their way up to and into the wire of the ARVN compound. Their assault was to begin with the B-40 attack. Budda had started things for them.

As soon as the small arms fire began, the sappers were up and rushing the compound, supported by automatic weapons from the tree line. Budda deployed his men on our side of the road to stem the onrushing tide that crept forward from the tree line. In all three compounds, everyone was up and in their fighting positions, manning the perimeter. Arty was called in, and in about 20 minutes two Cobras were on station straffing the tree line.

The fire fight lasted until just before dawn when the enemy withdrew, leaving their dead strewn about the battlefield. There were thirteen nephews of Uncle Ho who would never see his smiling face again. We had sustained two wounded ARVNs.

Budda's quick response had undoubtedly saved numerous lives, including mine as I, along with several other Marines, were sleeping in the original target. This one attack was the enemy's undoing in our A.O. Never again would they be able to mount any sustained opposition, their effectiveness had been terminated.

For his actions, Cpl. William "Budda" Biller was awarded the Bronze Star for heroism. Shortly thereafter, R-374 was transmitted over the air waves and I rotated, never to see Budda or Nam again. That was December, 1969.

Post Script:

In 1981 I was stationed at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina. I had since left my old MOS, a field radio operator, for a career in journalism and broadcasting for the Corps. I was in the process of writing an article on heroism, more specifically, what it is. In talking to LtCol. Wesley Fox, Medal Of Honor recipient of Ashau Valley fame, I was directed to talk to a buck sergeant that was serving as an instructor over at 2nd. Marine Division Schools. I was told that the sergeant would be a good subject for my article. So I called the guy.

As he walked into the office, I knew that I'd seen him before, but couldn't recall where. It turned out that my subject that day was none other than Sergeant John Johnson, a member of CAP 3-3-3, Budda's squad leader. I hadn't seen him for 12 years, but it was like old home week. Did we reminisce or what?

You had to be a special breed to be a CAP Marine...we were, and we still are.

NOTE: Since publishing this article on the CAP Web Site, I have had the opportunity to speak with both "Gunny" Ray and Bill "Budda" Biller. For action mentioned above, "Cpl" Bill Billers was awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star. The Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, I have been told, is their equivalent to our Medal of Honor.

Bill mentioned to me that something like only 50 such medals were awarded with the Silver Star.