



## **Marines and Vietnamese Popular Force Soldiers Fighting Side-By-Side As A Combined Action Company Are Tough To Beat.**

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It was no spectacular occasion. In fact, similar happenings take place twice daily all over the world. But this particular event was something special because of what it represented. It would take only seconds, and to the casual observer, it would mean little. To appreciate what was taking place you need a full understanding of the events leading up to these few seconds. The event actually represented a big step toward the beginning of the end for the Viet Cong, at least in the immediate locale.

The squad of Marines, sitting on the porch of the quarters and watching, understood because they were responsible for what was about to happen.

In the beginning--but not now--it was important for them to be on the porch at the right moment, casually writing letters, reading or cleaning their weapons. They had taken pains to make their presence appear unplanned and unrehearsed. They weren't trying to deceive anyone. They just thought this was the best approach. In reality their being there was a shrewdly calculated maneuver that eventually paid great dividends.

The squad leader, Sgt. Ole Jenssen-Klixbull, watched as four Vietnamese Popular Force soldiers approached. Only a few feet from the porch where he was sitting stood a wooden flagpole that had obviously been a tree in the not-too-distant past. The approaching soldiers proudly carried a Vietnamese flag and were undoubtedly a color guard.

"That's the way it began," explained Sgt. Klixbull as he nodded toward the color guard. "When we moved in here to form a Combined Action Company they didn't even have a flagpole."

Sgt. Bull, as he is known to the rest of the squad, was interrupted as the PFs attached the flag to the lanyard. All the Marines were on their feet now, and as the command "present arms" was given in Vietnamese they rendered a snappy salute.

"As it turned out," he continued, "getting that flagpole, and getting the Vietnamese to have a color guard, played a very significant part in getting us started off on the right foot here."

The Marines knew that when they moved into the compound, where they were now living, that they must first gain the respect of the PF soldiers. The PFs respected Marines, but the squad knew that they would have to make it a personal thing before an effective integration of their forces could take place. They wanted, and felt they needed, the Vietnamese respect, not only as Marines, but also as individuals. In turn, the Klixbull squad, working to gain the respect of the PFs and local citizens, developed their own genuine respect for the Vietnamese.

Sgt. Bull considers the Vietnamese regular army first sergeant in charge of the PFs as one of his closest friends. He makes this claim without reservation. He thinks 1stSgt Thanh is one of the finest men he has ever known. This takes on a special meaning when you consider that Sgt. Klixbull is a Danish citizen who has traveled throughout Europe and has friends of many nationalities all over the free world.

From the start the squad began trying to learn the language and local customs, and to become as much a part of the community as possible. They did admirably, and were soon well known and liked, but the flag was the beginning.

"It began," explained Sgt. Bull, "by my offering to try to get the PFs a flagpole. The offer was genuine and sincere, even if I didn't have any idea at the time how we (the squad) might accomplish this...but I was going to try. I also suggested that we cut a tree to serve as a temporary pole, and they went for the idea."

"That was several months ago and the subject of a new pole hasn't been mentioned since. I don't think they want one now. They prefer that ol' tree they're using. It's not much as far as flagpoles go, but they're proud of it because they made it themselves. They're a proud people and aren't looking for handouts."

It became apparent as the sergeant spoke that his perceptiveness and insight to the Vietnamese way of thinking and living was the key to the squad's success.

The Marines had adapted to the Vietnamese way in many respects, but through tact and diplomacy the squad had increased the unit's military scope of operations tenfold.

When they joined forces only 35 local villagers were on the Popular Force unit's roster. (The PFs are similar to our Reserve Units in some respect, but their primary mission is to serve as a home guard. For serving in the PFs the men are furnished a rifle for the protection of their own home and the village. In addition, they are paid \$18 a month and are given 20 pounds of rice.) Before the Marines arrived the PFs' duties were limited to gathering at the local grade school and were on call, should the VC attack the village.

As long as they stayed clear of the village, the VC were pretty much free to roam the surrounding countryside. The PFS made no patrols nor did they set up night ambushes. To send out patrols would have been spreading their forces too thin.

That has changed. Since they joined forces with the Marines the PF unit's strength has increased to more than 100. Now a patrol takes to the field every day to hunt for VC, and night ambushes have greatly curtailed VC activity in their CAC's Theater of Responsibility.

This didn't happen overnight. Sgt. Bull and his squad, though reluctant to claim their fair share of the credit, are considered by many to have one of the best CAC units in the area. The former Danish soldier is quick to give credit to every man in the squad for anything they may have accomplished.

Every man in the Klixbull squad speaks the language fairly well. To increase their proficiency they chip in to pay a local school teacher for Vietnamese language lessons one hour a day, six days a week. Sgt. Bull is the most proficient at speaking Vietnamese, although he admits that the squad's corpsman speaks it almost as fluently. This is quite a compliment to "Doc" Fisher because languages come easily to Klixbull. He is a linguist who speaks seven languages: Danish, English, German, French, Vietnamese, Swedish and Norwegian.

Sgt. Klixbull had (illegible.....) Heidelberg University when an Air Force National Guard unit training there offered to pay his way to the U.S. And Sgt. Bull feels his association with the people of so many different countries has been a big help in his present assignment.

"It's funny how the color guard played such an important part in our getting off on the right foot," he says. "After the flagpole was up the PFs seemed anxious to put it to use. You have to realize that this was something new to them because their small unit had never posted colors here.

(Illegible.....) wore off and they stopped having a color guard to raise the flag. One man would saunter out to put the flag up, and it wasn't done in a very military manner. They just didn't attach the importance to raising the flag that we do. It was easy to see the whole project wasn't going to be much of a success and we felt we had to do something.

"This is when we started the porch detail. We made certain that we were near at hand when the PF came out to raise the flag. As he approached, there was a mad scramble to drop whatever we were doing and to fall in. When he started raising the flag we were in ranks and at present arms.

"This was just a little more than their pride could take. They realized it wasn't our place to have a color guard for their flag. This was their job, and in a few days their color guard was back on duty. We don't fall out any more but we always snap to if we are in the compound.

"In the beginning I think this flag bit did more to gain their respect than anything else we did. They seemed to appreciate the extra effort we made to pay respect to their flag, and this turned out to be just the thing we needed to get off to a good start. Raising a flag is something pretty common, especially in the military, but you can see why it is something special around here."

As with the color guard, the squad expanded their efforts by making suggestions and setting an example. At first the Marines went on patrols alone. Then they asked if any of the PFs would like to go. The PFs didn't normally come to the compound during the day but soon more and more of the PFs began to accompany them on patrol.

As their military operations expanded, so did the rate of PF enlistments. Soon there were enough PFs who were making the patrols that it was necessary for only one Marine to go along. They also began putting ambushes in the field at night.

Most of the PFs had served in a branch of the Vietnamese regular armed forces, and the Marines soon learned they were good soldiers. At first the Marines thought the PFs were lacking in confidence, but this changed almost overnight. "We did pretty well in our first engagement with a band of VC, and that was all it took to give the PFs the confidence we thought they were lacking. They're an eager bunch now," said Klixbull. The company takes pride in the fact that they have 11 VC kills to their credit and have captured 40, especially since they haven't had a man receive so much as a scratch.

They have a good outfit and they know it. They have no problem in getting men for their daylight patrols, and three rapid shots will bring 20 to 30 more men on the run.

"If a patrol radios that they have run into something, all I have to do is fire three rounds and there'll be a platoon of PFs here within ten minutes. That's pretty damn good in any man's army," proclaimed Sgt. Bull. He couldn't help saying it with obvious pride.

He isn't the only one who is proud of the company. The entire village is proud of their home guard. The company's reputation for being one of the best has spread throughout the province, and they now furnish a 20 man security detail for the district and province chiefs. This is considered to be an honor.

A lot of changes and improvements have taken place since Sgt. Bull and his squad moved to Ky Khuong, and one of the most notable is Chief Hospitalman Melvin S. Fisher's hospital.

Fisher began by giving what medical aid he could to the local citizens. He held sick call daily in a small room of the building where the Marines are quartered and soon had more patients than he could handle.

"I had to draw the line somewhere until my facilities could be expanded," said Fisher. "At that time the hospital was only a dream. I had to do something to limit the number of patients who were showing up, so I began treating only dependents of the PF soldiers. This was the only logical solution I had to the problem at the time.

"It wasn't meant to be, but as it turned out, this proved to be a big recruiting incentive. When I started treating only PF dependents, enlistments seemed to increase. I like to think I was partly responsible for the increase in enlistments anyhow," Fisher confessed.

Chief Fisher is as good with words as he is with bandages, and this asset served him well in obtaining material to build the hospital. It took a lot of talking to scrounge the material he needed. He was determined, and piece-by-piece, he acquired what he needed.

"I turned the lumber over to the district chief and he, in turn, presented it to the village and explained what it was for. They welcomed the opportunity to build their own hospital and took a lot of pride in its construction. You can tell that by just looking at it."

The chief was right. You could tell. The building, which is within the confines of the CAC compound, is complete with waiting room, treatment room, and a 20-cot ward.

In explaining his services, the chief made it clear that he makes no diagnoses. He leaves that for the military doctors and dentists who volunteer their services and come to the hospital daily.

"I examine patients, and if they require a doctor's care, I have them wait in the ward until a doctor gets here. I treat mostly cuts and sores to combat infection."

Cleanliness is a byword with the chief, and none of his patients will bring a child in for treatment with dirty hand or a dirty face but once, since the chief refuses to see patients until they have cleaned up. "Doc" Fisher keeps a big box of soap handy and readily gives a bar to those who need it. Along with the soap goes a lecture on cleanliness.

"You know, I've never had a patient fail to return because of my policy of lecture," smiled Fisher. "They'll go out, wash up, and come right back."

Helping the chief with the hospital's operation, in addition to the American doctors and dentists, are three Vietnamese corpsmen and an interpreter. Two of the Vietnamese corpsmen were selected from the PFs ranks and have been trained by Chief Fisher.

American doctors who have given the Fisher-trained corpsmen written and tactical examinations consider them extremely competent. The other corpsman has greatly increased his proficiency under "Doc" Fisher's tutelage. All three are qualified to accompany a combat patrol, and do.

The fourth member of "Doc's" staff, the interpreter, is "Charlie," a 12 year old boy who speaks surprisingly good English. Because his duties in the hospital prevent him attending regular school classes, Fisher has arranged for the lad to receive an hour or two of private instruction daily. Charlie's grades are on a par with the upper half of the regular class. "The youngster is real sharp," proclaimed Chief Fisher.

It takes no great imagination to see that Chief Fisher and the Klixbull squad are performing a valuable service to the people of Vietnam, and their unit is but one of more than 60 now in operation. And more CAC units are being formed.

The Combined Action Company has proved to be a potent weapon in fighting the Viet Cong.