



The Battle for Hill 64

*Khe Sanh- Battle for Hill 64
1st Plt. Alpha Co. 1st Bn 9th Marines
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"The Walking Dead"*

*There is a price for freedom, it is called obedience.
Obedience to country,
to the call it places upon its young men in war, and an
obedience to oneself.
The men in this story paid that price, some with their very
lives.
We honor them with the memory of their sacrifice.
May it never be forgotten.*

Marines, this is the The Battle for Hill 64, as described by **Col. Radcliffe, C.O. Alpha Co., 8 Feb. 1968**. Please read this and you'll gain a greater understanding of the valor of these men.

*Radcliffe/Widner
A/1/9*

At 0420, 8 Feb, 1968 a reinforced battalion from the 101D Regiment, 325C NVA Division launched an attack against the 1st Plt A/1/9, which occupied Hill 64 some 500 meters west of the 1/9 perimeter at Khe Sanh. Following their usual pattern, the North Vietnamese tried to disrupt the Marines artillery support with simultaneous bombardment of the Khe Sanh combat base. To prevent friendly reinforcements from reaching the small hill, the enemy also shelled the platoon's parent unit and, during the fight some 350 mortar and artillery shells fell on 1/9 positions.

The NVA assault troops launched a two pronged attack against the northwestern and southwestern comers of the A/1/9 outpost. They either blew the barbed wire with bangalore torpedoes and satchel charges or threw canvas on top of the obstacles and rolled over them.

The enemy soldiers poured into the trenchline and attacked the bunkers with RPGs and satchel charges. They also emplaced machine guns at the edge of the penetrations and pinned down those Marines in the Eastern half of the perimeter who were trying to cross over the hill to reinforce their comrades.

The men in the northeastern sector, led by platoon commander, Second Lieutenant Terence R. Roach, Jr. counterattacked down the trench line and became engaged in savage hand-to-hand fighting. While rallying his troops and directing fire from atop an exposed bunker, Lieutenant Roach was mortally wounded.

From the sheer weight of numbers, the North Vietnamese gradually pushed the Marines back until the enemy owned two thirds of the outpost. At that point, neither side was able to press the advantage. Pre-registered mortar barrages from 1/9 and artillery fire from Khe Sanh Combat Base had isolated the NVA assault units from any reinforcements but at the same time the depleted 1st Plt was not strong enough to dislodge the enemy.

One Marine had an extremely close call during the fight but live to tell about it. On the northern side of the perimeter, PFC Michael A. Berry of the 1st squad was engaged in a furious hand grenade duel with the NVA soldiers, when a ChiCom grenade hit him on top of his helmet and landed at his feet. PFC Barry quickly picked it up and drew back to throw but the grenade went off in his hand. Had it been an American M-26 grenade, the Private would undoubtedly have been blown to bits, but the ChiCom grenades frequently produce an uneven frag pattern. In this case, the bulk of the blast went down and away from the Marine's body: Berry had the back of his right arm, his back, and right leg peppered with metal fragments but he did not lose any fingers and continued to function for the rest of the Battle.

In another section of the trench line Lance Corporal Robert L. Wiley had an equally hair raising experience. Wiley, a shell-shocked victim, lay flat on his back in one of the bunkers, which had been overrun by the enemy. His eardrums had burst and he was temporarily paralyzed and his glazed eyes were fixed in a corpse-like stare but the Marine was alive and fully aware of what was going on around him. Thinking that Wiley was dead, the North Vietnamese were only interested in rummaging through his personal effects for souvenirs. One NVA Soldier found the Marine's wallet and took out several pictures including a snapshot of his family gathered around a Christmas tree. After pocketing their booty, the NVA moved on. The relief column rescued Lance Corporal Wiley.

A relief force of approximately two squads of volunteers, led by Captain J.J.M. Radcliffe, Alpha Company Commander, Shortly after daylight, made its way to the eastern slope of the hill. With a squad-size force along the south-eastern side to block any enemy reinforcements along the trail, the remainder of the small force made contact with the shattered fragments of the 1st platoon. In addition to Lt. Roach, the platoon sergeant, S/Sgt. McKinney and the platoon radio operator, PFC Rizzo were KIA and two of the three squad leaders were out of action. Capt. Radcliffe consolidated the remaining members of the platoon, placing a small squad size force on the north, a squad of the relief force under Cpl. Jay Enzinna on the south, and took a small force of approximately nine Marines to include the company gunnery sergeant, Camile D.Hont, two radio operators, and Cpl. Clopton to move down the center of the position. The north and south squads were to coordinate their counter-attack to retake the position with the force in the center, thus preventing any NVA attempts to breach 'Alpha' company's efforts to re-gain the outpost. In close hand to hand combat including a continuing exchange of grenades (ours were far superior), the marines moved forward slowly, their efforts hampered by the NVA who had over-run and occupied many of the bunkers. Realizing that some of the bunkers under NVA control

and the trench lines contained wounded Marines, the relief force did not use LAAWs to blow the bunkers for fear of inflicting further Marine casualties.

The NVA attempted at least twice to stop the Marine force but were re-buffed. As quickly as tactically sound, but slowly, the Marines regained the hill. NVA bodies blocked the trench lines, clogged the bunkers, and were strewn over the western approaches to the hill. Attempts by the NVA to come up the western slope of the position were stopped by the supporting fires from Bravo and Delta companies, fires from 1/9's and 81's and from a tank within 1/9's lines. Capt. Radcliffe and Cpl. Genty, the former radio operator who was over-due to rotate home, stopped one NVA element attempting to come up the slope, and stymied either a counter-attack or an effort to retrieve NVA casualties by firing into a platoon size force coming out of the treeline and elephant grass at the bottom of the hill.

The rain, fog and winds reduced the effect of supporting arms. Fixed wing close air support was minimal until long after daylight. The first air on station was RVN sky-raiders, propeller driven, slow moving and bomb-loaded. They were dropping in the suspected enemy staging areas and within 50 yards of the base of the western approaches.

Upon securing the position, the priorities were: casualty treatment and evacuation, accounting for personnel, equipment, and ammunition, evacuation of POWs (at least four were alive among the 150 plus NVA bodies on the position and the western slope), and removing our KIAs. These efforts were slowed by a lack of personnel, the battle fatigue of those still able to function, and the losses of the leaders - Platoon Commander, Platoon Sergeant, & Squad Leaders.

The order to evacuate the position, despite having re-taken it and having complete control of it, was slowly carried out. Wounded and dead were carried down the eastern slope and loaded onto otters. Once this was accomplished, two otters were loaded with weapons, both US and NVA, and taken to the battalion position. Weapons, equipment, and personal gear that couldn't be removed because of the lack of personnel and the time restraint to clear the position, were blown in place.

Later in the day after the 1st platoon's area had been cleared, an air strike was called on it; bombs and napalm shook the hill and created an eerie look which now that the fog and rain had vanished could be seen from Khe Sanh Combat Base as well as the positions on 381, 861, and 915 (1050).

Marine casualties were 23 KIA and 29 WIA. NVA losses were 152 KIA and over 60 weapons captured.

Semper Fi, Randell Widner