

'Hueys Charlies' Are Familiar Vietnam Symbols

Film Critic Will Speak At Sheldon

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is the fifth installment of a series on the war in Vietnam written by Howard Moffett, Collegiate Press Service correspondent in Saigon. The Daily Nebraskan last semester ran another series by Moffett, who was former editor of the Yale Daily News.)

It was grey — typical weather for the northern border of II Corps. Thick green jungle covered the foothills of the Crow's Foot. In the valley, algae-brown rice paddies surrounded a deserted village.

Assault Formations
Flying in tight assault formation, the first wave of six Huey choppers topped a ridge at about a hundred miles an hour and slid toward the valley floor, 600 yards below. Two gunship escorts were flying in front and beneath. Others, including the battalion commander's which hovered above.

Suddenly the river turned a bend and the landing zone — a sand bar on its left bank — was rushing up at us. The air erupted with red flashes and the staccato burst of aerial rockets. Our machine guns were softening up in the tree line and brush thickets on the right bank of the river: that would be where Charlies were hiding, if by chance he was there at all.

Captain Benson was halfway out the side door, his feet resting on the chopper's skis. He looked very intent, almost grim, as if his features had been chiselled beneath his helmet.

"Stick with me," he said. I was only too glad.

Choppers Landing
Then we were down, the skis settling briefly in the soft sand. Benson was gone; I stumbled after him. His men were already jumping from the other choppers, fanning out across the sand bar in a running crouch, pouring rifle fire into the right bank 40 yards away.

I was not at my level-headed best in this situation. For a few seconds there seemed to be nothing but the whoosh of helicopter blades and the orange spiff and sharp report of rifles. I couldn't tell if we were also under fire.

Many of Benson's men were down on one knee, continuing to fire at the thickets on the opposite bank. Others were running in the opposite direction, emptying their rifles into a jungle-covered slope that came down on our position about fifty yards to the left.

Second Platoon
The six whirly-birds were off and circling back toward Pony to pick up the second platoon. I felt a little forsaken until I noticed Benson and his radio man. They were standing up, apparently confident that there were no Viet Cong in the area.

The captain got out his map to check his position. He tried to verify it by radio to Pony, saw his first estimate did not check with terrain features on the map, and called to reclarify. Satisfied, he sent one squad across the river to reconnoiter upstream, and

watched his other men deploying in a widening circle.

Within minutes the second platoon came in, each Huey touching down for just about seven seconds, one for each man that came out the side doors. I was to go back in the lead chopper when the third platoon came in.

Few Orders
Benson was giving a few orders, studying the terrain. Bravo Company would be here until after dark, when it would move out upstream, travel most of the night and set up three ambushes along a cluster of trails at the western end of the valley.

Benson's two best platoon leaders would have separate positions. The captain himself would take two platoons and cover the most likely exfiltration route. All three groups would be within supporting distance of each other.

The men were quiet, except for some sporadic reconnaissance by fire. An M-60 (.762 millimeter) machine gun had been set up on the sand bar, and now it began to chatter in the direction of a village just over the brow of the river bank.

Deserted Village
It seemed deserted, but I asked Benson how he knew there weren't any women or children in there. Then I remembered the leaflets declaring the Crow's Foot a war zone. He nodded: "Anybody who's still in there has been warned that we'll shoot at them, sir." He kept calling me sir, even after I told him he was

probably ten years my senior.

The third assault group was coming in. I said a hurried good luck, looked once around the circle of men, and started toward the lead chopper as it came in across a paddy.

I didn't make it. The Huey dropped its seven men and was off again before I had better luck with the last chopper, which landed just a few yards away.

We were up and off, circling the men on the sand bar below. As we headed back toward Pony, Benson looked up and waved. I realized then that I had never gotten his first name.

★ ★ ★
I returned to Saigon Saturday morning. Sunday's headline said units of the 1st Air Cav. had been hit by Viet Cong forces 38 miles north-northwest of Quinhon — the Crow's Foot.

First reports said the skytroopers took "moderate" casualties in a series of contacts with an estimated battalion-size enemy force. Some 80 Viet Cong were reported killed.

UPI Reports
United Press International, however, reported that the multi-company 1st Brigade force "suffered heavy casualties when they leaped into positions surrounding the communist force . . ."

If casualties were moderate, it means a good many men lost their lives. If they were heavy, it means several units were virtually wiped out.

What seems to have happened is this:

One platoon from either Alfa or Charlie Company, sweeping the eastern slopes of the Crow's Foot, very quickly ran into a Viet Cong force in the vicinity of a dirt road called Central Highway 506. From the number of American casualties, it looks as though Victor Charlie knew they were coming.

U.S. military spokesmen later said the fighting began about 10:20 a.m., when an American platoon opened fire on a Viet Cong squad, which fled over a ridge line. Another 1st Cav platoon was heli-lifted in seven minutes later and immediately came under automatic weapons fire, from enemy positions about 1,000 yards to the south. The battle took shape in the valley around Highway 506. The Viet Cong force was estimated to be a full battalion, dug in in trenches and tunnels.

NEWSWEEK's John Berthelsen later reconstructed this story from participants in Saturday's fighting.

"Valley 506"
About Dec. 8 the shattered 7th and 8th Battalions of the 18th VC Regiment began moving into "Valley 506" to harvest rice. Viet Cong defectors said they moved into the valley en masse because morale was so low that their political cadres feared small groups might desert.

The valley floor is checkerboarded with rice paddies about 30 yards square. Hedgerows and lines of palm trees border each square. The Viet Cong dug complete systems under each hedgerow, and under the roots of the palms they

hollowed out "spider holes" with firing apertures looking out across the surface of the paddies.

The 1st Cav reaction platoon, heli-lifted into the battle area Saturday morning seven minutes after contact was made, landed in the middle of these paddies. It was caught immediately in withering fire.

Hedgerow Fighting
The fighting went on for eight hours, hedgerow by hedgerow. As the 1st Cav cleaned one out, the VC used their tunnels to vacate it and move back to the next. Air strikes and artillery were called in every few minutes by the Americans.

By mid-afternoon, six companies (two battalions) of the 1st Cav were fighting in those paddies. Delta Company, down from its mountaintop radio station, was one of the hardest hit.

The Viet Cong, or NVA as the 1st Cav preferred to call them, kept incredible fire discipline, waiting until the American troops were just a few feet from the hedgerows. Many of the bodies brought into the battalion hospital after the fight had bullet holes running diagonally up from the chest through the top of the shoulders, indicating the men had been shot from under foot.

Close Fire
1st Lieutenant Timothy Feener, commanding Delta's Third Platoon, said later: "I was within three to five meters of a hedgerow. We were that close and suddenly we were taken under fire. Three to five meters and we couldn't see

where it was coming from. I never saw a North Vietnamese all day."

About 6 p.m., the Viet Cong broke contact. The 1st Cav units pulled into defensive perimeters for the night, while flares were dropped from circling helicopters and artillery and air strikes continued to pound the surrounding slopes.

About 7:30 Sunday morning the battle began again, as the Americans ran up against an unknown-size Viet Cong force in heavy bunkers.

The fighting lasted only about 20 minutes. Seven Viet Cong were reported killed and there were no American casualties. Victor Charlie simply withdrew slipping out of the area along the winding streams and small game trails.

Bravo Company never saw this fight, and might have been oblivious to it except for radio communication with Pony. While its sister companies were doing some of the bitterest fighting in recent weeks, Bravo had its own mission to perform at the other end of the Crow's Foot, 15 miles away.

Bravo should be coming back in as I am writing— it is Monday afternoon, the time they were due to leave the ambush zone if Charlie didn't show.

These men command respect: they do a thankless job that is hard to understand — not cheerfully, but without complaint.

A noted film critic and columnist for The New Republic, Pauline Kael, will speak Thursday evening to the Nebraska Union Film Society at Sheldon Art Gallery.

Miss Kael is the first of three lecturers to address the Nebraska Regional Film Screening.

The screening, sponsored by the Nebraska Art Galleries and the Nebraska Union Film Committee, consists of 11 films shown Thursday through Saturday for representatives from film societies throughout the Midwest.

However, film society members and Sheldon film subscription ticket holders will be admitted to the three evening showings and lectures, according to Norman Geske, director of Sheldon Gallery.

Miss Kael will lecture following the 7:30 p.m. showing of "Before the Revolution", an Italian movie.

Miss Kael's opinions appear in a variety of magazines, including Life, Vogue and Atlantic Monthly. She also contributes a monthly column to McCall's and has written a book, "Lost It at the Movies".

On Saturday at 7:30 p.m. John Kuiper, chairman of the motion picture division of the Library of Congress, will lecture and show slides from the Library. He formerly taught a film history course at Iowa State University.



DEE DEE DOLAN

"I've ironed my hair...tried lots of torchery things to get rid of natural curl."

(This is how Dee Dee Dolan looked before using CURL FREE. And these are her own words.) "It's obnoxious...not so much the ringlets...as the frizzy ends. I've tried all kinds of things to get the curl out but nothing does it. I have to set it in great big rollers...and just keep my fingers crossed. Whenever it's even a little damp outside...the set comes right out. My hair just hangs sort of bushy.

"I've always envied kids who've had straight hair. I'd really love to wear those straight, collegiate styles. Do you really think CURL FREE can do that for me?"



DEE DEE DOLAN, CHICAGO

"My bangs! The sides! Curl Free really took the curl out."

"The bangs—that's the part I'm crazy about. And it's springy. You know...not limp or anything. I love it! It was simple, too. Mainly, I just applied CURL FREE and combed it through. Now I won't have to set it as much. It won't frizz up—fantastic!"—DEE DEE DOLAN.

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