

# Vietnam Story

*The word was the Ia Drang would be a walk. The word was wrong*

BY JOSEPH L. GALLOWAY

support of Moore. As all that blessed relief rained down, an accident came perilously close to wiping out Moore and his command post. An Air Force F-100 Super Sabre jet mistakenly dropped two canisters of napalm into the area. Moore was shouting at Hastings, the air controller, to call off the F-100 pilot's wingman, who was about to release his napalm, too.

Sgt. George Nye of the 8th Engineer Battalion had come in with a small demolition team to help Moore's battalion. "Two of my people, Pfc. Jimmy D. Nakayama and Specialist 5 James Clark, were a few yards away, and Colonel Moore was hollering something about a wing man and I looked up," Nye recalls. "There were two planes, and one had already dropped his napalm. Then everything was on fire. Nakayama was all black and Clark was all burned and bleeding." Nakayama died. Three days later, Nye learned that Nakayama's wife had given birth to a baby girl on the day her husband was killed. Soon afterward, orders came through approving Nakayama's reserve commission as a second lieutenant.



Moore called for all his units to mark their locations for the pilots overhead and the artillery observers by throwing colored smoke grenades. Air Force Lt. Charlie Hastings, the forward air controller, says, "On the second morning, I used the code word for an American unit in trouble and received all available aircraft in South Vietnam for close air support. We had aircraft stacked at 1,000-foot intervals from 7,000 feet to 35,000 feet, each waiting to receive a target." Two more batteries of 105-mm howitzers were deposited in Landing Zone Columbus, 2.5 miles from X-Ray, putting a total of 24 artillery pieces in support of Moore. As all that blessed relief rained down, an accident came perilously close to wiping out Moore and his command post. An Air Force F-100 Super Sabre jet mistakenly dropped two canisters of napalm into the area. Moore was shouting at Hastings, the air controller, to call off the F-100 pilot's wingman, who was about to release his napalm, too.

Sgt. George Nye of the 8th Engineer Battalion had come in with a small demolition team to help Moore's battalion. "Two of my people, Pfc. Jimmy D. Nakayama and Specialist 5 James Clark, were a few yards away, and Colonel Moore was hollering something about a wing man and I looked up," Nye recalls. "There were two planes, and one had already dropped his napalm. Then everything was on fire. Nakayama was all black and Clark was all burned and bleeding." Nakayama died. Three days later, Nye learned that Nakayama's wife had given birth to a baby girl on the day her husband was killed. Soon afterward, orders came through approving Nakayama's reserve commission as a second lieutenant.

Just after 9 a.m., with the Alpha Company reinforcements arriving, Moore shifted Diduryk's men into the battered line held by what was left of Edwards's Charlie Company. Sergeant Setelin remembers crawling along that line finding foxhole after foxhole filled with dead Americans. By 10, the enemy attack had been beaten off. Edwards and his men had held.

**Afternoon.** Three hours later, Moore ordered all four companies on the line to move out 300 yards to the front and police the battleground. Dead North Vietnamese and their weapons littered the area. Some enemy dead were neatly stacked behind the termite hills; thick trails of blood marked where others had been dragged away. More than 40 dead Americans were recovered and evacuated. What was left of Charlie Company was pulled out of the line.

Earlier in the day, the brigade commander, Colonel Brown, had moved the 2nd Battalion of the 5th Cavalry, led by Lt. Col. Robert Tully, to Landing Zone Victor, 2 miles from X-Ray, and told them to reinforce Moore. By noon, they were closing in on Moore's position, and what they saw stunned them. Sergeant Adams was on the line when the first of Tully's men marched in. "My God, there's enemy bodies all over this valley," the newcomer shouted. "For the last 30 minutes, we've been walking around and over and through bodies."

Moore now ordered a two-pronged attack — by two companies of Tully's men across the slope of Chu Pong and by Herren's Bravo Company to rescue the Lost Platoon. Herren's men reached the knoll at 3:10. "When I got there I walked over

to where Henry Herrick was lying dead," Lieutenant Deal recalls. "It seemed so unnatural for my friend to be lying stomach down with his face in the red dust. I looked away; I did not want to remember him that way. But I have." Sergeant Savage had not lost a single man after taking command, despite a long night and day of attacks. When Herren's men told them that it was safe to get up, not one of them moved for 5 minutes. "They just stared at us in disbelief," Deal says.

**Nightfall.** With his reinforcements, Moore beefed up the lines. His tally showed that on Day Two his battalion had lost two officers and 44 men killed, three officers and 22 men wounded; the four line companies were down to eight officers and 260 men. Charlie Company had started the day with five officers and 102 men and ended it with no officers and 45 men. A bright moon rose in a clear sky before midnight and lighted the battlefield.

## CHECKMATE: Driving off the enemy



**Chow and ammunition.** A wounded trooper awaits evacuation amid the stockpiled supplies cluttering Moore's command post

JOSEPH L. GALLOWAY — UPI/BETTMANN

**DAY  
3**

At 4:22, an estimated 300 North Vietnamese attacked Capt.

Myron Diduryk's sector from the southeast. Diduryk, 27, a native of the Ukraine who had emigrated to the United States at age 12, was, in Moore's words, "the best battlefield company commander I've ever known, including myself in Korea."

Diduryk had prepared for the possibility of a night attack. His men were dug in deeply, two to a foxhole, and the holes were spaced to provide interlocking support. Before nightfall Diduryk and his artillery observer, Lt. William Lund,

had registered the artillery ranges so the 105-mm howitzers at Landing Zones Falcon and Columbus could fire instantly. Now, by the light of parachute flares kicked out of an Air Force C-123 overhead, Diduryk's men poured rifle and machine-gun fire on the attacking North Vietnamese while Diduryk and Lund directed artillery fire back and forth across the killing zone. The North Vietnamese broke and ran.

Nine minutes after the first attack, they tried again, this time with about 200 men. Again, American artillery and rifle fire chewed them up. The attack shifted to the southwest. The North Vietnamese were thrown back a third time.

"I heard bugles blowing," says Specialist 4 Pat Selleck, a 24-year-old rifleman from New York City. "I saw, in the light of the flares, waves of the enemy coming down off the mountain in a straight line. The company was shooting them like ducks in a pond." Twice during the attacks, Moore's reconnaissance platoon had carried huge loads of ammunition out to Diduryk's men. Less than 2 hours later, at 6:27, the North Vietnamese attacked again, this time directly at Diduryk's command post. Now, in less than 15 minutes, the attackers were dragging off their dead. Diduryk had only six men lightly wounded, but the field in front of him was piled with enemy dead. Diduryk would return to Vietnam for another tour of duty with the 1st Cavalry. In the spring of 1970, in another landing zone, he was killed by a sniper.

Moore now invented something that would be widely used

# U.S. News & World Report

# U.S. News

OCTOBER 29, 1990

\$1.95

**HOT CITIES**



**BRIGHT SPOTS IN THE  
ECONOMIC DOWNTURN**

► **SPECIAL REPORT** ◀

# VIETNAM STORY

Twenty-five years ago, soldiers of the U.S. 7th Cavalry fought the first major battle of the war. It forever changed the course of the conflict. An eyewitness account

1990  
WILLIE F. GODBOLDT

CTION  
1965



USEDmagazines