

EYEWITNESS STATEMENT
OF Bernie Bienwald
on action of 3 April 1969

On 3 April 1969 I participated in a night raid Company B, 3d Battalion, 60th Infantry of the 9th Infantry Division. I served as the radio operator for Captain William Perkins, the raid leader. During the briefing we were told that we were to capture prisoners, documents or weapons at a site where it was suspected that NVA soldiers were located.

After landing in 2 helicopters, our small raiding party moved into several bamboo hootches and found no males but a number of women and children and a few documents. The orbiting helicopters radioed that they had taken some fire and I had heard some male voices near one of the hootches. I reported this to the captain and suggested we move towards the pickup zone in a rice paddy. He agreed and told me to call the helicopters. But they had to refuel and we waited at the pickup zone for some time until they returned. As they landed, we received heavy automatic weapons fire from the area we had left and ditches near the paddy.

Both helicopters managed to take off but when we reached altitude the other helicopter radioed that a man was missing. The captain told the other helicopter to go back in and get him and our helicopter would follow in support. A few minutes later I saw the captain tap one of the pilots on the shoulder and motion to go down and pick up the man on the ground.

As we approached the ground, our aircraft received fire and a pilot was wounded and we pitched up, fell sideways and crashed. When it swung up I fell out and the aircraft landed on its side about 20 meters behind me. When I got up I saw about 10 enemy soldiers moving toward me from the hootches. I tried to fire my rifle but it wouldn't work. At that moment the 2 Cobra gunships opened fire and forced them back.

I moved to the helicopter and saw that Ed Eaton had pulled some from the wreckage. Then Ed began firing at the enemy and he crawled up on the skid of the overturned aircraft and began firing at the enemy. We were receiving a lot of small arms fire. But Ed was the only one us who was firing back.

The Cobras had been making gun runs very close to us because the enemy were closing in. But I think the gunships ran out of ammunition because one landed a few meters away and took away some of the men in our group. Meanwhile Ed continued to fire at the enemy from his perch on the skid of our crashed helicopter.

I believe another Cobra landed but I was too busy moving around and trying to help the wounded that I didn't see it. I continued to hear Ed shooting but I moved to the rear of the crashed aircraft away from the incoming fire because I had no weapon. There I saw some of the helicopter crew, apparently wounded.

Shortly afterward, Colonel Petersen's helicopter and a Cobra landed and the gunner from the Cobra jumped out and helped me haul the captain away from the crashed helicopter. Ed was still firing but had moved down near the captain. The Cobra gunner then ran back to his aircraft and got back in. I saw Ed run to that Cobra along with 2 other men and they took off--with the 3 men standing on the skids.

I took off in the colonel's helicopter, along with the captain and several others--I believe they were the crew of the downed helicopter. We landed at Dong Tam hospital and I was checked by the medics and learned I had sustained a cracked vertabrae.

Ed Eaton's firing kept the enemy away from us. Once the gunships ran out of ammo, he was the only one that kept the enemy at bay. Single-handedly he held off an enemy platoon and saved the lives of 3 helicopter crewmen and 6 infantrymen.

Bennie Biewald

Signature

11/11/2011

Date