



No Place to Hide: A Company at Nui Ba Den

Bill Sly

iUniverse (Aug 19, 2016)

Softcover \$13.99 (182pp)

978-1-5320-0304-2

This account of a deadly Vietnam battle serves the truth, and is a long overdue and thorough narrative.

Bill Sly's new book, *No Place to Hide*, comes forward to tell a little-known story of the Vietnam War—a unit's ill-fated assault at Nui Ba Den, informally called the Black Virgin Mountain.

No Place to Hide reconstructs a 1969 mission by Alpha Company, which was sent up the Black Virgin on a mission to engage suspected North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops. The book commemorates "common men displaying uncommon valor," as these American soldiers were caught in the relentless hellfire that ensued. Sly's is a compelling account that leaves no gaps.

Relying heavily on the words of the battle's survivors, Sly tells how Alpha Company of 2/2, a mechanized unit that was not trained or fully equipped for a ground operation, encountered daunting uphill terrain with no cover and stumbled into a harrowing ambush from above.

That encounter left eight men dead and thirty-two wounded, including several of the company's officers and NCOs. The next day, two GIs from Charlie Company died and more were wounded in a follow-up mission to recover bodies and secure disabled equipment.

Sly tells of the chaos, the heroic efforts, and the toll of this battle on "the leaderless people" under fire. He also includes a thorough discussion of the mission's futility, which was obvious at the outset to the men of Alpha Company, as well as a general's comment that the mission was "unnecessary, bloody, and poorly planned."

The best writing comes through Sly's third-person approach to the narrative. Clarity issues do arise, however, with the integration of a managing, controlling narrative voice with those of the mission's participants. Those participants find their voices honored, and their stories add color, but they also lead to some distracting repetition.

The text is thorough about including details, though they sometimes inhibit the flow. An index of nicknames helps to keep track of the many identities. Sly's tendency to quote himself or refer to himself in the third person is somewhat awkward.

Sly notes that the 1969 yearbooks of the First Infantry Division and the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division both omit the debacle on the Black Virgin. There was no accurate reporting of the battle by American media; the military's own *Stars and Stripes* called it a "great victory."

Thus *No Place to Hide* is a long-overdue account. It serves the truth, and it may help bring peace to those who were there, or to those who lost someone that was.

JOE TAYLOR (February 3, 2017)

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