

Nedenstående artikkel om 10-4-1-3-2 Kevin Bruce Piccione har vært presentert på følgende webadresse: <http://samagte.freewebspages.org/hc/dewet.html>.

Artikkelen, som bare foreligger på engelsk, er klarert med Kevin Bruce.

## **Trooper Kevin Bruce Piccione**



L1 Kevin Bruce Piccione, HCS  
SA Pantserkorps

### **Outline in bullet holes**

“You mean it wasn’t my day? You must be joking! It. . . it was. . . it was my day, that’s why I have been kept alive. I think the Good Lord was having a good look . . . down upon us. So Boxing Day will always remain quite . . . quite a day for me.

Trooper Kevin Bruce Piccione is the great-grandchild, on his mother’s side, of Oswald (I denne publiserings korrigeret til Oddmund) Christian Oftebro, winner of the Military Cross in the Second World War. He is also a descendant of the Scandinavian Oftebro family, well-known missionary pioneers in Zululand. Courage and faith are well blended in this tall good-looking Natalian who had turned 19 a month before the incident related here.

On Boxing Day, 1975, this young man of 1 Special Service Battalion of the SA Armoured Corps, found himself in Eastern Angola. He was young, but no rookie. Since his arrival by plane at Silva Porto early in December, his Combat Group had had thirteen odd contacts, with the kill-rate on enemy side in each engagement between 10 and well over 200. They had fought at Luso airport and along the Benguela rail, and at all times their armoured cars had been in the lead.

“We engaged many, very tough resistance areas, but managed to knock the hell out of the lot of them, and never really having to withdraw; but Lumege was to change all of this. Lumege is a river quite close to the Zaire border. We were covering . . . we were going through some

plains, very wide open plains; and this was where the name X-ray — our Combat Group X-ray — changed to Boxer.”

They received orders, some seven hours slow driving beyond the town of Lumege, to turn back and secure or destroy a bridge on the road leading to a small town. They spent the night at Lumege and, unlike the previous weeks when they had been confident, they now experienced uneasiness for no apparent reason, unless it was some kind of premonition. They proceeded in the morning.

Kevin takes up the story. “I was in No. One Car, with the others following. We had four Eland armoured cars, two Unimogs of infantry and one of engineers, under the command of Lt. C. H. de Wet. We had to make a fair amount of haste, and my job was to look, to do recce, make sure the middle distance was right, the long distance was right, check for ambush and make sure that the road was clear of mines — a well-nigh impossible task, which I performed as well as I could.”

The group covered good ground, but about 12 km out of town, as they were passing a little township of mud huts, there was a thundering explosion emanating somewhere behind them. Kevin’s first thoughts were that they had been ambushed and he heard, what sounded to him like the missiles of a Stalin Organ coming in their direction. Immediately afterwards, however, he saw further back a big cloud of smoke, which signified one thing: a landmine.

The rocket-like noises that he had heard were those of pieces of rubber and debris exploding from a wrecked armoured car about 200 yards behind his.

Still under the impression that it was an ambush, Kevin fired a speculative burst into some hundred yards of bush and thought that he had attracted one round of fire, but was overruled by his mates. He thereupon ran back to the stricken armoured car and applied first-aid to the crew, Rob Fletcher, Dawie Minnie and Frans Kruger, who, although severely shaken, were not too badly injured.

Kevin returned to his own car and soon realized how lucky he had been. In the first moments after the explosion, his driver, H. H. Muller, had stopped the car and was actually reversing into a better position, when Kevin shouted at him to stop, which he did. This saved them, as the engineers now unearthed a landmine six inches from one of the wheels.

The engineers under Lt. de Wet and a couple of the armoured car crew walked ahead, locating and extracting land-mines. They pulled out three mines virtually from under the wheels of the armoured cars and a further nine down to what later turned out to be a blown-up bridge Kevin recalls: “While the engineers were going down, eventually disappearing round a corner, I was right at the top with the armoured cars. This happened to be on a high ridge, falling away to the river; on the other side was ground where the enemy would have better vantage than us, for they would be looking down onto our cars and men straggling along the road. All of a sudden all hell broke loose down at the river, while shells from a recoilless gun came whining at us.

“It was a deadly ambush and I thought, this was tickets, as I grabbed my belt, rifle and magazines and ran down through that fire to try and recover our men or . . . their bodies. Those guys had managed to find reasonable cover but some of them were so shaken that they were unable to fire. As it happened I dived under what turned out to be the wrong bush for a fight

that was to last from about 12 noon to 2.30 pm. Afterwards I couldn't believe that I had scraped through, because the bush that I was lying under had more or less disintegrated under the rain of bullets and missiles.

"I remember that when I first got down I found myself quite close to Lt. de Wet who, on my query as to what the position was, replied: 'You are soon to discover that it would have been safer for you to have stayed where you were.' Bullets were flying as I got my wits about me and started to fire back, drawing an incredible amount of fire on myself.

"At one stage one of the enemy got up across the river, not more than 75 yards away, and fired a rocket at me. I thought, this was it, pressed my fingers over my ears and nose and just looked aside as this thing came towards us. It hit the river sand just about ten yards from me and, fortunately, exploded upwards. I immediately fired and shot the guy in the chest, and he literally flew into the sky before he dropped. I then got five guys with five shots, and de Wet subsequently commented that all of those shots were dead-centre."

The amount of fire that Kevin drew made it possible for the armoured cars on the ridge to locate the enemy positions better.

"We managed to put out one by one each mortar nest. I was firing with the standard R1, which is a very dangerous piece of machinery, and I was also directing the machine gun fire from our troops plus our armoured car fire onto the enemy positions. At one stage we were drawing quite heavy fire from a heavy calibre gun down-stream, and they were firing high explosives around my feet. I sort of acted dead for a moment, and as they lifted their fire to the armoured cars, we killed them all."

He went through about three magazines with selective fire. There was always the temptation to simply lift the snout of his rifle and fire, but that would have been senseless in such a situation. One had to be almost a sniper and pick out the main targets; it might be nerve-racking for the sniper, but it usually has a demoralising effect in enemy ranks.

"One incident that I shall never forget, happened while there was a slight lull in the firing. Five black enemy troops came from among the bushes down a ramp, rifles at the ready. I saw them and they saw me, and it was like a freeze situation. They didn't know who I was and, fortunately, I was wearing a tank suit, which looked a bit foreign. They challenged me, aiming their rifles, and I stood up slowly expecting to be either shot or taken captive. But they were so nervous that I could sort of pretend to ignore them, moving to one side, whereupon they disappeared in the bush. We hammered them then, but whether we killed them, I don't know."

The chaps in the armoured cars on the ridge were too afraid to move down and give a hand, for they were ignorant of the fact that the landmines had been removed. They did, however, fire with such good effect that Kevin was able to organise the withdrawal of the men down at the river.

"This happened after 2½ hours of intense fighting. I grabbed the Lieutenant first and we ran down a donga beside the river which I had sighted as I was diving for cover in the first place. And one by one Lt. de Wet and I managed to get the fellows into this thing and we looped up to the top. I would go on ahead —and very, very hot it was — take up cover and fire, while the other guys would come up, pass me and do the same. So we went up buddy-buddy in the donga and ran to the armoured cars, not one having received a scratch."

Back with the armoured cars, they shot some very heavy stuff into the enemy positions, which Kevin could pick out from his knowledge gained by the riverside. But the enemy was by no means beaten and they finally had to withdraw, driving the seven hours odd back to their base camp — to have their revenge, total revenge, the following day.

Lt. Kevin Bruce Piccione, in civvies an articulated accountant-auditor, speaks softly, as if inwardly, when he recalls this incident in which he earned his Honoris Crux Silver. It still amazes him that they all came out of that hell-fire unscathed.

“Not a scratch. It was . . . You know, I don’t like to relate this story. I don’t enjoy it, because people find it difficult to believe that you can actually stand up and see your own outline in bullet holes in the sand and not having a scratch. It seems unreal, yet it happened to me.”

It was his lucky day, he says, because the Good Lord favoured him. Two days later, many miles to the west, someone else was less lucky, or maybe he wasn’t.

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**Kevin Bruce Picciones krigsmedaljer fra Angola.**