

OPERATION SARATOGA 26 JAN. - MAR. 1968

Large concentrations of Viet Cong soldiers had massed south of Cu Chi and had extensively dug into the village of Ap Cho, building numerous concrete bunkers connected by trenches and tunnel complexes. The 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, was called upon to aid the 2nd Brigade forces of the 25th Infantry Division in locating the enemy forces and driving them from the locations.

The resulting operation amounted to 37 different enemy engagements accounting for 253 enemy dead. The greatest part of the engagements were made in the village of Ap Cho.

Offensive operations against a thoroughly dug-in Viet Cong force are uncommon in Viet Nam because the enemy is rarely willing to withstand concentrated American firepower. A notable exception was the Battle of Ap Cho. The battalion had to attack it daily until all of the enemy were killed.

For a period of 13 days the Regulars supported by several units moved against the enemy and started hacking away at the concrete bunkers. It was obvious that the enemy had no intentions of giving up. They were determined to fight to the end or win. That's exactly what they did, that is - they all died from the hands of the infantry and supporting fire.

Enemy Losses:

253 KIA	31 Possible KIA
6 POW	6 Detainees

U.S. Losses

44 KIA	6 KNIA
134 WIA	1 WNIA

Ordinance Captured:

- 2 -AK-50 assault rifles
- 28 - AK-47 assault rifles
- 8 - RPG -2 launchers
- 5 - RPG-7 launchers
- 8 - US M-16 rifles
- 2 - 82 mm mortars
- 1 - 51 cal. machine gun
- 4 - Chicom light machine guns
- 2 - US 50 cal. machine guns
- 1 - Chicom radio
- 44 pounds of documents

SUPPORTING UNITS:

ARTILLERY:

- A Battery, 1st Battalion, 8th Artillery - 105 mm Howitzers
- C Battery, 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery - 105 mm Howitzers
- C Battery, 2nd Battalion, 77th Artillery - 105 mm Howitzers
- B Battery, 3rd Battalion, 13th Artillery - 155 mm Howitzers

ARMOR:

- B Company, 3rd Battalion, 17th Cavalry
- C Company, 3rd Battalion, 17th Cavalry
- B Company, 3rd Battalion, 4th Cavalry

AVIATION:

- 116th Helicopter Assault Company
- 25th Helicopter Assault Company
- 205th Helicopter Assault Company
- 269th Combat Aviation Battalion
- 242nd Chinook Assault Support Helicopter Company

The battle was long and fierce. The Regulars worked beside the 4th Battalion (Mechanized) Infantry. Each morning both units would go "on line" and start another day's assault on the reinforced enemy bunkers. When the day came to an end the troops would pull back only to assault again the next morning.

After a tremendous amount of fighting coupled with immense quantities of artillery and air support the battle was won. Although not very climatic, the victory marked a major upset to enemy troops who tried to remain in good defensive posture and failed.

James Dice recalls (letter dated 11 September 1994)

"Andy Crawford was a fine young man. I became close to him and Ron Hudson in the brief time we had together. I am going to tell you all that I can recall about the Battle of AP Cho."

"On 5 February 1968, the enemy was sheltered in concrete bunkers and were well armed. The bunkers were connected by massive tunnel networks under the village. As we approached the village, James Richard Holt of Jacksonville, Arkansas was KIA by automatic fire. There were several others wounded. We shot a tremendous amount of firepower in there and it seemed to have little effect on the enemy. The next day we would assault and they would be waiting for us."

"After the first day of contact, we set up our perimeter. The next morning 6 February 1968, we crossed the road and went into the village at about the same place we had entered the day before. The third platoon was point for the company and Jackie Smith was point man for the third platoon."

"About a quarter of the way into the village all hell broke loose. Jackie Glen Smith of Hornbeak, Tennessee never knew what hit him. Andrew Paul Crawford of Hinsdale, New York and Wallace Lee Giesen of LaCrosse, Wisconsin moved forward and were killed trying to rescue Jackie. We assaulted the enemy again. Sergeant Norman Earl Rose III, 4th platoon, of Oxford, North Carolina was mortally wounded and died a few minutes later and several other guys were wounded. We had to retreat back across the road and leave Smith, Crawford and Giesen in there. That night the situation was grim. Nobody hardly spoke. Aircraft bombed the hell out of Ap Cho all night long. The ground shook hour after hour from the massive bombing and shelling."

"The next morning 7 February 1968 we retrieved the bodies of our KIAs without incident. As we moved farther into the village, automatic rifle and machine gun fire pinned us down again.

"I was in the first platoon and RTO for S/Sgt. William L. Watson of Louisville, Kentucky and we were about 25 yards behind the third platoon guys in the lead. The battle raged so intensely that nobody could move forward."

"This went on everyday until the fourteenth. Then the 4th and 17th mechanized units came in with their .50 and .30 caliber machine guns blazing and flame throwers engulfing the bunkers in an inferno of flames. I was wounded that day with a perforated eardrum and shrapnel wounds to the head and back."

"After spending a month in the hospital, I was returned to the field. The eardrum continued to bleed so I was transferred to the Cu Chi ammo dump in May. The doctor sent me to Japan in June, where I resided until being returned to the States. I still consider myself very lucky to be alive today. When I have a problem, I just reflect back to crossing that road and assaulting Ap Cho for so many days in a row. My problem just fades away."

Major Charles Boyle recalls: 10 May 1995

Specialist 4 Eddie Runge, company RTO, rushed up and excitedly told me that our "soft touch" mission had been abruptly modified. Co. C, 3/22d had been providing security for an engineering company as they swept for mines along the MSR (Military Supply Route) a few "clicks" south of Tay Ninh.

It was easy duty for us although increased enemy activity along the road demanded a watchful eye. Everyone felt strongly that something big was happening. We just didn't have a name for it yet. It was 5 February 1968. TET was under way. I had been in command of the company for six days.

Pressing the handset against my ear, I listened while Captain George A. Dean, the battalion operations officer, explained that an officer from another unit had been ambushed along with his jeep driver near the village of Ap Cho, some 15 kilometers south of us. He described an overturned burning vehicle that was being protected by an unarmed observation helicopter.

Arrangements had already been made to borrow engineer dump trucks to transport us to the scene. Almost immediately, a tremendous roar announced the arrival of six huge steel bottomed trucks. Charlie Company, with very little direction enthusiastically loaded onto the heavy steel beds amid a clamor of shouts and excitement. Tired of walking, eager for a fight, anxious to liberate, they defined at the moment, at least for me, the true character of the American fighting man in Viet Nam.

Lucky to get a "shotgun" seat in the lead vehicle, I fumbled with maps, ammunition and cigarettes. As I tried to close the door, I felt a tugging resistance. Sp4 Wallace Lee Giesen shouldered it open while PFC Jackie Smith and PFC Andrew Crawford stood behind him.

"Don't worry Lt.", Wallace said. "We're going to nail those bastards for ya. We won't let you down."

I thanked him, mumbling something about not being foolish, as his two buddies bellowed their zealous agreement and slammed the door on my foot. Those were the last words I ever heard from any of them.

Somewhere along the dusty road, perhaps a "click" from the objective, we blew the right front tire of the lead vehicle. It was a disastrous delay. The second platoon quickly solved the problem by lifting the front of the truck just enough to exchange the flat with a spare. We didn't have time for heavy jacks. In moments we were off again. By this time the word had spread by voice, rumor and radio that we were riding to rescue two downed Americans. We had no guidance and few plans, but that was customary and sufficient for the men of Charlie Company.

The village of Ap Cho lay to the left or east of the MSR as we approached it from the north. It stretched perhaps 300 yards along its front and boasted 10 rows of structures in depth. It seemed serene and inviting at first without a hint of the horror that lay within. No movement or activity could be seen from our off-loading point, about 100 yards to the north. A mechanized platoon had just arrived minutes ahead of us. They were "Manchus" commanded by Lt. Johnny Day, a good friend of mine.

Deploying platoons to the east as we approached, the CP group scrambled a few meters south to coordinate with the early arrivals. Johnny stood atop his command track, saluted with a broad grin and shouted for us to get our asses down. "It's thick with NVA," he advised. "I can see como wire and took fire from at least two heavy machine guns as we approached. They are dug-in good!"

"You're here and I gotta go," Johnny shouted as he stretched his hand toward me. "Good luck"! He straightened and stood majestically atop his track, feet widespread, hands upon his hips, shouting orders to his men. As we withdrew a few yards, an RPG round slammed directly into the nose of his vehicle. I watched as he somersaulted through smoke and shrapnel. He came down without legs. Johnny had been our physical fitness champ at OCS.

Everyone returned a heavy volume of fire in the direction of the assault. I was heartsick as I watched Johnny's men carefully place him into the back of an APC and disappear southward. Sending a farewell message, the Manchus expended most of their .50 caliber ammunition into Ap Cho as they defiantly rode off. We were alone at Ap Cho now.

That initial outburst caused the second and third platoons to naturally swing into action. The fourth platoon became enmeshed in the battle with their advance. Lt. Balser, second platoon leader, along with Lt. Adkins, third platoon leader, led the way. The first platoon, led by Lt. Oscar Harris, was unloading from the trucks last when contact was made. They soon approached from the north, sashaying left into the village proper.

About 50 yards from the first line of hooches, the company came under a heavy volume of automatic weapons fire. It was interspersed with the unmistakable boom of .51 caliber machine guns, RPGs and a few small mortars. Men began to fall. I don't know how the men of Charlie Company recovered

James Richard Holt's body and the rest of the wounded, but they did.

From the command post position on the west side of the road and centered on the village, it was easy to assess the magnitude of the action. At least a company of NVA, I thought, if not a battalion. Those heavy weapons didn't belong to a unit of lesser size.

Instinctively I called for help. It is common infantry doctrine to duel the enemy with a plan of fire support and a scheme of maneuver. It means that we attack with some sort of movement plan while supporting forces; artillery, air or whatever is available, pounds the target.

In this case, support was denied. Battalion headquarters alluded to difficulty of obtaining "political clearance" from the local Vietnamese Province Chief to bombard the village. Further it was implied that since we were probably facing a squad sized element, it would be imprudent to expend sophisticated ordnance on such a meager target. I've often wondered how they came to that conclusion from their observation post fifteen kilometers away.

Lt. Balser called and appraised me of the situation. We had one KIA (James Holt) and several wounded. Lt. Adkin's report confirmed that we were in the most impossible of situations. We were exposed, with little cover, attacking a numerically superior force that was well dug in and enjoyed maximum fields of fire. We had casualties that we could not get to and were appraised as being "tokenly involved". At my insistence (I believe it was Captain Dean's decision), it was agreed that we should recover our casualties and pull back to consolidate in preparation for another attack. It was about 1400 hours on 5 February 1968.

By mid afternoon it was allowed that Alpha Company, commanded by Captain Herbert C. Chauncey would join the attack. All we had to do was wait for them. Finally Herb and his valiant band of "Alphagators" arrived. I was ecstatic because I had served under Captain Chauncey and admired his courage and good sense. We collaborated on tactics and I offered him overall command.

"Aw heck no Charlie 6," he responded in his best Georgia drawl. "You've been here longer and know the lay of the land. I wouldn't think of pulling rank on a first lieutenant in a situation like this." He grinned and assured me of his absolute loyalty as we departed.

With Herb's courage and experience as a commander being legend throughout the battalion, I knew that our headquarters had to finally abandon their faulty appraisal and give us some support. Even at Herb's insistence, none was forthcoming.

After collecting our casualties, we pulled across to the west side of the road and prepared a defensive perimeter. Darkness soon enveloped us. We licked our wounds and made preparations for the long night to come.

All through the night radio transmissions flew back and forth between myself and battalion headquarters. They offered no solution except to prepare for another attack. During the night we did receive some artillery support. It shook the ground so violently that sleep was impossible. I concerned myself with getting a resupply of food, water, ammunition and the comfort

of my men. We dug in and sent out night time ambush patrols to keep the enemy off of our backs. A prudent measure since they were less than 500 yards away. It was a lonely night under the stars of Ap Cho. Our strength depleted, we continued to dig in and patrol the perimeter.

Men began drifting into the CP as the night wore on. They wanted answers and offered encouragement. They said they'd fight! At daylight they got their chance. During the night, battalion issued another attack order. They promised artillery and tanks. We would cross the line of departure at 0600 hours. Artillery pounded the village for 10 minutes in preparation for our attack. The armor was to meet us at the line of departure. Everyone knew this was it. We would kick some ass today. It was 6 February 1968.

The attack began as planned. Charlie Company with three platoons forward, one in reserve, crossed the line of departure at the appointed time. Bayonets were fixed! No rumble of tanks could be heard. None could be seen. There was no screaming artillery fire either. We had been duped. There was no plan of fire support! We were isolated in this attack and that fact, even today, lays in my belly like a stone. We pushed forward. The attack bogged down just inside the village and failed.

Later that afternoon, at about 1500 hours, we launched another two company attack, again without fire support. We headed east, straight across the road. Herb called it "hey diddle diddle, straight up the middle". Charlie Company took the left and Alpha Company took the right. Lt. Adkins and the third platoon spearheaded the assault. Jackie Smith took point. The third platoon managed to push through the first two rows of hooches and then a horrendous volume of firepower hit them. Jackie took a burst of automatic fire in the chest. He never knew what hit him!

Sp4 Wallace Giesen and PFC Andy Crawford, carrying an M-60 machine gun decided to mount their own attack. They laid down a wall of grazing fire as they stood and advanced toward Jackie Smith's body. Within moments both men were hit by machine gun fire, RPG shrapnel and grenade fragments. They too died within minutes. We were unable to recover their bodies until the next day.

Sergeant Norman Rose III, a much admired and exceptional young squad leader with the fourth platoon, apparently decided to attempt a rescue of the downed men. Mustering a few men, he made an effort to move forward to get to Giesen and Crawford. Within a few yards, he was hit squarely in the chest with a RPG-2 round. Still living, his men recovered him quickly and carried him behind a hooch. Men were going down in both companies and we laid the dead and wounded in a row behind the remaining wall of a partially destroyed hooch. I counted ten in all. Our medics, Sp4 Glen Nishizawa and Sp4 Carl Felgenhauer worked frantically on them. They saved some lives that day, but they couldn't save Norman.

Moving from man to man to offer comfort and assess their wounds, I shared Norman's last few moments on earth with him. He asked clearly, "am I going to make it Lieutenant, can you get me a Dust-off"? Haltingly I answered, "no Norman, you're not and we can't get you out". A tranquil look

flashed across his face and he calmly said, "alright sir, take care of my boys, pray with me". We did and in a few moments, life ebbed from Norman's body.

Facing the prospect of another frontal assault on fortified positions, I begged for artillery support. None was forthcoming. "We cannot get political clearance from the Province Chief," explained Captain Dean again. Badly demoralized, I decided to withdraw both companies back across the road for consolidation and evacuation of the wounded. I called for a "Dust-off" chopper. The request was denied. Inwardly I agreed. No pilot in his right mind would fly into this mess, nor should he be asked to.

I was advised by battalion that a truck convoy loaded with badly needed fuel and ammunition was fighting its way toward Tay Ninh. It would pass between us and the village in a few minutes. Back across the road we went, taking up positions in ditches, depressions and anything else that would stop a bullet. The convoy roared into sight just as we got set up. With their ring mounted .50 caliber machine guns blazing away at Ap Cho, they sped past us. We laid down a devastating barrage of suppressing fire for a "mad minute". Apparently one of the lead vehicles got hit and was disabled, slowing the column. A gasoline tanker stopped behind him, dead in the killing zone.

The volume of fire directed at him, coupled with our frantic gesturing must have convinced the driver to push his way around the stalled truck. An ammunition truck followed. Then more and more trucks passed by. Finally all the trucks had passed us, leaving two trucks ablaze with their occupants trapped inside. We were getting as much as we gave.

Upon instructions from battalion, we broke contact and consolidated back across the road. I estimated the enemy strength at a reinforced NVA battalion and informed headquarters. My evaluation was again ridiculed. As dusk approached, Alpha Company was pulled out and my heart sank as I watched them disappear northward. Another fight was brewing at Cu Chi City and Alpha Company was being thrown in. We were alone again at Ap Cho.

Assessing the casualties, I counted 75 able bodied fighting men left in Charlie Company. We had entered Ap Cho two days earlier with 110 men. With 5 killed and numerous wounded, we dragged our way to safety about a kilometer north of the village. I recall that there were no officers left except myself. Lieutenants Dennis Adkins and Mike Donnelly, our artillery F.O. had been hit several times. Lieutenant Mike Balser had been wounded several times, but returned to lead the fight again. Only a few NCOs remained and I took heart from Staff Sergeants William Watson's and Alfred Beebe's unruffled and natural leadership.

Headquarters soon ordered our total withdrawal and we prepared to move toward the Cu Chi base camp. We placed our dead on the bottom of three ox carts and piled the wounded on top of them. With the able bodied walking, stumbling, and pulling, we dragged the carts two kilometers northward before everyone collapsed, totally exhausted. It was 2100 hours 6 February 1968.

While we were resting along side the MSR, battalion issued new orders. "Return to Ap Cho and attack"! I protested vehemently.

"We are almost out of ammunition and to mount a night attack requires detailed reconnaissance and coordination," I offered.

"Fix bayonet and conduct a night attack, damnit," came the reply.

"Roger that," I answered mildly. My easy submission to that ludicrous order was formed on a flash of inspiration. I knew that no one from battalion headquarters would step foot outside the TOC to verify our movements. I knew that the remaining men would follow us and our superb NCOs if there was even the slightest chance of survival. I promised them that we would survive! We planned to enter the village only far enough to draw fire, then find cover and wait it out. At about 2200 hours, 55 men and myself fixed bayonet and entered Ap Cho again. The NVA were waiting for us!

On a skirmish line, we managed to silently work our way into the village about 50 yards when our illumination rounds exposed us. The NVA opened fire with everything they had. As instructed, the men had selected cover as they inched forward and it served them well. At the bottom of a small shell hole with Eddie Runge and about six others on top of me, I radioed our lack of progress to the operations officer. Captain Dean ordered a withdrawal. We backed out without any argument.

Linking up with our small security force and our carts laden with the dead and wounded, we began the long pull toward Cu Chi. About three kilometers north of Ap Cho, we came upon one of the ammunition trucks laid slightly on its side in the ditch, the driver dead in the cab. Captain Dean ordered us to secure it for the night unless we could get it moving toward Tay Ninh, where the ammunition was badly needed.

Without hesitation, PFC James A. Asher of California, stepped forward and volunteered to drive it. James had been with us only a few days and I questioned his decision, but did not forbid it. He got the 5 ton monster running and in short order was barreling up the road toward Tay Ninh. He outran two ambushes along the way and somehow made it safely into the 2nd brigade CP at Tay Ninh. His heroic efforts allowed us the freedom to continue our somber march toward Cu Chi.

By 0500 hours, 8 February 1968, we had pushed through two ambushes hastily set by the NVA and had a couple more guys wounded. As we approached the city of Cu Chi, it was burning and in the hands of the NVA. Captain Dean advised us to move through a rubber plantation a few hundred meters south of the city to avoid it. As I issued the instructions, a contradictory message came over the net.

An unfamiliar voice countermanded our orders and insisted we enter Cu Chi to support Alpha Company. Knowing that Alpha Company was inside the base camp, I questioned the caller. Captain Dean, monitoring the call, broke through advising me that it was NVA on our net. I told the caller to kiss my round ass and we trudged on the last few kilometers through the rubber trees. We arrived at Cu Chi base camp at about 0600 hours. First light was just breaking through to the east.

We were very happy to be with "friendlies". We transferred our casualties into field ambulances just inside the gate. We resupplied with ammunition, water and rations. We received five or six new men as replacements. Captain Dean

congratulated us, consoled us, and then dropped a bombshell. "Return to Ap Cho and attack"! he ordered.

We gathered up our men, our weapons and our courage and walked back to Ap Cho. There was plenty of action along the way.

Upon arrival at Ap Cho, I heard LTC Roy K. Flint's voice on the radio for the first time. He had replaced LTC Thomas U. Harrold as battalion commander and within minutes had seized command and was directing the operation. Over the next ten days we attacked, attacked and attacked again. This time, however, it was different. Each day we received more and more reinforcements.

On the final day, 17 February 1968, Alpha Company reunited with us. Delta Company, commanded by Captain William J. Monahan, was thrown in on the right flank. Four batteries of 105 mm artillery with 40 mm "dusters" fired indirect and flat trajectory rounds into the village. Three companies of armor from the 17th and 4th cavalry joined us. Five helicopter assault companies flew support and blasted the targets with their gunships. Thirty air strikes preceded the final attack. The 4th battalion mechanized, spearheaded the attack, with the gallant men of Company C, 3/22d interspersed between the tanks and APCs as walking infantry.

It resembled the WWII battlefields. Tanks and APCs were burning, foot soldiers fighting their way into concrete bunkers and pulling the enemy out with the points of their bayonets. No written description can do justice to the magnitude of that violent episode. The NVA lost 253 KIA and six POWs were detained. Total US losses were 44 KIA and 134 wounded.

Howard Leroy Painter, second platoon, of Rothbury, Michigan was KIA 2-10-68

Albertis Williamson, ??? platoon, of Abbotburg, North Carolina was KIA 2-10-68

Following the Battle of Ap Cho, we continued to move south towards Saigon. The assigned mission was to stop post-Tet attacks by NVA troops in the Tan Son Nhut region.

S/Sgt. William L. Watson, 1st platoon, of Louisville, Kentucky KIA 2-24-68.

Jay Cee Dyer, _____ platoon, of Dearborn, Michigan was KIA 2-26-68

Jimmy Francis Lehman, _____ platoon, South Bloomingville, Ohio was KIA 3-3-68

Joseph Edward Hartz, _____ platoon, of New York City, New York was KIA 3-6-68

Charles Howard Rampley, first platoon, of Chamblee, Georgia was KIA 3-7-68

Jimmy Ray Pierce, _____ platoon, of Prichard, Alabama was KIA 3-17-68

OPERATION TOAN THANG I (Complete Victory) - 8 APRIL - 31 MAY 1968

Operation Tan Thang I was a coordinated effort involving 42 US Battalions, 37 ARVN Battalions, Australian, and Thailand armed forces. Until this time, it was the largest operation in terms of participating troops which the Vietnam conflict had known. During the course of the 53 day operation, more than 3300 enemy soldiers fell dead from the guns of TROPIC LIGHTNING'S fury. This fact in itself proved that the 25th's soldiers left little to chance when they attacked their foe throughout their operational zone.

Directed jointly from US II Field Force, Vietnam, and ARVN II Corps Headquarters, the operation also involved the US 1st and 9th Divisions, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, 199th Light Infantry Brigade, and the 1st Division's 3rd Brigade.

The offensive was designed to locate and terminate enemy forces conducting aggressive and terroristic activities from isolated and fluid bases of operation. Once Operation Tan Thang I began, Tropic Lightning soldiers did not have to wait long before they made enemy contact.

The Battle of Good Friday

On Thursday, April 11th, the 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry acting on G-2 reports of intensive enemy activities, climbed from choppers into a remote jungle region 13 miles north of the Dau Tieng base camp. They carefully swept the designated area before establishing a perimeter. The laager site was arranged in a clearing surrounded by jungle ranging from single to tripple canopy. Scattered trees and large ant hills caused some obstruction, although the flat terrain mostly provided excellent fields of fire.

In the few hours before darkness, the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Roy K. Flint employed the rifle companies on the defensive perimeter where they hastily prepared foxholes and bunkers. All elements were arranged to employ interlocking fire. His reconnaissance platoon was held as battalion reserve.

Three ambush patrols and three listening posts were placed outside the perimeter to provide early warning of enemy attack. Then as night fell, the Infantrymen made themselves as comfortable as possible.

Peter Novosel recalls:

"Just before dark 16 men from second platoon Co. C 3/22nd were sent out to set a night ambush. Our platoon had several new guys so S/Sgt. Willie Mosley split them up. Half of them went on the ambush patrol and half of them went on perimeter guard. I had one position with an inexperienced soldier and Dennis Rushing had another position with an inexperienced soldier. We had an experienced guy and a new comer in each position."

"After dark, it seemed as if every gook from North Vietnam walked by us. They came so close that we could have reached out and touched some of them. Every one of us was