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BATTLE AGAINST SOUTH VIETNAMESE RANGERS DESCRIBED

[Article by Liberation Press Agency reporter on battle of Quang Nam, Da Nang; Hanoi, Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 25 October 1968, p 1]

After the fierce attacks by Liberation troops at various cities, townships and districts, on 13 September 1968 the enemy tried to gather up their remaining troops to launch operations aimed at driving the peasants out of liberated areas to achieve what they called "operation liberation." But the Liberation troops of North Quang Nam, Da Nang had taken the offensive position and attacked violently, giving the enemy additional heavy strikes. Unit X of the Liberation Army which had already scored many big victories in various battles at Go Noi, Hoi An Township, etc., dealt the enemy strong blows by killing the entire Ranger Battalion 39 while this battalion was forming reinforcement operations of the whole Ranger Brigade 1 and of 2 battalions of U.S. Marines and destroyed them right on their defense line around Da Nang.

On 15 September 1968, after crossing the Ha Nong River, Ranger Brigade No. 1, consisting of 3 battalions, the 21st, the 27th and the 39th, divided into 3 arrows entering Dien An, Dien Phuoc, and Dien Ban areas. Battalion 39, the strike force unit of this Brigade, was in the middle with armored tank support and advanced straight into La Tho Nam Village. Here they were stopped by an element of Unit X of the Liberation Army. Six armored M.113 tanks were destroyed as they came to the edge of the village. Anti-tank gunner Hoang Van Canh shot and set afire 4 tanks in a row. Suffering a heavy defeat, the enemy fled. The first troop advancement of the enemy was defeated. It was then 8 o'clock in the morning. To save the situation, the enemy herded their troops and moved to the right and left to make flank attacks but they encountered fierce resistance from Platoon 3. The hand-to-hand battle lasted

until 11:30. To reinforce the Liberation troops who were fighting in La Tho Nam in order to stop, destroy, and constrain the enemy's strength and to create an opportunity for us to attack and destroy completely enemy Ranger Battalion No. 39, Unit X of the Liberation Army dispatched successively 2 assault arrows. Arrow leaders Ngo Tan Bong and Giang Manh Kha led the assault movement for 2 hours on the empty field. Despite enemy L.19 reconnaissance planes and helicopters flapping overhead, the assault troops made a surprise attack from behind the enemy and drove Battalion 39 back. Being attacked violently from behind, the enemy rangers panicked and screamed for help. The enemy quickly sent Battalion 21 following along the La Tho River and then moved in. Platoon leader Nguyen Xuan Thanh and 7 other soldiers in the platoon used bayonets, grenades and hand grenades in hand-to-hand fighting with the enemy, killing 50 of them and breaking dozens of attacks by Battalion 21.

At 4:00 P.M. the enemy used helicopters to bring in reinforcements and sent armored tanks in to tow the 4 burned tanks away. The anti-tank gunners of Unit X of the Liberation Army opened fire and destroyed another one. By the evening of 15 September, Ranger Battalion 39 had suffered heavy losses, 150 killed, 5 armored tanks burned. The survivors fled to the cemetery in the middle of the field, worried like a bunch of fish on the cutting board.

That night in the command bunker, under the flashing light of enemy cannon shells and flares, the commanding officers of Unit X met to discuss the situation. Political officer Ho predicted that the next day the enemy would retreat across the river. We must stop them and deal them some new strikes to destroy completely Ranger Battalion 39.

Just as anticipated, early the next morning, 16 September, the enemy's 3 battalions hurriedly retreated. Battalions 21 and 37 had just got to Trunh Hamlet, Dien Tho Township when they fell into the ambush trap of Platoon 3. Platoon leader Nguyen Van Lai and other soldiers, Diep, Thoi, Ngoc, Khue, etc., opened fire and fought fiercely with those 2 battalions and constrained them until 11:00 o'clock. From the first barrage, Tran Van Diep had already destroyed one heavy machinegun and 6 rangers. Then Diep and other soldiers received orders to move to the rear line and the entire unit prepared to assault and destroy the rest of Battalion 39. Battalions 21 and 37 fled all the way to Giang La, leaving Battalion 39 struggling in the steel arms of the clamp of Unit X.

Being surrounded, Battalion 39 was petrified. At 11:30 they were trying to flee but immediately 30 of the forerunners were killed by the Liberation soldiers who awaited them in readiness. The enemy hurriedly turned around and while they were bundling up in terror in the middle of the field, cannons of Unit X poured mortar shells right in the middle of their troop formation. Then rifles, light machineguns, heavy machineguns from our combat trenches opened cross-fire, forming a fire net breaking up the enemy's troop formation.

Everyone ran for his life. They ran over their dead fellow soldiers. By 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, the enemy remnant force dragged themselves toward Thuy Bo, Ai My. At the same moment, Ranger Battalion 21 with 13 armored tanks came to get these survivors. But the soldiers of Unit X again had mobilized there to meet them in that direction. Battalion 21 was attacked, just as they crossed over the main road. Anti-tank gunner Nguyen Van Hung fired and blocked the enemy tanks. They fled again, leaving the survivors of Battalion 39 half-alive in the encirclement by the Liberation troops. Platoon 1 of the Liberation Army fired heavily, pushing the enemy down the rice field of Tay Hamlet, Dien Tho Township. The enemy commanders called for help but the SVN Brigade Commander and the 2 U.S. Marine Battalions nearby played deaf.

When it was getting dark, our assault arrows like steel arms immediately tightened around the enemy. Through the flashing lights of cannon shells, we could see the enemy stumbling along Tay Dinh Hamlet toward Giang La. Deputy Company Commander Nguyen Ngoc Lanh quickly led the assault troops to form a line across, using grenades, hand grenades, and sub-machineguns to fight hand-to-hand. The enemy ran to the right, and fell in the ambush ground of Platoon 1. From all directions, we opened fire on the enemy and they fell like hay being cut down. By 11:00 o'clock at night all our troop elements moved in, locked the front, and locked the back so that none of them could escape. Then Company Commander Giang Manh Khoa led the assault troops advancing straight into the confused troop formation of the enemy, killing the whole bunch of commanding officers who were hiding in a cannon hole. By 5:00 AM, 17 September 1968, Ranger Battalion 39 was completely destroyed, including 410 killed, many captured, 5 tanks burned and many war facilities demolished.

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