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II. "WIPING OUT AN ENEMY BATTALION IN FIFTEEN MINUTES"
A PLA BATTLE ACCOUNT FROM THE MEKONG DELTA

[Liberation Press Agency, clandestine, in English to East Europe and the Far East, 1501 GMT, 9 August 1970]

[Wiping out an enemy battalion in fifteen minutes/a battle account from the Mekong delta/--PLA heading]

[GPA.] -- There was not a stir on the two-kilometer long battleground of the Liberation Army and the guerrillas. Dung was busy readjusting a branch that obstructed his observation when he heard Viet call in a subdued voice from behind:

"Dung! Is there any chance to bag a whole battalion of the 7th Division if they come according to our plan?"

"Sure!" Dung replied.

It was in full harvest time. Yet in front of them lay a vast fallow field since the rice crop had been ruined by toxic chemicals. The caterpillar chains of armoured vehicles and tanks left deep imprints on the rice plots. All along the canal the trees had been cut down by bombs and shells, some truncated and charred, others having fallen into water with a few green twigs emerging. A short way from where the liberation forces were positioned the small hamlet had also been completely destroyed by American planes. Houses, fruit trees and everything else has been burnt to ashes. Eleven people, mostly aged women and children, had lost their lives. Pointing to the scene of devastation before him, Tien, political instructor of the company, told his fellow fighters:

"Look how our countrymen suffer! Yet they have given the Liberation Army every assistance. This will be a good opportunity for us to avenge our people!"

The sun had reached its zenith, casting its burning rays on the fortifications. The liberation fighters were boiling with impatience. Then suddenly the drone of aircraft was heard. From the horizon a formation of helicopters came out of the cotton-like clouds and made straight for the battleground. Flying in the lead were three choppers in V-shape formation. They were followed by four others in single file. Some distance behind were three others, also in single file. The rumbling of the rotors was more and more distinct. They flew past the place where the Liberation Army

unit was positioned, broke their formation into a single file, turned round, came down and landed on an open ground near a deserted pagoda. Troops scrambled out of the planes.

About 15 minutes later, there was another landing, then a third and a fourth, until two companies and the battalion command had been lifted to the place. The troops fanned out only to regroup immediately into combat position. At 2 P.M. another company was relifted to village T., about three kilometers of the battleground [sic]. But soon after the landing, five puppet soldiers were cut down by booby and grenade traps laid by the guerrillas. The enemy hastened to move the rest to where their battalion command post had been set up.

Then, suddenly the sky darkened and a storm came with violent wind and rolling thunder. It rained heavily, bringing great relief to the fighters after 10 hours of exposure to a sweltering heat. As the enemy finished their landing operation, a signal flare was fired into the air. Guns of all calibers blazed away from the liberation fighters' fortifications. The enemy was thrown into disarray right in the first minutes. The captain battalion commander together with all his battalion staff were put out of action. Communication with their headquarters was cut off. All the enemy companies were flushed out into the open fields. At the first order, the Liberation Army men sprang out of their fortifications and made straight for the enemy, driving wedges between their formations. As planned, company two, like a dagger, dashed into several groups. The enemy tried to regroup but they were quickly encircled and wiped out. Amidst the crackle of machineguns, the explosion of grenades and the shouts for charge came the distinct and authoritative orders:

"Surrender and you'll be spared!

"Drop your guns and you'll enjoy lenient treatment! "

While the battle was raging, word came that company five had captured 16 enemy troops with all their weapons. The news rejoiced everyone. The battle ended more quickly than expected. After 10 minutes, only sporadic submachine bursts were heard on the main battlefield. Suddenly from the command post came the order to company three to track down the enemy remnants fleeing in the direction of hamlet F.

It continued to rain cats and dogs. Men of company three immediately went after the fleeing enemy across the field now littered with puppet soldiers' corpses. Knowing that they were being pursued, the enemy ran as

fast as their legs could carry them. None dared return a fireshot. In their flight they dropped everything: haversacks, cartridge belts, grenade pouches.. some jettisoned even their rifles and fled into the hamlet, hiding wherever they could. Many flocked into civilian anti-artillery shelters. A group of them huddled into Mrs. Sau's shelter, pushing her and her baby into a corner. By now Mrs. Sau could already hear distinctly the shouts of the liberation fighters and a voice calling out, "This way, they ran this way!" She held her baby closer to her chest and told the puppet soldiers:

"Let me go out and see which way the Viet Congs are coming and I'll warn you".

One of the soldiers said beseechingly:

"Save us and the National Government will reward you"

This set Mrs. Sau's nerves on edge. She said to herself: "Your National Government has three times dropped bombs and burnt my home, and its army has killed my brother.". She came out of the shelter and looked round. Seeing some liberation fighters in the distance, she called out earnestly, "Come here, they are in this shelter!" Immediately a group of liberation fighters came, surrounded the shelter and called on the soldiers inside to give themselves up. As the latter resisted, a grenade was tossed in killing all the 17 occupants.

At the other end of the hamlet, Mr. Eau also got out of his shelter and called out to the liberation fighters:

"They are hiding here!"

The enemy stubbornly resisted. They were finished off by the liberation fighters. Mrs. Bay laughed proudly:

"Yes, yes, that's how we must deal with the mercenaries who refuse to heed reason!"

From remaining troops were hiding in a pigsty. [sentence as received] at the approach of the P. L. A. F. men they dropped their guns and raised their hands.

"I surrender, I surrender!"

The battle ended completely. Army men and guerrillas began collecting war trophies. The population came out of shelters to welcome the triumphant liberation fighters. From the other end of the hamlet, some villagers took pleasure in counting the enemy dead. Old T. with a bronze-like chest forced his way among the crowds and said in his stentorian voice:

"Well done, boys. That's what I'd call a battle! A battalion wiped out in 15 minutes, and 50 prisoners and 35 guns captured!

The news of the complete annihilation of a main force battalion in Village L. was frightening for the "Regional Forces". For many following days, none of them dared venture out to their posts. The spies and informers were also bewildered, many fled to the towns. [? Availing] themselves of the enemy's disarray, the people shut up in "strategic hamlets" rose up and broke the enemy's grip, punished the cruel agents and razed the fortifications before returning to their home villages.