

CHARGING CHARLIE'S CHARGE
Duc Pho, Vietnam, 15 July 1967

AVDC-C-CTG-3

By Garold L. Tippin
Major, Infantry

On 15 July 1967, Company C, 1st Bn 35th Inf, 3d Bde 25th Inf Div was conducting a Search and Destroy Operation in the rugged terrain about 15 Kilometers SW of Duc Pho, Vietnam. The area that the company was operating in consists of rugged mountains whose slopes are covered with thick jungle undergrowth. In most places the double canopy completely shuts out the sunlight. On this particular day the temperature was 103° and the men of Charlie Company were thirsty, hot and tired. The Battalion had received intelligence that an NVA Battalion was operating in the area. In an attempt to find the enemy and gain tactical surprise, the Battalion Commander, Major James E. Moore Jr., Mclean, Va., decided to infiltrate his Company into the area on foot with three days rations.

On the third day the company was moving south on two axes. The 2nd and 3rd platoons were on a high ridgeline with the company (-) moving parallel in the valley below. The 2nd and 3rd platoons were to swing down a finger to the east and link up with the remainder of the company. At about 1000 hrs the two platoons on the ridge began their movement downhill. The 2nd platoon was in the lead with the 3rd platoon following, echeloned to the left. At 1035 hrs the 2nd platoon commanded by, 2nd Lt Anthony M. Hassa, North Hollywood, California, approached an enemy bunker from the rear. The position was orientated to fire east down the finger. Three NVA ran from the bunker and were quickly cut down. Two AK-47's and one Chicom LMG were captured. (See figure 1).

The platoons continued moving cautiously down the finger. Suddenly, the jungle interrupted in a blaze of fire. Two men were wounded in the initial volley. The enemy had evidently allowed them to get within 15-20 meters before they opened up. According to PSG Jack H. Jasper, Lawton,

Okla., the Plat Sgt 2nd plat, "The fire was so intense that no one could move - if he did he was hit. We had nine men hit in the first 30 minutes. The men were magnificent! - they followed orders and operated like machines. As our firepower built up the enemy fire decreased. We fired sixteen, M-72 LAWs during the firefight. I'll never be without LAWs again, they are a good weapon. I don't know how many we killed but I do know those LAW's really hurt the PAVN's." (See figure 2).

The third platoon maneuvered to the left in an attempt to flank the enemy. However, it wasn't long before they too were heavily engaged with two enemy bunkers. (See figure 3). The 3rd platoon leader, 2nd Lt James H. Smith, Patterson, N.J., was hit in the arm. He picked up a 45 cal pistol and assaulted one of the bunkers. He was hit again in the left leg and was pinned down by the heavy fire. SP/4 Lawrence W. Ireland, Houston, Texas the platoon medic, ran through the enemy fire and carried Lt Smith back to a covered position where his wounds could be tended.

In the meantime, Capt John H. Cavender, Waycross, Georgia, the company commander, was bringing his 1st and 4th platoons up the finger in an attempt to close the pincer on the enemy. The 4th (Wpns) platoon was being used as a rifle platoon for this operation. (See figure 4). His elements were fired upon by a lone rifleman at the base of the finger. When fire was returned the enemy fled. The vegetation in this area was so thick that the elements with the Company CP were forced to move on the narrow trail. Capt Cavender sent the 1st and 2nd sqds of the 1st platoon toward a small knob east of the enemy to act as a blocking force. (See figure 5). He then maneuvered the remainder of the 1st plat and the 4th plat to the north of the enemy. (See figure 6). When this had been accomplished he moved forward with a squad to locate the enemy positions and determine his course of action.

At this time the men of Charlie Company believed there were only two enemy bunkers, the ones that were engaged with the 2nd and 3rd platoons.

Upon approaching these positions from the rear, Capt Cavender and the squad began receiving heavy automatic fire from their left front, resulting in several casualties.

The Battalion Commander, Maj Moore and his S-3, Major Garold L. Tippin, Columbus, Ohio, had been in the air over the battle since 1100 hrs. Capt Cavender requested an ammo resupply and medevac for two seriously wounded men while he completed his maneuver and brought forward his 90mm RR. There were no landing zones in the area, so, at 1230 hrs, one squad from the 2nd plat pulled back 100 meters to care for the wounded and assist in the resupply. (See figure 7). The Bn Cmdr requested a medevac helicopter with a hoist and flew back to the fire base in his C&C (Command Helicopter) to pick up ammunition. Meanwhile, the squad from the 2nd plat began clearing the underbrush for the medevac and resupply drop. Minutes later, the Bn Cmdr returned; the C&C flew down and hovered at tree top level while the ammunition was dropped to the waiting men below.

The 3rd platoon using M-72 LAWS maneuvered and destroyed the two bunkers to their immediate front. By this time they were receiving heavy fire from further to their east. Because of the dense vegetation and the proximity of US troops, artillery was not feasible and gunships could do little through the thick jungle canopy. Maj Moore talked to the Company Commander concerning the feasibility of pulling back and bringing in TAC air. Capt Cavender stated that the enemy fire was so heavy and accurate that he felt he would sustain more casualties by withdrawing. He also had all escape routes cut off and was waiting for his 90mm recoilless rifle to be brought forward for a direct shot at the enemy bunkers. At this time it appeared as if the fire was coming from one or two positions that were situated in the saddle.

The disposition of Charlie Company was as follows. The 2nd and 3rd platoons were west of the enemy positions. Two squads of the 1st plat, the

4th platoon and Company CP group were to the north and two squads from the 1st had laboriously worked their way up to the knob to the east. The only gap in the encirclement was to the south, but it was covered effectively by fire from the 2 sqds east of the enemy positions.

By 1420 hrs the medevac ship had arrived and evacuated two of the wounded by hoist. At this time, however, there were 14 more wounded which had been brought to the rear. The Bn Surgeon Capt Carroll P. Osgood, West Hartford, Connecticut, volunteered to be lowered into the battle area to care for the wounded and organize their evacuation. On the medevac ship's third trip, the doctor was lowered into the area, with much needed blood plasma, and another wounded man was evacuated. Unfortunately, the hoist on the medevac ship broke, so a CH-47 Chinook was requested to hoist out the remaining wounded. When it arrived four more wounded men were hoisted aboard. The Brigade Surgeon, Capt Dennis E. Lee, St. Louis, Mo. was on the Chinook with medical personnel and as soon as the wounded were lifted aboard their treatment began. The hoist was not working properly and the Chinook hovered for 45 minutes in the battle area while the men were being extracted. As the fifth casualty was being lifted the hoist stuck in place. The Chinook proceeded toward the 25th Med hospital with the wounded man dangling some 50 feet below. Maj Moore then directed the Chinook to an open area and landed his ship. The man was removed from the hoist and taken to the medevac center by the C&C. Because of the soldier's condition this action probably saved his life.

While the Chinook was extracting the wounded the Company attempted to neutralize the bunkers using M-72 LAWs and the 90mm recoilless rifle. The thick vegetation hampered these efforts, although they did get several direct hits. By this time Charlie Company had 17 wounded. Captain Cavender decided, therefore, that he could no longer afford to continue the stalemate. The enemy fire was extremely accurate and his casualties had been steadily increasing. It seemed as though everytime one of the men exposed himself he was hit

by the unseen marksmen. Therefore, while the hook was making the final extractions, Capt Cavender organized his men for a final assault. At 1600 hrs, using the 2nd and 3rd platoons as a base of fire, Capt Cavender led the two squads of the first platoon and the fourth platoon in the final assault. The assault wave rose up as one man. Shouting and screaming at the top of their lungs they closed on the enemy positions. The violent assault was so effective that some of the enemy fled from the bunkers, others were found cowering in their holes. As the men ran forward they threw hand grenades in the enemy bunkers, and cut down the fleeing enemy. It wasn't until the positions were overrun that the men from Charlie Company realized that there were five large bunkers arranged in a circle instead of the one or two they had expected to find. (See figure 8). In and around the bunkers 25 NVA bodies were found along with 6 AK-47's, 3 IMG's, 2 SKS, 1 Mauser and several grenades.

1/Lt David W. Hockett, Marengo, Iowa, platoon leader of the 4th platoon, led his platoon in the final devastating charge. He said, "About 1600 the CO informed me that my platoon and two squads from the 1st would assault the enemy position. I organized my platoon into two waves; instructing the 2nd wave to fire in the trees above the first wave and to move up and replace any men hit in the first wave. I was in the middle and the CO was on the right. On the signal we moved out; after a few meters, enemy fire became intense and the line began to hesitate. At this time Capt Cavender let out with that "Georgia Rebel Yell" of his, and that relieved the tension. The men picked up the cry and we surged forward through the enemy positions.

"As I broke through the thick foliage I saw Sgt Michale H. Mortenson, Chicago, Ill, assaulting two bunkers under the covering fire of Dale W. Kindred, Arrowsmith, Ill. Kindred was firing directly into the apertures of the bunkers as Mortenson ran forward and threw in grenades."

"SP/4 Clyde F. Walker, Corinne, Utah, jumped into the last bunker, screaming & using his rifle as a club - he was hit three times by the remaining NVA inside - he got one; then we pulled him out and tossed in two grenades - that finished the fight. It was suddenly very quiet, there were dead NVA all over the place. There is no doubt in my mind that once we started yelling - the battle was ours. I felt then that nothing could stop us".

Sgt Mortenson said, "I don't think we could have taken the position without the final charge. I already had three men in my fire team hit. Once we saw the bunkers and started yelling, those gooks must have known they were dead - They had no where to go and nothing to do but die".

After the battle Capt Cavender said, "This battle was won by the men, not artillery or airpower - but the infantrymen who were willing to close with and destroy the enemy. They did everything I asked of them and more. Once we started our assault I knew that it would soon be over, and victory was ours".

"The longer we stayed where we were, the more casualties we were taking. I have never seen enemy fire so accurate. It seemed like everytime a man moved he was hit. We were too close for artillery and air, and we couldn't pull back without taking a lot of casualties. I know Charlie was surprised when we charged. His fire was still heavy - but not as accurate and we could see some of them trying to run out of their holes. When I heard the men yelling and saw the determination on their faces - I was proud to be an infantryman and their company commander. I sure wouldn't have wanted to be in one of those bunkers. I still prefer to use our basic concept of finding and fixing the enemy - then use all the artillery and air we can get. However, I feel that on that day I fulfilled a company commanders dream - to lead his men in an overwhelming, successful assault of an enemy fortified position. We learned an important lesson that day and that is that an aggressive, well trained American rifle company is the ultimate weapon.

This action by Co C is an outstanding example of the application of fire and maneuver plus the use of organic direct fire weapons. No artillery, air, or gunships were employed. Support was not used due to the close-quarters fighting with infantryman engaged within 15-20 meters of the enemy. Of particular note was the final assault in true infantry style, through heavy enemy fire, and the fact that only one man was wounded.

Company C had a total of 18 casualties, two of which subsequently died of their wounds. The remainder of the wounded were not serious. After the battle area was policed, the company moved back down the finger to the east to their night location. Here, the remaining six walking wounded were extracted. (See figure 9).

The Battalion's normal concept of operations has been to use the Infantry to find and fix the enemy and then to use all available fire support means to kill the enemy. Company C had been in many other battles where the enemy body count was much larger and their casualties were fewer. However, the men were proud of this victory, as they had met an NVA platoon in prepared positions; fighting on the enemy's own terms, and defeated him as Infantrymen.



EXCERPT FROM GENERAL ORDERS
NO. 35
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
WASHINGTON 25, D.C., 8 APRIL 1952

DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATION — Citation of units.

DISTINGUISHED UNIT CITATION — As authorized by Executive Order 9396 (sec. I, WD Bul. 22, 1943), superseding Executive Order 9075 (sec. III, WD Bul. 11, 1942), citation of the following units in the general orders indicated is confirmed in accordance with AR 260-15 in the name of the President of the United States as public evidence of deserved honor and distinction. The citation reads as follows:

Companies I and L, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, and the following attached units:

Heavy Machine Gun Platoon, Company M, 35th Infantry Regiment,

75-mm Recoilless Rifle Platoon, Company M, 35th Infantry Regiment,

are cited for outstanding performance of duty and extraordinary heroism in action against the enemy in the vicinity of Tangwon-ni, Korea, during the period 6 to 8 September 1951. On the afternoon of 6 September, Companies I and L and attached units joined in the defense of Hills 682 and 717. As the friendly forces consolidated their defensive positions, they were subjected to a heavy mortar and artillery barrage. The barrage could not be returned because of a communications failure between the forward observation team and the supporting friendly artillery. At 0015 hours on 7 September, the tempo of the hostile fire increased, with approximately 1,000 shells landing on the friendly emplacements during a 35-minute period. With the artillery barrage lifted, an enemy force estimated at two reinforced enemy regiments and supported by mortar and automatic-weapons fire, launched a fanatical attack against the perimeters of Companies I and L. Throughout a 6-hour period, the fiercely determined enemy troops hurled themselves again and again at the friendly positions, but were repeatedly repulsed by the valiant units defending the two hills. As the hostile forces were working their way behind the friendly defenses, both companies discovered that their supply of ammunition was almost exhausted and, realizing that it would be suicidal to remain in their present positions because supplies and ammunition could not be brought to them through the encircling enemy, Companies I and L and attached units consolidated forces in an attempt to fight their way back to the friendly lines. Constantly under attack, the friendly forces gathered all of their wounded and began to battle savagely in order to break out of the enemy entrapment. Despite the numerically superior hostile troops, who continuously harassed the friendly forces from all sides, Companies I and L and attached units expending their remaining ammunition with deadly accuracy, successfully fought their way back to the friendly lines. In the entire engagement, an estimated 600 enemy troops were killed or wounded. Companies I and L and attached units displayed such gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in carrying out their assignment under difficult and hazardous conditions as to set them apart and above other units participating in the campaign. The extraordinary heroism and steadfast devotion to duty displayed by the members of Companies I and L, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, reflect great credit on themselves and are in keeping with the finest traditions of the military service. (General Orders 968, Headquarters, Eighth United States Army, Korea, 6 December 1951.) Distinguished Unit Emblem.

The Distinguished Unit Emblem is awarded to units of the Armed Forces of the United States and cobelligerent nations for extraordinary heroism in action against the armed enemy occurring on or after 7 December 1941. The unit must display such gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in accomplishing its mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions as to set it apart and above other units participating in the same campaign. The degree of heroism required is the same as that which would warrant award of a Distinguished-Service Cross to an individual. Extended periods of combat duty or participating in a large number of operational missions, either ground or air, is not sufficient. Only on rare occasions will a unit larger than a battalion or air group qualify for award of this decoration. It is a blue ribbon set in a gold colored metal frame of laurel leaves; it is worn immediately above the pocket of the right breast to the wearer's right of all other emblems.