

Infantry In Action



INFANTRY CHARGE

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*EDITOR'S NOTE. This is another in our *Infantry in Action* series. We use the series to highlight the U.S. Infantryman through historical accounts of his past combat actions during World War II, the Korean War, and the war in Vietnam. This*

*article has been reprinted from our 1967 book, *INFANTRY IN VIETNAM* (pages 125-129), and reinforces our belief that the U.S. Infantrymen is one of the best fighting men in the world.*

There are times when many of the fundamentals of offensive combat must be put aside and a decision sought by an overwhelming infantry assault on an enemy's fortified position conducted by an aggressive, well trained rifle company. No better example of this can be found than that illustrated by the actions of Company C, 1st Battalion, 35th U.S. Infantry in difficult terrain about 15 kilometers southwest of Due Pho in July 1967.

On 15 July 1967, Company C was on a search and destroy operation in an area that consisted of rugged mountains whose slopes were covered with thick jungle undergrowth. In most places the double jungle canopy shut out the sunlight, while the temperatures hovered during the daylight hours near the 100-degree mark. During the previous days, the 1st Battalion had received intelligence reports that a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) battalion was operating in the area, hoping to locate the enemy and thus gain tactical surprise, the battalion commander, Major James L. Moore, Jr., had decided to send Company C to seek out the enemy unit and bring it to task.

Company C moved south on two axes: the 2d and 3d Platoons on a high ridge line with the remainder of the company moving parallel in the valley below. Captain John H. Cavendar planned to swing his two platoons on the ridge line down a trail to catch further on to join up with the rest of the company.

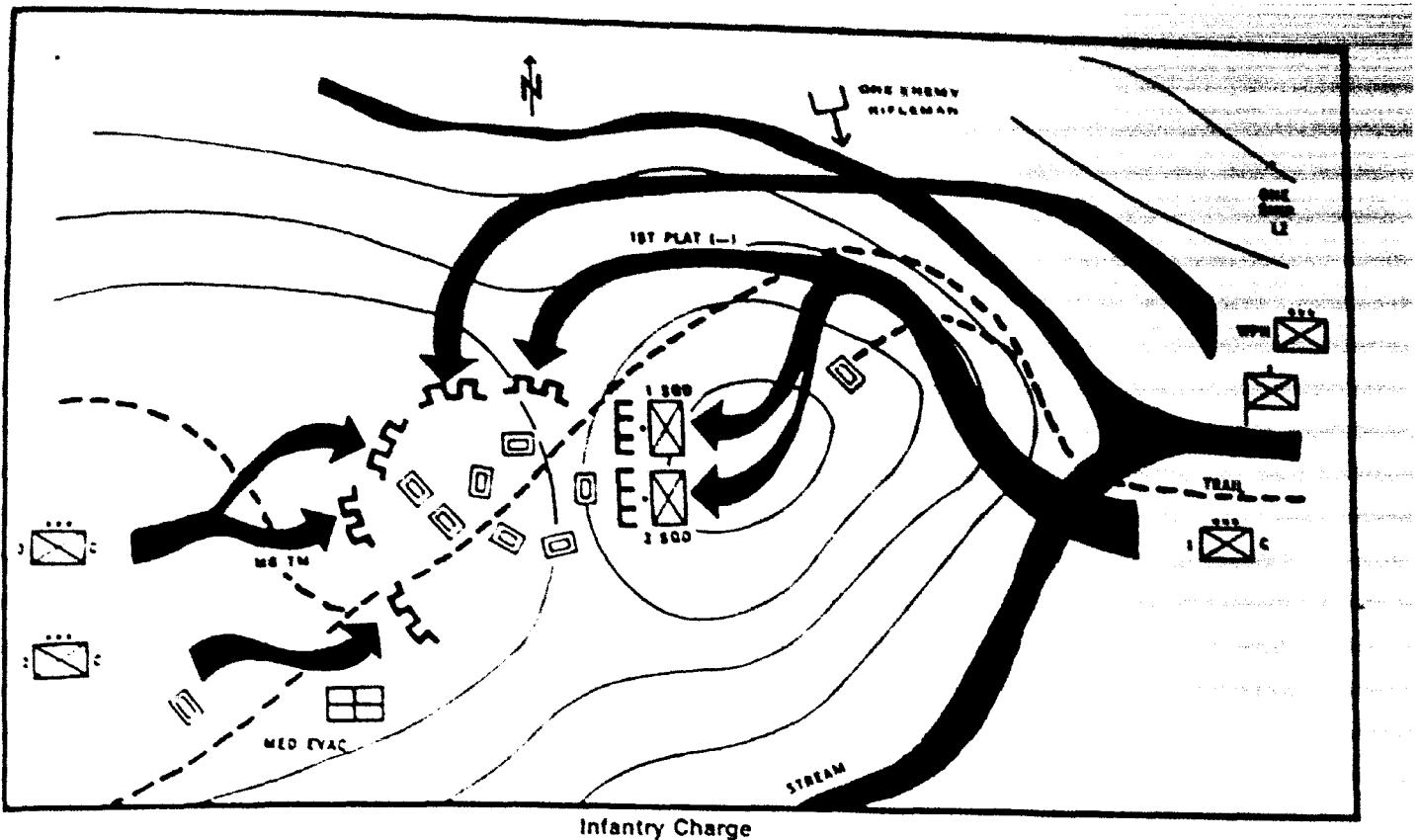
At about 1600, the two platoons began their movement down trail. The 2d Platoon was leading, with the 3d Platoon following and angled to the left. Thirty minutes later, the 2d Platoon came down to a bunker positioned to fire east across the trail. Three NVA soldiers ran from the bunker

but were quickly cut down (see map). The platoons continued their downward trek.

Suddenly, and without warning, an enemy force hidden in the jungle opened fire—intense, deadly. Nine U.S. soldiers went down almost immediately. But the remainder, following the orders of their leaders and reacting with machine-like precision, built up their own firepower; the LAW was used to good advantage, and the enemy firing decreased in intensity. But the 3d Platoon, trying to flank the enemy position, also ran into heavily fortified bunkers and it, too, was soon engaged in a hot fire fight with an undetermined number of enemy soldiers.

Captain Cavendar, hearing the sound of firing above him, began moving his 1st and 4th Platoons up the ridge to close the pincer on the enemy force. Since the vegetation on the ridge was so thick, Cavendar sent the 1st and 2d Squads of the 1st Platoon toward a small knob east of the enemy to act as a blocking force, while he maneuvered the remainder of the 1st Platoon and the 4th Platoon, reorganized for this operation into a rifle platoon formation, to the north. When his units were in position, he moved forward with a squad to locate the exact extent of the enemy's positions.

Major Moore had been in the air over the battle zone since 1100 and Captain Cavendar radioed a request to him for an ammunition resupply drop and for a medical evacuation mission for two of his more seriously wounded men. In the meantime, he halted all forward movement until he could move his 90mm recoilless rifle forward to a position from which it could be brought to bear on the enemy's bunkers.



Infantry Charge

There were no landing zones in the area, so Cavendar had one squad from the 2d Platoon back off 100 meters to care for the wounded and to assist in the resupply mission; the men fell to clearing away the underbrush for the medical evacuation helicopter and for the supply drop, while Major Moore headed back to the firebase to pick up ammunition. He returned within a few minutes, and as his helicopter hovered at treetop level the ammunition was pushed out to the waiting men below.

Using LAWs again, the 3d Platoon maneuvered and destroyed the bunkers which were holding up its advance, but it soon began to receive fire from further to the east. Supporting artillery fires could not be brought in because of the denseness of the jungle and the nearness of the platoon to the enemy, and gunships could do little through the thick jungle canopy. Moore suggested to Cavendar that the company move back while he brought in an air strike, but Cavendar intimated that his platoons would sustain too many casualties in trying to withdraw since the enemy's fire was so heavy and accurate. Because he had all of the escape routes cut off, Cavendar felt that as soon as his recoilless rifle came up to take direct shots at the bunkers, he could knock out the enemy's strong point and Company C could then launch a final assault.

At 1420 the medical evacuation helicopter had arrived, used its hoist to pick up the two wounded, and had departed. But there were 14 more wounded now who needed help and the battalion's surgeon, Captain Carroll P. Osgood, volunteered to be lowered to Company C's position to care for the wounded and organize their evacuation. On the medical evacuation helicopter's third trip, Captain Osgood was lowered into the area, with much-needed blood plasma. Unfortunately, the hoist on the helicopter broke, so a CH-47 Chinook was requested to hoist out the remaining wounded.

When the larger helicopter arrived, four more of the

wounded were hoisted aboard, where the surgeon from the 3d Brigade, 25th U.S. Infantry Division—Captain Dennis E. Lee—instigated further medical treatment. But since the hoist did not function properly, a total of 45 minutes was consumed in getting the four wounded up into the ship. As a fifth casualty was being lifted, the hoist stuck; unable to move the hoist either up or down, the helicopter commander decided to chance a flight to the nearest medical installation with the wounded man dangling below his ship. And so he started, but Major Moore, observing the happenings, directed the Chinook commander to proceed to an open area which he could see off in the distance. Moore then had his pilot land his ship in that open place, and dismounting, as the Chinook again hovered, removed the wounded man from the hoist. Loading the soldier into his helicopter, Major Moore delivered him to the medical evacuation center.

With Captain Cavendar, though, the recoilless rifle had not made as great an impression on the enemy as he had hoped. Although the crew of the recoilless rifle did get several direct hits, the thick vegetation hampered their efforts. The enemy's fire was extremely accurate and the company's casualties were steadily increasing—it seemed as though every time one of the men exposed himself, he was hit by an unseen marksman.

Cavendar decided that the time had come for Company C to assault the enemy bunkers—to stay where it was would only invite complete disaster. At 1600, then, using the 2d and 3d Platoons as a base of fire, Cavendar led the two squads of the 1st Platoon and the 4th Platoon in a final assault. Rising as one, shouting and screaming at the tops of their lungs, the men charged forward.

The enemy soldiers were caught unawares, and as the U.S. soldiers closed in on them, some fled from their bunkers while others cowered behind their erstwhile protection. As the men

When Company C ran forward they threw hand grenades in the enemy bunkers and fired at the enemy soldiers who were attempting to flee. Not until the positions had been overrun did they realize there were five large bunkers arranged in a circle instead of the one or two they had expected to find.

After the battle, Captain Cavendar 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 every time 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 would not 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 commander's dream: to lead his men in an overwhelming, successful assault of an enemy fortified position. We learned an important lesson that day—an aggressive, well trained American rifle company is the ultimate weapon.

SWAP SHOP



DOUBLE-STAKED CONCERTINA FENCE

The purpose of an obstacle is to divert the enemy or delay him by making him either redeploy or conduct a breach.

When adjoining ends of the concertina rolls in a wire obstacle have been attached to each other or to a common anchoring stake, an opposing force (OPFOR) can remove literally hundreds of meters of connected fencing with a grappling hook attached to a single vehicle. The moving wire tangle can also detonate any tilt-fuzed antitank mines or any antipersonnel devices deployed on or near the fence.

Once such a large breach has been created, OPFOR dismounted or mounted elements can pass through it without having to redeploy from combat formation. They can maintain their momentum and make the most of their combat power, thus rendering the obstacle useless.

When double anchoring stakes are used to fasten adjoining wire rolls independently, however, a single breaching vehicle can remove only one roll-width of wire at a time, creating a single 10-meter gap.

The enemy must then move from his deployed combat formation to march column to pass through the narrow gap one vehicle at a time, or he must expend critical time in a probable engagement area conducting other breaches. Either way, he presents a lucrative target and the obstacle accomplishes its mission of slowing him down.

Note in the sketch that the end of each concertina roll is independently attached to a stake anchored three to six inches from the next one.

