

NVA human waves hit 25th Inf base defenders kill 399

FSB CROOK — Defenders of this tiny fire support base killed 399 members of an estimated NVA regiment that tried to overrun the base in two human wave assaults.

The successive attempts to overrun this base 14 miles northwest of Tay Ninh, five miles from the Cambodian border, were beaten back by 25th Infantry Division soldiers of Co. B, 3rd Bn., 22nd Inf.

After having 76 killed in an abortive attack launched one night, the NVA launched another attack the next morning.

"We observed movement outside of the wire shortly before 3 a.m.," said Lt. James Trebilcock. "We pulled in our listening posts and opened fire on the NVA soldiers. We started getting incoming rockets and mortars, but we smashed the main force of the attack before it really got started."

"There was an NVA sapper squad near the wire but the main force was near a woodland. We just had them outgunned — that was all there was to it."

Attacking in monsoon showers, the NVA sappers blew holes in the perimeter wire at several points but could not get through the withering fire laid down by the stubborn defenders.

"We saw NVA soldiers standing up and walking around while we laid direct M-79 grenade fire on their positions. It was hard to believe," Sgt. Steve Layton said.

During the assault, Air Force "Spooky" gunships laced the area in front of the defending infantrymen, while flareships illuminated the battlefield, enabling fire directors to call in artillery on the assaulting force with pinpoint accuracy.

While the main ground attack came from the jungle to the north-northwest of the base, sappers probed from all sides.

"They blew a hole in the fence about 20 meters wide in front of one of the bunkers," said Lt. Roland J. Smith, "but we stopped them with machinegun fire."

As night gave way to day, the defeated NVA soldiers pulled back and fled into the jungle, leaving 323 of their dead comrades behind.



HITTING THE GROUND and moving out fast during an assault near Xuan Loc, a combat medic of the 1st Bn., 8th Cav., 1st Cavalry Division heads for the action.

First to die in Vietnam action

Army nurse killed by enemy rocket

CHU LAI — An enemy 122mm rocket fired at the sprawling military complex here struck down the first Army nurse to die as a result of hostile fire in the Vietnam conflict.

The rocket impacted near a heavily populated 312th Evacuation Hospital ward and also killed a Vietnamese child, while wounding 25 other Vietnamese civilians, a military policeman and a medic.

The Army nurse, Lt. Sharon A. Lane, 25, had arrived at the 325-bed 44th Medical Brigade facility on April 29, and immediately assumed duties as a staff nurse in the Vietnamese ward.

"The ward consists of two Quonset-type huts shaped like the letter 'H,'" said Capt. John D. Medlin Jr., commander of the

312th Evacuation Hospital Detachment. "The rocket exploded in the open area between the sides of the 'H' and tossed shrapnel through both walls."

The impact came at 5:55 a.m., one hour and five minutes before the nurse's 12-hour 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. night shift would end. "All the patients were sleeping," said Lt. Patricia E. Carr, the staff nurse who shared night duty with Lt. Lane.

"We were just relaxing before starting to wake the patients up at 6 a.m. I was sitting behind the desk and Lt. Lane was sitting on an empty bed when the rocket hit."

Three other rockets landed one mile south in the South China Sea, while another exploded in an empty field nearby.

Maj. Bruce Lippman was the first doctor on the scene. "I was walking to get some early coffee when I heard the explosion. I couldn't tell where the rocket had landed until I saw a number of Vietnamese running around crying. Then Lt. Carr took my arm, and we went into the shattered ward."

"Nurse Lane died within seconds of being hit by a piece of shrapnel which entered through the throat," the medical officer added.

Lt. Lane's immediate superior at the hospital, Capt. Lorraine W. Monts, said the blonde, brown-eyed girl was an excellent nurse. "She was always so kind to people and listened to them with compassion. She liked

the Vietnamese, and they appreciated her tenderness and concern for them."

"After she had worked in the Vietnamese ward for about six weeks, I asked 'Missy Lane' (that was her nickname), if she would like a transfer," remarked the head nurse. "She replied that she liked it here and wanted to stay."

The chief nurse at the 312th, Lt. Col. Minnie Sue Walker, reiterated that the petite Lt. Lane was a very good nurse.

"Lieutenant Lane served on the staff at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Denver before coming to Vietnam," the chief nurse said. "She fit in beautifully. She was sweet, quiet, and willing to work."

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1st Inf Div wages big battle of year

LAI KHE—"In all my military experience I've never seen our American soldiers do a more magnificent job," said Maj. Gen. Orwin C. Talbott, commanding general of the 1st Infantry Division, following a violent one-day melee throughout the division's area of operation which brought the deaths of 191 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army soldiers.

"Big Red One" troops marked the 25th anniversary of the Normandy Invasion with the division's biggest battle since the Loc Ninh offensive nine months ago.

Action started before dawn with enemy rocket and mortar fire attacks on numerous 1st Division installations and continued until dusk. More than 240 Communist rockets and mortar shells fell in the "Big Red One" operational area.

The first firefight of "The Longest Day — 25 years later" took place three miles northwest of An Loc when troops from Co. B, 2nd Bn., 2nd Inf., ran into an estimated NVA company fighting from well-fortified bunkers. When the skirmish had ended, 115 NVA lay dead.

While the 2nd Inf. soldiers were mopping up the remaining NVA resistance, 3rd Bde. troops supported by the 1st Bn., 4th Armored Cav. drove another NVA force deep into the rubber trees 11 miles south of An Loc. Ripping the fleeing enemy with miniguns, artillery, and 50 cali-

ber machinegun fire, "Big Red One" soldiers killed 38 more NVA.

Troops from the 1st Bde. quickly repelled an enemy probe on the perimeter at Quan Loi, killing 14 Reds and detaining five suspects. Other brigade contacts claimed 18 more enemy deaths. The remaining six VC were killed by supporting elements throughout the day.

General Talbott summed up the day's heavy action, saying, "The enemy appeared in several areas around the An Loc-Quan Loi area today. In every instance, our forces were present in overwhelming strength. By late afternoon, all the enemy had been destroyed and no more could be found on the battlefield."

Artillery smashes VC in area of 82nd Abn

CU CHI—On a 45-day operation west of here A Btry., 2nd Bn., 321st Arty., made their presence felt with accurate fire in support of the 1st Bn., 305th Inf., leaving 46 enemy dead on the battlefield.

Firing from the dust bowl of LZ Tracy, the battery's list of killed by artillery began when its fire base was hit by enemy rocket and mortar fire. Quickly striking back with their 105mm howitzers on counter-rocket targets, the artillery unit was credited with three kills when the infantry unit swept the suspected rocket locations after daybreak.

Two days later an aerial observer spotted several VC in the open, and relayed the grid coordinates. Speedily zeroing in on the area, A battery received credit for 8 KBA's after only 26 rounds fired.



North Vietnamese sapper zapped

Fist fight kayoes invading lightweight

LE BALDY — Sgt. Larry Cathey may not be a Golden Gloves boxer, but to an NVA sapper the young Americal Division soldier could have been heavyweight champion of the world.

The 194th Inf. Brigade soldier was sleeping in his hootch here when an incoming rocket shattered the silence and signalled the beginning of an early morning sapper attack.

The 30-year-old sergeant sat up instantly, jumped out of bed and hurtled out the door of his building to head for the fighting positions.

No sooner was the supply sergeant from Co. B, 4th Bn., 31st Inf., outside then he found himself, unarmed, practically face to face with two very surprised sappers in the inky darkness.

"They were still about six feet from me, so I let them keep coming and jumped the first one — the other one turned and ran," said Cathey.

Lt. Haze A. McDougal, the company executive officer, was hurriedly leaving his hootch when "I just saw a glimpse of

Cathey as he tackled the NVA.

"I couldn't fire on the NVA for fear of hitting Cathey so I was forced to hold off," said McDougal.

"I hit the first one three times," said Cathey, "and he pulled a grenade, so I hit him once more, grabbed his AK and took off. The grenade exploded and the bruised NVA crawled under a building, getting back in a corner against some sandbags," he concluded. Later in the battle, the sapper was KO'd by a party of Cathey's buddies.

Though a bit shaky after his brush with the enemy, Cathey sought more sappers. He joined two other men led by McDougal who were attempting to make their way to a bunker, about 300 yards away. The perimeter guard bunker had received heavy enemy fire, and communications were knocked out. The infantrymen feared their buddies in the sandbagged position were surrounded by enemy and in danger of being overrun.

Moving quickly along the edge of the road leading to the bunker, the rescue

squad received heavy enemy fire from four desperate sappers. The NVA were armed with three AK's and one rocket-propelled-grenade launcher. In the confusion of battle, two of the sappers were attempting to get in through the same obstacle.

One of the NVA soldiers hurled a grenade, which landed close to Cathey. A piece of shrapnel struck between his eyes, but only broke the skin and gave him a bloody nose. The four enemy were brought under fire and killed by the infantrymen.

Cathey continued on with his squad, only to arrive at the bunker and find it surrounded. Under incoming RPG rounds, the sergeant helped evacuate the wounded. Three NVA soldiers were trying to crawl through the perimeter wire directly in front of the bunker. "Everytime they moved," said McDougal, "Sgt. Cathey and the other men just picked them off."

Back in the company area, Cathey assisted in trapping two of the escaping

NVA still inside the perimeter. Pinning them down with heavy fire inside the first row of barbed wire, the infantrymen finished them off with grenades.

Like the rest of the company, Cathey was unable to detect any more evading NVA, and waited for the dawn in a firing position. As the sun slowly rose over the bloody battlefield, the sergeant joined his company in a sweep of the surrounding hills inside the perimeter.

The men observed several NVA soldiers escaping through the concertina. Cathey followed McDougal and five other men as they gave chase to the fleeing enemy. The cross-country pursuit carried the Americans almost 700 yards outside the perimeter. They followed several blood trails before they were ordered back to the company area and security.

The sergeant then helped in the body count and removal of clusters of explosives the enemy had strapped to their bodies. The quick reaction to the sapper strike had accounted for 17 dead enemy lying near and in the company area.



EVERYBODY OUT as soldiers of the 1st Bde.'s 2nd Bn., 327th Inf., 101st Airborne Division leave a chopper being used in the unit's operation in the southern A Shau Valley.

Savage assault on Americal inflicts heavy US casualties

DUC PHO — A battalion-size NVA force savagely assaulted an Americal unit four and one-half miles south of here, inflicting heavy casualties before six APCs arrived to beat back the enemy.

Co. C, 3rd Bn., 1st Inf., 11th Bde., was conducting a search and clear mission when they were hit hard by an enemy force that was to suffer 51 dead in the action.

"We were walking through cane and potato fields in a wedge formation," explained Staff Sgt. Willie T. Helms, 1st platoon leader. "There were sugar cane fields to our rear, hedgerows to our right, a hill to our left and nothing but open potato fields to our front."

The enemy waited until the soldiers reached the potato fields before making their move. "When we got well into the fields, we started receiving sniper fire," said 2nd Platoon leader Lt. Paul H. Yamada. "We started returning fire and that's when they threw everything they had at us. We began receiving RPGs, automatic weapons fire, and small arms fire from three sides and suffered heavy casualties."

The infantrymen then called for support from E Troop, 1st

Cav., who immediately responded with six APCs under the command of Staff Sgt. Gary T. Whitnack. "The first thing we did when we got to the area was to give Charlie Company supporting fire and get the wounded to safety," explained Whitnack. Early in the action, he suffered facial wounds from an M-79 round but refused medical attention and continued to coordinate the APCs with the infantry unit.

After the wounded had been cared for, the trucks were put on line and began sweeping toward the enemy.

"We put down a heavy base of fire and then began to move over the enemy positions," Whitnack continued. "As we passed the spider holes, we tossed the grenades right back at them." Two other infantry companies then moved in to help rout the enemy.

Infantry, gunships unite for 84 kills

BEN TRE—Two companies of the 9th Infantry Division's 2nd Bde. teamed up with gunships to kill 84 VC in a six-hour battle six miles northwest of here.

Co. A had been airlifted into the area in the morning, and light contact was established immediately. Gunships from D Troop, 3rd Squadron, 5th Armored Cav., killed four VC during the landing operations.

Heavy fighting began in mid-afternoon when the infantrymen found an estimated 100 VC hiding in hootches in thick nipa palm growth. The VC were well-armed and fought back with heavy automatic weapon and rocket propelled grenade fire.

Co. C was airlifted from their floating home on the Navy LST supply ship U.S.S. Nueces and inserted into the contact area late in the afternoon.

Artillery and air units were called in to support the infantrymen when they were stopped 75 yards short of the woodline by intense enemy fire.

"Those air strikes were right on the money," said Capt. Dwight A. Beck, company commander. "We were so close to the enemy bunkers, we could hear the shrapnel flying overhead."

A sweep of the area by both companies revealed dozens of freshly dug bunkers and foxholes and a large store of medical supplies. The bunker complex was destroyed the next day by the infantrymen and supporting engineers.

"It was a perfect example of small unit tactics on the part of squadron and platoon leaders and their company commander as they moved against the VC from several different directions simultaneously," said Maj. Michael McNamara, the battalion executive officer.

During the action seven Silver Stars and eight Bronze Stars were earned by the infantrymen, who received the awards in a ceremony soon after the battle ended.

Scout rescues interpreter

CU CHI — Heavy fighting and Vietnamese heroism marked the action when the aero-rifle platoon of C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 17th Air Cav., was inserted into a suspected enemy position 10 miles northeast of here.

After the last attack departed, an estimated platoon-size force of VC began firing grenades and automatic weapons from four bunkers with connecting trenches. Cobra gunships were called in from C Troop and from the 3rd Squadron.

During the hour and a half of intense fighting, C Troop's Kilt Carson Scout, a Hoi Chanh identified as Tran Thai Nghia, saved the life of his American buddy, Spec. 4 George Myers. Myers,

the only interpreter in C Troop, described the events, saying, "I was standing in front of a bunker with Nghia and two other guys when suddenly this hand holding a grenade appeared in the mouth of the bunker. I fired a quick burst with my M16 trying to hit the grenade, suddenly Nghia pulled me away from behind and threw me to the ground. The grenade went off and got another guy who had been standing about 2 feet away from me. If it weren't for Nghia, I probably would have got it, too."

Nghia had been with C Troop for only five days before the action. Prior to becoming a Hoi Chanh seven months ago, he served in the North Vietnamese Army as a "Trung Si" (Staff Sgt.).