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Tan Son Nhut, Vietnam

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Col Dempsey, 13th Avn CO, Dies Aiding Men; Wins DSC

TAN SON NHUT, (USARV-10) — "No, I'm going in after my men."

These are the last known words of a dauntless aviation commander before he was killed by Viet Cong bullets as he was trying to rescue the crews of two downed helicopters.

Colonel Jack T. Dempsey, the commander of the 13th Aviation Battalion, 1st Aviation Brigade, was involved in an airmobile assault near Tam Binh in the Mekong Delta.

He has been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously for his actions.

The Viet Cong had launched a pre-dawn attack on a Vietnamese Revolutionary Development team in Tam Binh. After dawn, the 13th sent five transports loaded with troops of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam into the area. Dempsey was observing the progress of the airlift into the besieged landing zone near the VC's position.

One of the transports was disabled by VC fire. A med-evac ship from the 1st Logistical Command's 82nd Medical Detachment went in to rescue the crew.

Before the wounded could be extracted, the ship was ordered out because of heavy ground fire. As it lifted off, it was also hit and then crashed.

Dempsey then chose to go aid both crews himself, although he was advised against it by one of the alternate mission commanders. Dempsey radioed for gunships and airstrike support. With this cover, he ordered his pilot to dive through the hail of bullets and head for the zone.

Between 50 and 100 feet from the ground, VC fire struck his chopper. He was again advised to pull out, but refused, saying he was going in to get his men.

Intense small arms fire hit Dempsey when the chopper was about five feet from the ground. He radioed he had been hit, but was going on in. A few seconds later, a bullet caught him in the head, killing him instantly.

The chopper dropped to the ground with a hard landing. Major Donald Casper, co-pilot, and the two crewmen, gunner Sp4 Jerry E. Ross and crew chief Sp4 William A. Rhodes, piled out to load the wounded.

It was then they discovered their chopper was not flyable and

that Dempsey was dead. They made two attempts to get his body out and Casper was wounded both times. The heavy VC volley of bullets forced them to retreat to cover. About four hours later, med-evac ships were able to land and extract the crew.



MAKING PROGRESS—Bandoleered and battle weary, these two troopers of the 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division plow through dense jungles near Soui Ga during Operation Junction City. (Photo by Sp5 Kevin Malone, 69th SIG BN)

NVA Unit Surrounds 101st Platoon; Driven Off By 10th Avn Bn Gunships

PHAN RANG, (101st ABN-10) — Gunships from the 10th Aviation Battalion, firing almost blindly through thick jungle foliage, saved a 101st Airborne Brigade platoon which was surrounded

by a NVA unit recently northwest of Song Mao.

After a helicopter assault into the area, the platoon, led by 1st Lt. David M. Belding, from the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry, engaged what was believed to be an NVA squad. While advancing on the enemy, the platoon began receiving fire from its left and right flanks, pinning the unit down.

As the fire increased, the enemy began to assault positions which were being held by wounded paratroopers.

In the midst of the battle, tracer rounds set the dry area afire, filling the air with smoke and impairing vision.

At the beginning of the battle, Capt. Lucius V. Reeves, Company B commander, had called for gunships to help the platoon, but the dense jungle prevented the pilots from the 10th Avn. from finding the exact location of the outnumbered platoon.

"We were almost out of ammunition and the gunships still had not fired. I told them to bring it in as close as possible and I would adjust it from

PLEI DJERENG, (4th INF-10)

"There were more automatic weapons than I could count shooting at us," said Maj. Clifford Roberts, S-3, 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, as he spoke of the attack on the fire support base of the 3rd Brigade, during Operation Junction City which resulted in 596 Viet Cong dead.

"It was still dark when the VC mortars started coming in but we had prepared positions for just such an occurrence. It isn't unusual for Charlie to mortar an artillery unit but to follow a mortar attack with a daylight human wave charge is," Lt. Col. John A. Bender, 3rd Bn. commander, said.

"The actual attack took place about 6:30 in the morning. The VC opened up with numerous automatic weapons and started

to charge. They came out of the wood line and swept toward the 105's," said Sp4 William Blakey who was in the midst of the battle.

"They started to push back more and more positions and it looked as though they were going to put the guns out of action. We leveled our tubes to shoot at point blank range. My men never left the guns, even when the VC were just feet away," said Capt. John Cartland, Battery B, 2nd Battalion, 77th Artillery.

"Charlie pushed us back into a tight perimeter. He was fighting for his life and he was fighting damned well too," said Capt. Jerry Jeffrey, C Battery commander. "Then came the most beautiful sight in the world — APCs and tanks."

"The first thing I saw was two M-48 tanks and I wanted to kiss them," Capt. George Shoemaker, Company A, 3rd Bn. commander, said.

Chaplain Earns SS

BIEN HOA, (173rd ABN-10) — A

Lutheran minister was awarded the Silver Star recently in ceremonies at the 173rd Airborne Brigade Forward Headquarters for his actions when the company he was with came under attack by the Viet Cong last June.

Chaplain (Maj.) Conrad N. Walker was presented the award for bravery by Brig. Gen. John R. Deane, Jr., commander of the 173rd Abn. Bde.

The chaplain accompanied a relief platoon to the site where the company was pinned down by VC sniper fire during Operation Junction City.

The major began doubling as a medic, treating the wounded, and giving spiritual assistance.

"I went to each man and helped him pray," the minister said. "For all of them I performed the 'laying on of hands' in the name of the Holy Trinity, the symbol of healing, to dispel their fears."

Still under sniper fire, the major directed an operation to clear an evacuation area in the thick jungle for helicopters.

The chaplain showed the paratroopers how to notch the trees and exposed himself to sniper fire to guide the falling trees with ropes so they would not hit the wounded waiting to be evacuated.

When the clearing was completed, Walker helped carry each wounded man to the dustoff choppers.

VC Keep 196th's Artillery Busy

TAY NINH, (196th INF-10) —

Two batteries of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade used their big guns to spoil a would-be Viet Cong attack on their position recently in Operation Junction City.

The artillerymen from the 3rd Battalion, 82nd Artillery were alerted to the enemy's plans by an ambush patrol from the brigade's 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry, which had spotted the enemy 1000 meters from the artillery's base camp. The artillery's prompt counter-action stopped what could have been its second mortar attack in less than a week.

Meanwhile, to the north, Batteries A and C blasted remnants of a VC squad which had been ambushed by a patrol from the 196th's 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry.

One dead VC was found. He was wearing full field gear, carried 140 rounds of ammunition and a well-oiled rifle, which indicated he was a member of a hard-core professional unit.

Taken from his body was a document believed to be a sketch of a nearby Viet Cong training center or base camp. Artillery units subsequently fired on the suspected enemy camp.

Wounded Twice, Sgt Fights On

TAN SON NHUT, (USARV-10)

—Wounded twice, dazed from the loss of blood and able to use only one arm, Sgt. Kenneth E. Murphy of the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Infantry, 101st Airborne Brigade, pulled his squad through a NVA ambush with his courage and determination. For his actions he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

The incident took place last November during a search and destroy mission near Tuy Hoa. Murphy was a squad leader with a recondo platoon.

The unit had covered several thousand meters of terrain with no sign of the enemy. Then his point man found and killed an NVA soldier.

Sporadic fire began from the left flank. Murphy led his squad

in an assault on the enemy's positions.

Suddenly the entire hillside was raked with enemy fire. Several of his men fell wounded. Murphy tried to reach them, but the heavy enemy fire pinned him down. Again he tried but was hit in the head by a bullet.

The sergeant continued forward, reached one of the men and carried him to safety. When he went back for another wounded soldier, Murphy was hit in the arm.

Disregarding his wounds, he then organized his squad and led them in an assault of the entrenched enemy positions and personally killed three NVA soldiers.

Behind their leader, the squad broke out of the trap and overwhelmed the enemy force.