

Blackhorse troopers of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment's third squadron today swept through a bunker complex where they had tangled with an estimated reinforced battalion yesterday about 15 miles west of Saigon.

The search yielded a number of Viet Cong bodies left behind after an afternoon of fighting. The U.S. soldiers, working with Vietnamese forces, found a total of 18 enemy dead, some buried in hastily-dug graves.

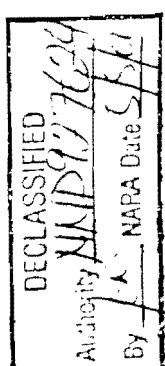
Fighting started early yesterday afternoon when the third squadron's M Company, working with Vietnamese soldiers, swept across open rice paddies toward a hedgerow infested with well-fortified Viet Cong.

The Viet Cong, in sturdy bunkers, opened fire with mortars, machineguns, RPG heat rockets and small arms. The tankers answered with machineguns and cannon, aided by airstrikes, and moved toward the treeline. They were assisted by other elements of the third squadron.

The battle, which began about 1 P.M., lasted intermittently for more than four hours, with armored units pulling back for air strikes. Artillery support continued until about midnight. During the battle, the Viet Cong used the Communist version of our caliber 50 machineguns, in an antiaircraft role, when helicopter gunships peppered the area with rounds. Two helicopters were crippled and others sustained light damage.

Casualties for the U.S. regiment were moderate, with only one fatality. But among the wounded was Col. Jack MacFarlane of Arlington, Va., commander of the 11th ACR. He was evacuated with chest and arm wounds.

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The regimental Sergeant Major, Donald Horn, played a big part in rescuing the Colonel shortly after AK47 fire wounded him about 3 P.M. It happened some 50 yards from the enemy's position.

Sgt. Maj. Horn, separated from the Colonel during the battle, got on a tank commanded by LT Tate Moerer, of Memphis, Tenn., and rode to where the Colonel lay wounded.

The Sergeant Major dismounted while the tank exchanged fire with the enemy, some 50 yards away. The Viet Cong, using automatic weapons and RPG heat rockets, were well protected. One soldier reported seeing one bunker take four hits from the tank "and each time the guy hidden there popped up and returned the fire."

Ignoring the Colonel's orders to, "Go back, Top. Thanks for coming, but there's no sense in your staying here." Sgt. Maj. Horn remained with his commander until help arrived. An ACAV (Armored Cavalry Assault Vehicle) came some 15 minutes later and removed Col. MacFarlane to the rear where a helicopter took him to an evacuation hospital.

"That was the longest 15 minutes of my life," Sgt. Maj. Horn remembers. "while we were laying there, the bullets kept kicking up the dust between our heads."

In mopping-up action today, the soldiers captured some 1300 lbs. of rice which were turned over to the South Vietnamese soldiers. They also detained 10 VC suspects, destroyed five caliber-50 machinegun positions, 13 structures and six bunkers. Captured items included 31 antitank rockets, 250 lbs. TNT, and 1300 lbs. rice.

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