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From: ROUSH_GB@corning.com (Gary B. Roush [REDACTED])
To: loadhacker@aol.com

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Date: Wed, 24 Apr 1996 22:40:00 EST
From: "Gary B. Roush"@mr.tcc.corning.com
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Date of Loss: 12 May 1968
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: 152607N 1074808E (ZC007083)

Personnel in Incident: Ngok Tavak; Horace H. Fleming; Thomas J. Blackman; Joseph F. Cook; Paul S. Czerwonka; Thomas W. Fritsch; Barry L. Hempel; Raymond T. Heyne; Gerald E. King; Robert C. Lopez; William D. McGonigle; Donald W. Mitchell; James R. Sargent (members of USMC search team - all missing); Glenn E. Miller; Thomas H. Perry (USSF teammates - missing); Kham Duc: Richard E. Sands (missing from CH47); Bernard L. Bucher; Frank M. Hepler; George W. Long; John L. McElroy; Stephan C. Moreland (USAF crew of C130 - all missing); Warren R. Orr (USSF on C130 - missing); Harry B. Coen; Andrew J. Craven; Juan M. Jimenez; Frederick J. Ransbottom; Maurice H. Moore; Joseph L. Simpson; William E. Skivington; John C. Stuller; Imlay S. Widdison; Danny L. Widner; Roy C. Williams; Richard Eugene Sands (all missing); Julius W. Long (released POW).

SYNOPSIS: Kham Duc Special Forces camp (A-105), was located on the western fringes of Quang Tin ("Great Faith") Province, South Vietnam. In the spring of 1968, it was the only remaining border camp in Military Region I. Backup responsibility for the camp fell on the 23rd Infantry Division (Americal),

based at Chu Lai on the far side of the province.

The camp had originally been built for President Diem, who enjoyed hunting in the area. The 1st Special Forces detachment (A-727B) arrived in September 1963

and found the outpost to be an ideal border surveillance site with an existing

airfield. The camp was located on a narrow grassy plain surrounded by rugged, virtually uninhabited jungle. The only village in the area, located across the

airstrip, was occupied by post dependents, camp followers and merchants. The camp and airstrip were bordered by the Ngok Peng Bum ridge to the west and Ngok

Pe Xar mountain, looming over Kham Duc to the east. Steep banked streams full of rapids and waterfalls cut through the tropical wilderness. The Dak Mi River

flowed past the camp over a mile distant, under the shadow of the Ngok Pe Xar.

Five miles downriver was the small forward operating base of Ngok Tavak, defended by the 113-man 11th Mobile Strike Force Company with its 8 Special Forces and 3 Australian advisors. Since Ngok Tavak was outside friendly artillery range, 33 Marine artillerymen of Battery D, 2nd Battalion, 13th Marines, with two 105mm howitzers were located at the outpost.

Capt. Christopher J. Silva, commander of Detachment A-105 helicoptered into Ngok Tavak on May 9, 1968 in response to growing signs of NVA presence in the area. Foul weather prevented his scheduled evening departure. A Kham Duc CIDG platoon fleeing a local ambush also arrived and was posted to the outer perimeter. It was later learned that the CIDG force contained VC infiltrators.

Ngok Tavak was attacked by an NVA infantry battalion at 0315 hours on May 10. The base was pounded by mortars and direct rocket fire. As the frontal assault

began, the Kham Duc CIDG soldiers moved toward the Marines in the fort yelling,

"Don't shoot, don't shoot! Friendly, friendly!" Suddenly they lobbed grenades into the Marine howitzer positions and ran into the fort, where they shot several Marines with carbines and sliced claymore mine and communication wires.

The defenders suffered heavy casualties but stopped the main assault and killed

the infiltrators. The NVA dug in along the hill slopes and grenaded the

trenches

where the mobile strike force soldiers were pinned by machine gun and rocket fire. An NVA flamethrower set the ammunition ablaze, banishing the murky flare-

lighted darkness for the rest of the night. SFC Harold M. Swicegood and the USMC platoon leader, Lt. Adams, were badly wounded and moved to the command bunker. Medical Spec4 Blomgren reported that the CIDG mortar crews had abandoned

their weapons. Silva tried to operate the main 4.2 inch mortar but was wounded.

At about 0500 hours, Sgt. Glenn Miller, an A-105 communications specialist, was shot through the head as he ran over to join the Marine howitzer crews.

The NVA advanced across the eastern side of Ngok Tavak and brought forward more

automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. In desperation, the defenders called on USAF AC-47 "Spooky" gunships to strafe the perimeter and the howitzers, despite the possible presence of friendly wounded in the gun pits. The NVA countered with tear gas, but the wind kept drifting the gas over

their own lines. After three attempts, they stopped. A grenade fight between the two forces lasted until dawn.

At daybreak Australian Warrant Officers Cameron and Lucas, joined by Blomgren,

led a CIDG counterattack. The North Vietnamese pulled back under covering fire,

and the howitzers were retaken. The Marines fired the last nine shells and spiked the tubes. Later that morning medical evacuation helicopters supported by covering airstrikes took out the seriously wounded, including Silva and Swicegood. Two CH46's were able to land 45 replacements from the 12th Mobile Strike Force Company, accompanied by Capt. Euge E. Makowski (who related much of this account to Shelby Stanton, author of "Green Berets at War"), but one helicopter was hit in the fuel line and forced down. Another helicopter was hit

by a rocket and burst into flames, wrecking the small helipad. The remaining wounded were placed aboard a hovering helicopter. As it lifted off, two Mike Force soldiers and 1Lt. Horace Fleming, one of the stranded aviation crewmen, grabbed the helicopter skids. All three fell to their deaths after the helicopter had reached an altitude of over one hundred feet.

The mobile strike force soldiers were exhausted and nervous. Ammunition and water were nearly exhausted, and Ngok Tavak was still being pounded by sporadic

mortar fire. They asked permission to evacuate their positions, but were told to "hold on" as "reinforcements were on the way". By noon the defenders decided that aerial reinforcement or evacuation was increasingly unlikely, and night would bring certain destruction. An hour later, they abandoned Ngok Tavak.

Thomas Perry, a medic from C Company, arrived at the camp at 0530 hours the morning of the 10th. He cared for the wounded and was assisting in an attempt to establish a defensive perimeter when the decision was made to evacuate the camp. As survivors were leaving, Perry was seen by Sgt. Cordell J. Matheney, Jr., standing 20 feet away, as Australian Army Capt. John White formed the withdrawal column at the outer perimeter wire on the eastern Ngok Tavak hillside. It was believed that Perry was going to join the end of the column.

All the weapons, equipment and munitions that could not be carried were hastily piled into the command bunker and set afire. The helicopter that had been grounded by a ruptured fuel line was destroyed with a LAW. Sgt. Miller's body was abandoned.

After survivors had gone about 1 kilometer, it was discovered that Perry was missing. Efforts were conducted to locate both Perry and Miller, including a search by a group from Battery D. They were searching along the perimeter when they were hit by enemy grenades and arms fire. Neither the men on the team nor Perry was ever found. Included in this team were PFC Thomas Blackman; LCpl. Joseph Cook; PFC Paul Czerwonka; LCpl. Thomas Fritsch; PFC Barry Hempel; LCpl. Raymond Heyne; Cpl. Gerald King; PFC Robert Lopez; PFC William McGonigle; LCpl. Donald Mitchell; and LCpl. James Sargent. The remaining survivors evaded through dense jungle to a helicopter pickup point midway to Kham Duc. Their extraction was completed shortly before 1900 hours on the evening of May 10.

In concert with the Ngok Tavak assault, the Kham Duc was blasted by a heavy mortar and recoilless rifle attack at 0245 hours that same morning. Periodic mortar barrages ripped into Kham Duc throughout the rest of the day, while the Americal Division airmobiled a reinforced battalion of the 196th Infantry Brigade into the compound. A Special Forces command party also landed, but the situation deteriorated too rapidly for their presence to have positive effect.

The mortar attack on fog-shrouded Kham Duc resumed on the morning of May 11. The bombardment caused heavy losses among the frightened CIDG soldiers, who fled from their trenches across open ground, seeking shelter in the bunkers. The LLDB commander remained hidden. CIDG soldiers refused orders to check the rear of the camp for possible North Vietnamese intruders. That evening the 11th and 12th Mobile Strike Force companies were airlifted to Da Nang, and half of the 137th CIDG Company from Camp Ha Thanh was airlanded in exchange.

The 1st VC Regiment, 2nd NVA Division, began closing the ring around Kham Duc during the early morning darkness of 12 May. At about 0415 to 0430 hours, the camp and outlying positions came under heavy enemy attack. Outpost #7 was assaulted and fell within a few minutes. Outposts #5, #1 and #3 had been reinforced by Americal troops but were in North Vietnamese hands by 0930 hours.

OP1 was manned by PFC Harry Coen, PFC Andrew Craven, Sgt. Joseph Simpson, and SP4 Julius Long from Company E, 2nd of the 1st Infantry. At about 0415 hours, when OP1 came under heavy enemy attack, PFC Coen and SP4 Long were seen trying to man a 106 millimeter recoilless rifle. Survivors reported that in the initial enemy fire, they were knocked off their bunker. Both men again tried to man the gun, but were knocked down again by RPG fire.

PFC Craven, along with two other men, departed the OP at 0830 hours on May 12.

They moved out 50 yards and could hear the enemy in their last position. At about 1100 hours, as they were withdrawing to the battalion perimeter, they encountered an enemy position. PFC Craven was the pointman and opened fire. The enemy returned fire, and PFC Craven was seen to fall, with multiple chest wounds. The other two men were unable to recover him, and hastily departed the area. PFC Craven was last seen lying on his back, wounded, near the camp.

OP2 was being manned by 1Lt. Frederick Ransbottom, SP4 Maurice Moore, PFC Roy Williams, PFC Danny Widner, PFC William Skivington, PFC Imlay Widdison, and SP5

John Stuller, from the 2nd of the 3rd Infantry when it came under attack. Informal questioning of survivors of this position indicated that PFC Widdison

and SP5 Stuller may have been killed in action. However, the questioning was not sufficiently thorough to produce enough evidence to confirm their deaths.

The only information available concerning 1Lt. Ransbottom, SP4 Moore, PFC Lloyd and PFC Skivington that Lt. Ransbottom allegedly radioed PFC Widner and PFC Williams, who were in the third bunker, and told them that he was shooting at the enemy as they entered his bunker.

SP4 Juan Jimenez, a rifleman assigned to Company A, 2nd of the 1st Infantry, was occupying a defensive position when he was severely wounded in the back by enemy mortar fire. SP4 Jimenez was declared dead by the Battalion Surgeon in the early morning hours of May 12. He was then carried to the helipad for evacuation. However, due to the situation, space was available in the helicopter for only the wounded, and SP4 Jimenez's remains were left behind.

At noon a massive NVA attack was launched against the main compound. The charge was stopped by planes hurling napalm, cluster bomb units and 750 pound bombs into the final wire barriers. The decision was made by the Americal Division officers to call for immediate extraction.

The evacuation was disorderly, and at times, on the verge of complete panic. One of the first extraction helicopters to land was exploded by enemy fire, blocking the airstrip. Engineers of Company A, 70th Engineer Battalion, frantically reassembled one of their dozers (previously torn apart to prevent capture) to clear the runway. Eight more aircraft were blown out of the sky.

PFC Richard E. Sands was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 46th Infantry, 198th Light Infantry Brigade being extracted on a CH47 helicopter (serial #67-18475). The helicopter was hit by 50 caliber machine gun fire at an altitude of 1500-1600 feet shortly after takeoff.

Sands, who was sitting near the door gunner, was hit in the head by an incoming rounds. The helicopter made a controlled landing and caught fire. During the evacuation from the burning helicopter, four personnel and a medic checked PFC Sands and indicated that he had been killed instantly. Because of the danger of incoming mortar rounds and the fire, personnel attempting to remove PFC Sands from the helicopter were ordered to abandon their attempt. The remaining personnel were evacuated from the area later by another helicopter.

Intense antiaircraft fire from the captured outposts caused grave problems. Control over the indigenous forces was difficult. One group of CIDG soldiers had to be held in trenches at gunpoint to prevent them from mobbing the

runway.

As evacuation was in progress, members of Company A, 1/46, who insisted on boarding the aircraft first, shoved Vietnamese dependents out of the way. As more American infantry tried to clamber into the outbound planes, the outraged Special Forces staff convinced the Air Force to start loading civilians onboard a C130, then watched as the civilians pushed children and weaker adults aside.

The crew of the U.S. Air Force C130 aircraft (serial #60-0297) consisted of Maj. Bernard Bucher, pilot; SSgt. Frank Hepler, flight engineer; Maj. John McElroy, navigator; 1Lt. Steven Moreland, co-pilot; George Long, load master; Capt. Warren Orr, passenger, and an undetermined number of Vietnamese civilians.

The aircraft reported receiving ground fire on takeoff. The Forward Air Control (FAC) in the area reported that the aircraft exploded in mid-air and crashed in a fire ball about one mile from camp. All crew and passengers were believed dead, as the plane burned quickly and was completely destroyed except for the tail boom. No remains were recovered from the aircraft.

Capt. Orr was not positively identified by U.S. personnel as being aboard the aircraft. He was last seen near the aircraft helping the civilians to board. However, a Vietnamese stated that he had seen Capt. Orr board the aircraft and later positively identified him from a photograph. Rescue efforts were impossible because of the hostile threat in the area.

At the time the order was given to escape and evade, SP4 Julius Long was with Coen and Simpson. All three had been wounded, and were trying to make their way back to the airfield about 350 yards away. As they reached the airfield, they saw the last C130 departing. PFC Coen, who was shot in the stomach, panicked and started running and shooting his weapon at random. SP4 Long tried to catch him, but could not, and did not see PFC Coen again. Long then carried Sgt. Simpson to a nearby hill, where they spent the night.

During the night, the airfield was strafed and bombed by U.S. aircraft. SP4 Long was hit twice in the back by fragments, and Sgt. Simpson died during the night. SP4 Long left him lying on the hill near the Cam Duc airfield and started his escape and evasion toward Chu Lai, South Vietnam. SP4 Long was captured and was released in 1973 from North Vietnam.

The Special Forces command group was the last organized group out of the camp.
As their helicopter soared into the clouds, Kham Duc was abandoned to advancing
NVA infantry at 4:33 p.m. on May 12, 1968. The last Special Forces camp on the
northwestern frontier of South Vietnam had been destroyed.

Two search and recovery operations were conducted in the vicinity of OP1 and OP2 and the Cam Duc airfield on July 18, 1970 and August 17, 1970. In these operations, remains of personnel previously reported missing from this incident
were recovered and subsequently identified. (SP4 Bowers, PFC Lloyd, Sgt. Sisk,
PFC Guzman-Rios and SSgt. Carter). However, extensive search and excavation could not be completed at OP1 and OP2 because of the tactical situation.

It was assumed that all the missing at Kham Duc were killed in action until about 1983, when the father of one of the men missing discovered a Marine Corps
document which indicated that four of the men had been taken prisoner. The document listed the four by name. Until then, the families had not been advised
of the possibility there were any American prisoners taken other than Julius Long. A Vietnamese rallier identified the photograph of Roy C. Williams as positively having been a POW.

--Boundary (ID tUWfdp5dW8yOZXBOH33Qsw)--

----- Headers -----

From ROUSH_GB@corning.com Wed Apr 24 23:11:42 1996
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From: "Gary B. Roush 607-974-7688" <ROUSH_GB@corning.com>
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To: loadhacker@aol.com
Message-id: <0113XQUCJGZO8WWCJ0@mr.tcc.corning.com>
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