

Hill 292

28 Oct 1966

THESE MEN FROM COMPANY C, 2/35TH, GAVE IT ALL THIS DAY

Sp4 Aaron Cowan, Age 22, East St. Louis, Illinois
Pfc Thomas Leek Jr., Age 20, Kansas City, Missouri
Sp4 Robert Martinez, Age 19, Denver, Colorado
Sgt Wendell Wilson, Age 20, Scottsville, Kentucky
Pfc Glen Young, Age 20, South River, New Jersey

At 1845 on 28 October 1966 the perimeter of Company C (-), consisting of the headquarters and the 1st and 2d platoons, was attacked by two companies of North Vietnamese Army troops. The initial firing and assault was made against the northeastern section of the perimeter with two or three enemy firing automatic fire from positions almost due north (Tab A). Within five minutes, however, a significant number of the enemy were on line firing on the entire northeast and east portions of the friendly perimeter as well as a portion of the southeast side. Within ten minutes, the defensive perimeter was receiving fire of some kind from every direction except southwest. Five minutes later, fire was being received from all directions.

The disposition of friendly forces at the time of the initial firing placed the 2d platoon on the east and the 1st platoon on the west. One third of the men were in their positions digging, another third seated beside their foxholes eating the evening meal, and the final third were accomplishing miscellaneous tasks. The local security daylight outposts were entering the perimeter and the night LP's were in the process of moving out for their respective locations.

A water party also was entering the perimeter and was about to warn the commander of the possibility on enemy in the area when the initial enemy burst was fired. The water party was returning from a nearby creek, having skirted the east of the open area north of the perimeter (Tab A), When approximately fifty meters from the perimeter, the last one or two, men noticed a fleeting, shadowy movement to their right rear on the southwest side of the open area. (When asked why they hadn't provided warning by firing their weapons, the individuals replied that they believed the movement might have been the friendly LP going into position. In any event, it is felt that their slightly hurried manner in which the water party continued to the perimeter caused one element of the NVA force to open fire prematurely before all elements could move into position for a coordinated attack).

Almost simultaneously with the initial burst of enemy automatic weapons fire, the left machinegun of the 2d platoon commenced firing. Within five seconds of the initial enemy burst, outgoing fire was three times as heavy as incoming fire. M-79 grenadiers were firing heavily using both HE and shot rounds. The heaviest outgoing fire was in the 2d platoon area where firing continued for approximately twenty minutes. Because of the ferocity of the enemy attack, the deafening roar of both friendly and enemy weapons, and the difficulty of movement because of the heavy incoming fire, it took that long to slow down the rate of fire. During this period, the 1st platoon was receiving and returning fire, however, no infantry assaults were made on their positions. Their fire, therefore, was slow and well controlled.

From approximately 1850 to 1915, the enemy made repeated heavy assaults against the 2d platoon sector (Tab B). Enemy fire consisted primarily of short automatic bursts. Spread over a distance of approximately fifty meters and with ten to fifteen men firing at a time, the enemy advanced, dropped back, and then advanced again. At times, the enemy moved to positions

as close as five to ten meters from friendly positions. During approximately the last five minutes of intense enemy fire, the attacking elements seemed to form a line and, from the prone position or from behind trees or irregularities in the ground, simply poured heavy fire into the perimeter.

As the charging attacks slowed down in the 2d platoon area, a number of small rushes were made against the 1st platoon sector (Tab C). The first assault was made astride the trail from the northwest against the MG position in that sector. The enemy came within ten or fifteen meters of the perimeter before being forced to fall back. About five minutes later, the other MG position of the 1st platoon was assaulted astride the trail from the southeast. Again the enemy was repelled by fire.

By this time (approximately twenty minutes after the initial enemy burst) artillery fire began to come in close enough to be effective. A contributing factor in the delay was that the artillery FO's radio failed to function initially and several minutes were wasted in the process of finding another radio and re-establishing contact with the firing battery. Once the artillery began to burst close to the enemy on the east, the ferocity of the enemy attacks in that area decreased considerably until after 1915 when enemy activity degenerated to a "lie on the ground, shoot, and throw grenades" effort.

The enemy had used fire and movement effectively. Also, he had use of stealth in some cases to crawl to positions very close to the friendly perimeter. In these instances, men armed with shotguns proved to be extremely effective.

At this juncture (approximately 1930) after the action in the 2d platoon area had diminished, a third assault was made from the southwest. The brunt of this attack fell on the 1st platoon. As in the case of the other two assaults on the 1st platoon positions, the NVA threw a large number of hand grenades followed by a rapid charge using assault type fire. The adeptness of the 1st platoon machine gunners broke up this attack as long bursts of fire were placed across the front of the friendly positions forcing the enemy again to withdraw. About fifteen minutes later, a final assault was made against the right flank of the 1st platoon. The attack which again featured a hand grenades prelude, was repulsed by machinegun and small arms fire.

From this time (1950) until contact was broken completely, the enemy fired at the perimeter from approximately thirty meters range, threw hand grenades, and fired M-79 grenade launchers. A few minor attacks consisting of only four to five men were made against the 2d platoon sector and were relatively easily repulsed.

Action of this type continued until approximately 2045 when a red star cluster was fired to the northeast of the perimeter. Upon firing the cluster, one NVA officer, apparently miss-oriented, ran into the north corner of the perimeter, was pulled into a hole and killed in hand to hand combat. However, it was apparent that the enemy was withdrawing and by 2100 fire into the perimeter essentially had ceased.

During the entire action, the enemy used grenades to the maximum. The M-79 rounds he also used proved to be extremely effective, inflicting nine of the thirteen friendly casualties. Many of the enemy rounds burst on the edge of the friendly positions. There were also a number of tree bursts, planned possibly in an attempt to get increased fragmentation effects or in an attempt. to hit the command group in the center of the perimeter. In any event, the gunners seemed to be well trained.

At 2100, friendly casualties stood at two KIA and ten WIA. Two men had been hit in the first exchanges of fire, the others accumulated as the fighting progressed. Since contact was considered to be broken, aerial medevac was requested for the more seriously wounded. At 2213, a USAF "HUSKY" medevac helicopter arrived in the area to extract three seriously wounded men by winch through the heavy tree canopy.

At approximately 2237, just as the three wounded had been loaded aboard the aircraft, a rocket was fired from southeast of the perimeter causing the helicopter to crash inside the perimeter. The ship was burning as it came down. The three wounded men were killed either by the rocket or the crash itself. The pilot and copilot were both injured, however, the men of Company C were able to chop into the aircraft and get them out before the fuel caught fire. The mechanic was pinned inside the wreckage. Although numerous attempts were made to get him out by cutting into the ship, finally the fuel ignited and the ship was engulfed in flames before he could be saved. This incident raised the Army KIA total to five.

During the time that the helicopter was hovering overhead, the men on the perimeter fired whenever they detected movement or noise. On the other hand, seeing and hearing was extremely difficult because of the noise of the helicopter and the light generated by its floodlights. Thus, the outgoing suppressive fires, while not continuous were considerable during the entire period of time taken by the extraction effort.

From the time the medevac helicopter crashed until 0630 the following morning when sweeps were sent out, there were movements of individuals detected around the perimeter, however, no further attacks were made. The individuals moving about were engaged to prevent them from policing the battlefield and artillery fire was brought in continuously for the same purpose.

The sweeps of the area in the morning found seven NVA KIA. One enemy WIA was captured. There were also one RPD, two SKS, three pistols, and six AK-47's found near the scene of action.

At 0815, a second USAF "HUSKY" medevac helicopter returned to the area and evacuated the pilot, copilot, and some of the Company C wounded. That afternoon, men with relatively minor wounds were evacuated by UH-1D helicopters after an LZ had been cut in the clearing to the northeast.