

Infantry In Action



Heroes Born of Battle

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quest for A Presidential Unit Citation submitted by the 1st Battalion, 12th U.S. Cavalry, 1st U.S. Cavalry Division.

Success or failure in battle is often decided by an intangible ingredient that lies dormant in many men until the need is apparent. This intangible but essential ingredient — courage — produced tangible results in unexpected quarters during early October 1966 when the 1st Battalion, 12th U.S. Cavalry, assisted by Companies A and C, 1st Battalion, 5th U.S. Cavalry, met and defeated elements of the 7th and 8th Battalions of the 18th North Vietnamese Army Regiment in the Village of Hoa Hoi in the fertile coastal region between the Phu Cat and Min Mieu mountains of central South Vietnam.

Earlier, during Operation THAYER, the 1st Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel James Root, had met only light, scattered enemy resistance as it had swept toward Hoa Hoi. But now, in the opening phase of Operation IRVING, an enemy battalion had been reported in Hoa Hoi, and as Colonel Root deployed his companies to encircle the village, the feeling persisted that strong enemy resistance would be encountered. (See Map 1)

Company B, commanded by Captain Frederick Mayer, was the first of Root's units to be air assaulted into the area, landing at 1005, 2 October on an open beach 300 meters east of the village. As Captain Mayer maneuvered his platoons to the southeast of Hoa Hoi, they came under intense enemy small arms and mortar fires, and two of the mortar rounds landed in the immediate vicinity of the company command post, wounding Mayer and four others. Although he bled profusely from fragment wounds in his face and forearm, Mayer continued to direct Company B's drive through a well prepared enemy bunker system that criss-crossed the entire area.

The 2d Platoon, proceeding across an open area, came under particularly heavy fire and was momentarily halted. At this crucial moment, Private First Class Roy Salazer, realizing his platoon's critical situation, stood up and with rifle blazing advanced on the enemy. Although he was mortally wounded during his charge, Salazer succeeded in setting the example for the other members of his squad, who breached the enemy's booby-trapped perimeter and cleared the way for the other squads to break through the enemy's barrier. Within minutes the enemy force in this area was withdrawing into the village.

Private First Class Francis Royal set the example for the 3d Platoon when he carried a wounded comrade across an open field. He had almost reached safety when he, too, was mortally wounded. But despite his wounds, he managed to drag his comrade the last few feet to cover before losing consciousness.

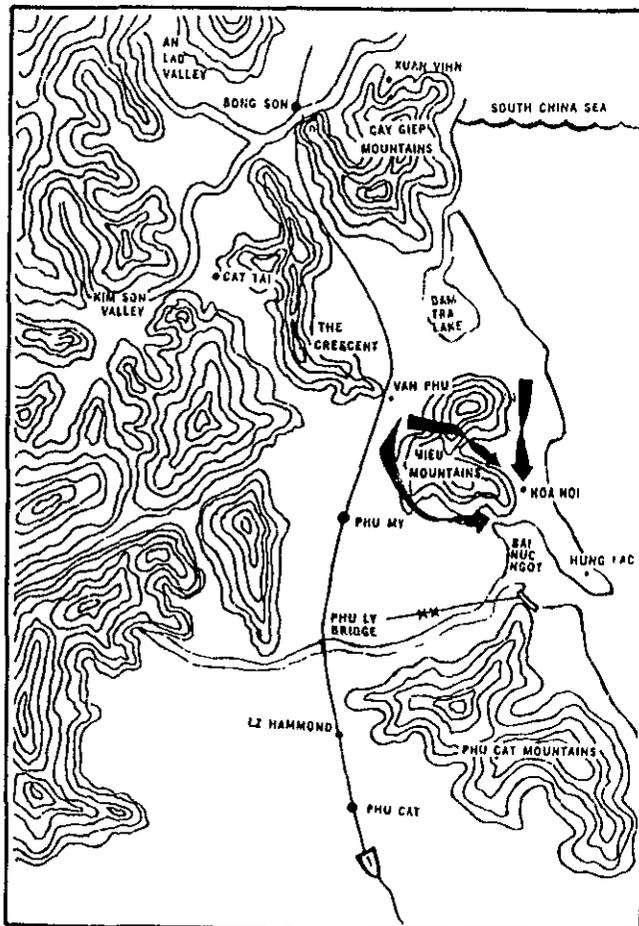
As Company B fought its way into the village from the southeast, Company A landed to the southwest and attacked northeast toward Hoa Hoi. Lieutenant Donald Grigg maneuvered his 3d Platoon toward the village as he and his men came under automatic weapons fire from across an open field. At the same time, though, he noted several elderly men and women, with a few children, walking aimlessly into the line of fire. Grigg threw down his weapon, web gear, and helmet and raced 150 meters through the enemy's fire to the civilians. Picking up two of the small children, he carried them back to the safety of his lines, as the other civilians followed him.

Lieutenant William Prichard's 1st Platoon was the first unit to penetrate the enemy's defenses from the west.

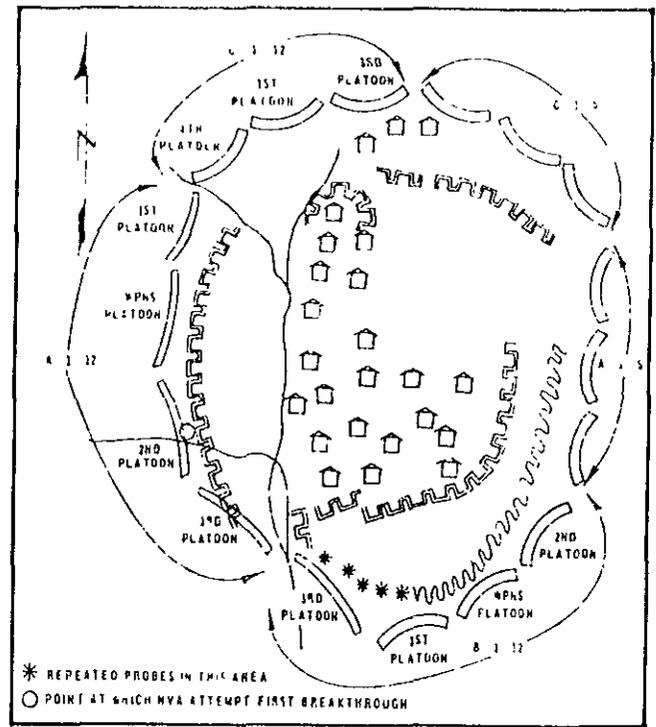
When his point squad came under heavy fire as it broke into a rice paddy bordered by enemy entrenchments, Platoon Sergeant John Sinkovitz and two volunteers crawled forward into the trenchworks and shot it out with the North Vietnamese soldiers, position by position. Although Sinkovitz was seriously wounded, he eliminated two machine bunkers and drew much of the enemy's fire away from the remainder of the platoon. Sergeant Donald Beltz, realizing that the enemy's fire had slackened, rallied his squad and in a fierce charge ruptured the enemy's lines. With his breakthrough, the platoon advanced toward the village on a three-pronged axis with the three squads on line.

In the meantime, Company C had been committed to the battle at 1250, landing north of the village and moving south under the leadership of Captain Darrell Houston. After clearing out an enemy ambush position along its route of advance, largely the work of Platoon Sergeant Robert Jackson and Private First Class Larry Willis, the company continued a slow but methodical advance on the village.

By this time, Companies A and B, had effected a linkup and were beginning to establish positions to keep the enemy from slipping out of the village during the night. Enemy fire again laced Company B, and realizing his unit's exposed situation, Specialist-4 Norman Jackson crawled forward through booby traps and the enemy fire to a position from which he could employ his machine-gun against the enemy. With enemy fire kicking up the



Map 1



Map 2

dirt around him, Jackson fired his machinegun from this position for more than an hour. When his machinegun jammed, Specialist-4 Richard Schmidt, another machine-gunner, voluntarily scurried to Jackson's position and maintained fire on the enemy-occupied huts until darkness blanked out his targets.

During the course of the evening, Companies A and C, 1st Battalion, 5th U.S. Cavalry were airlifted into the area to assist in the containment mission, since it was expected that a full scale attack would not be launched against the village until daylight. The latter two companies went into position along the eastern side of the perimeter. (See Map 2)

On numerous occasions during the night, desperate bands of North Vietnamese soldiers tried to shoot their way out of the encirclement, but every attempt was repulsed. One of the reasons for the successful night containment was the proficiency of the artillery forward observers who called in the fires of the supporting artillery unit — Battery A, 2d Battalion, 19th U.S. Artillery. Captain John Sutton and Lieutenants Stephen Stant and Charles Campanella continually braved enemy fire to get to the best possible locations from which to direct the supporting fires and, during the night, called in almost 900 rounds of artillery fire on the enemy-held village. On one occasion, when the battalion command post came under attack and two men nearby were wounded, Captain Sutton remained in his position and simultaneously adjusted artillery fire while directing flareships overhead to illuminate the battlefield.

During one of the enemy attacks, Private First Class James Pender was seriously wounded in a fire fight in Company C's sector, and an immediate helicopter medical evacuation mission was requested by radio. As the

helicopter approached to land, though, the pilot could not pinpoint the exact landing zone, so Lieutenant John Rieke, the company's executive officer, grabbed a flashlight and a radio and dashed from his covered position to the LZ. When he began waving the flashlight, the enemy shifted their fires to the new target. But despite the enemy fire, Rieke stood fast and brought in two helicopters, the second with vitally needed ammunition. Rieke then supervised the medical evacuation and the unloading of the ammunition and saw the two helicopters off before he returned to his own area.

Early in the morning, the enemy soldiers broke through Company A's sector of the thinly spread perimeter, but when Captain Harold Fields led a counter-attack with his headquarters element to plug a gap that had opened in his lines, the enemy charge was stopped in its tracks and eventually thrown back.

When morning came, Company C, 1st Battalion, 12th U.S. Cavalry and Company C, 1st Battalion, 5th U.S. Cavalry attacked south to drive the remaining enemy into Companies A and B, 1st Battalion, 12th U.S. Cavalry, which were braced in strong blocking positions to take the attack. Several times Company C, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry temporarily slowed its advance because of enemy resistance, but each time the company rallied and by individual combat at almost point blank range drove on through the village.

Lieutenant John Rudd's 3d Platoon took the brunt of the enemy's resistance. Just after jumping off, the platoon was pinned down as it tried to cross a large, open rice paddy. As he lay in the dirt of the rice paddy, Rudd saw Private First Class David Osborne stand up and

begin firing his machinegun at the bunkers to his front. Specialist-4 Daniel Shubert, the other machinegunner in the platoon, also stood up, and for a few seconds the two soldiers waged a deadly showdown with the dug-in enemy; then, after killing eleven of the enemy soldiers, they led the platoon in a charge through the enemy's bunkers.

A few minutes later, the platoon was again halted by enemy fire, this time coming from a trench concealed in a hedgerow. Try as they would, none of the soldiers could locate the enemy position. That is, they could not until Specialist-4 Gary Lusk, Rudd's radio operator, stood up, exposing himself to the enemy's fire, and began pointing out the enemy position to a machinegunner on his right. The pair worked well, and as the enemy's fire slackened, the platoon again made a successful charge.

The last action seemingly broke the back of the enemy's resistance effort, and Company C had little trouble in completing its part of the operation.

The courage of the fighting men on the ground was the single most important ingredient in the success of the battle of Hoa Hoi. From the moment Company B landed on the beach outside the well fortified village until Company C completed its final sweep, the men of the 1st Battalion, 12th U.S. Cavalry displayed a gallant determination to win, no matter how grave the risks involved. The combination of quick reaction, sound planning, exemplary leadership, and aggressive teamwork fused the men of the battalion into a fighting unit that would not be stopped as they repeatedly charged through enemy fire to accomplish their mission.

