

“One Day in Vietnam”

My blue eyes wandered through the swamps and marshes of Vietnam during American's involvement in the "Longest War" without questioning the political implications of the war. I only wanted to serve my country. This was about to change. India Company, 3d Battalion, 26th Marines (I Co3/26 Marines) had set up perimeter in the vicinity of Phong Dien, north of Hue, on 19 December 1966. First platoon, first squad positions was facing level ground sloping away from the fighting positions and had open terrain for approximated 300 yards to the front. The rest of the company was facing rice paddies. From 19 December to 21 December, I Co. made numerous small unit sightings and small scale contacts. The Viet Cong (VC) would not stay in contact, once brought under fire the VC would withdraw. In the early morning on 22 December in thick fog I Co. came under heavy concentration of mortars, rockets, grenades and automatic weapons. The attack was coming from the 802d VC Battalion where as they launched wave after wave attacks against our positions. In the attacks the VC employed the same tactics; a mortar barrage, followed by a ground probe of our lines. I Co returned fire with M-60's, M-14's and 60 mm mortars and held our positions. At approximated 0415 hours I Co received 50 to 75 rounds of 60mm mortar fire falling in front of our perimeter on all sides. These coupled with intense small arms fire from semiautomatic and automatic weapons.

The attack continued until about 0430 hours. This last attack the VC gave everything they had. When the VC got into our lines the word was past to fix bayonets and stand by to counterattack. I thought for sure at the beginning of the mortar and ground attack most of the Marines wouldn't see day light. But when the word came down to fix bayonets I told myself I'm going to take as many of the VC out before I go down.

I'm sure the other Marines were thinking the same way. As it happen we stood by waiting for day break. When it got day light we couldn't check outside our perimeter because of heavy fog. By 0730 hours the fog lifted and the squad I was with (3d squad, 3d Platoon) commenced a sweep of the battle area looking for possible VC killed and wounded. What we found in the area was VC bodies piled in heaps. The trails leading away from the battle site were soaked with VC blood. We found 56 VC killed and 4 wounded. There was an estimated attack force of two VC Companies. In the outer area of the battle zone we found VC with bamboo about ten feet long with wire loops attached to the other end. It appeared the VC were trying to use the bamboo to drag the VC casualties away from the battle field. We had a listening post about 200 meters from our perimeter. We followed the com-wire and about 50 meters from our lines we found the wire cut. Based on our observation of the battle area there was no way the three Marines, M.

Norcross, D. Cosby and R. Knapp, would be alive. As we approached their position Norcross poked his head up and then Cosby and Knapp showed themselves where as we all cheered, what a sight that was. After the first mortar attacked Bruce Gray from weapons platoon killed a VC who had penetrated our lines. Gray glanced to his rear during the fighting and spotted the infiltrator and dropped him with a burst from his automatic weapon. Because of this action Gray received the Navy Commendation Medal.

Our casualties were extremely light. I contribute this to 3/26 Marines cohesion. We attained our unit cohesion and battle skills from the training we received as a unit from July 1966 through November 1966. It wasn't until after the battalion started transferring Marines to other units our casualty rate increased I've been asked would I go back in the Marines again knowing what I know today and have experienced combat, the answer is "Yes".
"Semper Fi"

Michael Harris Mulraney
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