

Battle of Suoi Bong Trang

By John Micheal Black

This happened in February, 1966 in Tay Ninh Province, Viet Nam. This is what I remember, but it was 47 years ago. We had been out for several days on a "road building mission" in the Tay Ninh area. Every night we would dig in and place out machine guns and stand guard duty and nothing happened. About 4 or 5 days into the mission we were camped near a Michelin rubber plantation. The water purification guys threw a line into a rice paddy and started "purifying" water. We setup our trucks and the antennas to start to do some intercept.



The area, as I remember it, was a dried out rice paddy with small dikes and the rubber plantation about 100 meters to our front. The ground was really hard and a lot of the guys did not do a lot of foxhole digging. I had a tent half connected from the trailer of my jeep to a bush and my bedroll beneath it. I was on guard duty from about 11pm to 1AM I think and had just gotten to a deep sleep when I awoke and looked out of my sleeping area. The video was on but the audio had not kicked in yet. The sky was filled with red and green streaks and bits of leaves were falling all over me. All of a sudden the audio kicked in and I heard the sounds of M14s,

AK47s, heavy machine guns and 105MM artillery at full speed.



I rolled over and slipped out of my sleeping bag and reached up on top of the trailer to grab my helmet. When that was fastened, I crawled over to the Jeep to retrieve my flak jacket and M2 carbine and rolled over to one of the rice paddy dikes.

Over the next few hours I was expecting to be seeing VC pouring in at any moment. The main enemy that I fought that night were small brown scorpions. I got several stings as they were quite testy and did not like company.

Lt. Bailey crawled by several times to make sure we were OK and whether or not we needed ammo or anything. At some point there was a rather loud explosion over near the Brigade HQ area. I later heard that a cook had nailed a VC sapper with a satchel of explosives that was trying to get to the Brigade HQ but I do not know if that was fact or fiction.

We had a battery of New Zealand 105mm's with us and they were firing with the barrels levelled at the NVA troops coming at us through the rubber trees. It sounded sometimes like they were shooting individual NVA troops. AT any rate, the NVA decided to move to another part of the perimeter.



I heard that Puff was flying cover that night but did not actually see it. I did see Puff in action another time and it was awesome! A river for fire falling from the sky. When the sun came up the NVA retreated to escape the Huey gunships and, as we were not allowed to chase them without permission from Washington, the Auzies and Kiwis took care of that.



During the night we lost a tank crew and another crew lost their radiator to a 75MM RPG. Over the night the NVA tried repeatedly to get into the tank and the guys would call the other tanks to come and shoot them off. In the morning there were a lot of NVA and VC bodies around that tank and the guys inside were a bit punch drunk. Several other pieces of equipment were also damaged.



A lot of enemy weapons were picked up scattered around after the battle.



The CATs dug a trench where we buried about 260 NVA and VC bodies and the Brigade was pulled back to an area where we had been a day earlier.



A really good meal and a lot of beer was flown in and that night we had a big party and bonfire.

Unfortunately, we were at the border between two provinces and that night a Red Haze (infrared) flight picked up the bonfire. They checked with one province that did not know we were there and did not check with the other province which did.



The next morning I was sleeping in a jungle hammock strung between my Jeep and a tree when I was awakened by the sound of a rather loud freight train barreling in on us. I cut the mosquito netting and rolled into my foxhole before the first of several 175MM rounds from our own 1st Division artillery landed in the middle of the kitchen where the bonfire had been. We lost a few of the guys from the 1st Infantry Division to our own guns.

I recently saw an After Action Report on this battle and the above mostly conforms to it. The AAR says that the crews of 2 tanks were killed and the enemy KIA numbers has changed a bit, but the above is what I wrote in 2013, 47 years afterwards.

All the photos were taken by me on February 23rd and 24th 1966.