

## Company D, 1/12th Cavalry at The Battle of Tam Quan

Though little noticed at the time, and still little known nearly 50 years later, the Battle of Tam Quan (according to the Infantry Museum at Fort Benning the Second Battle of Tam Quan) was one of the most significant of the Vietnam War.

The first contact that December was on the 6<sup>th</sup> when aviation elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry discovered the headquarters of the 22<sup>nd</sup> NVA Regiment near the hamlet of Dai Dong (1). B Company of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was quickly thrown into the fight, then the next day was joined by other companies of the 1/8<sup>th</sup>, while companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry while another sharp contact with elements of the 22<sup>nd</sup> flared up on the afternoon of the 7 December a kilometers to the east at Dai Dong (3) The 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, supported by the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry, (Mechanized) carried the these early December battles with the 22<sup>nd</sup>, which had then, after a big scrap with B Company, 1/50<sup>th</sup> Infantry on December 10th, dropped from sight except for sporadic contacts with small elements. Radio intercepts identified the regiment's headquarters on the 14th, and the officers of Company D, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry then on a stand down on LZ English, were called from an outdoor showing of *One Million Years B.C.* to the company headquarters tent. I never have seen the rest of the campy Raquel Welch classic.

The 1<sup>st</sup> battalion of the 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry believed it had a bone to pick with the 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment that had attacked its Charlie Company on LZ Bird just after Christmas 1966.

D Company's part of the battle of Tam Quan was fought at My An (2), Binh Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam, on 15 December, 1967. The recommendation for award of the Medal of Honor to Specialist 4 Allen Lynch describes D Company, the enemy, and the battle's environment. "The terrain was a large village surrounded by rice paddies and small, numerous, heavily grown hedgerows considerably restricting visibility. Enemy force exceeds a battalion in size. He is well equipped with recoilless rifles, light and heavy machineguns, and well supplied with ammunition. His position is carefully chosen and well fortified. Enemy morale is high. Company D's morale is high after brief stand down (on LZ English), but the company is extremely under strength; just 85 infantryman are flown into battle on UH1B "Hueys" on that early morning in December."

I'd been in country for less than a month and met newly-assigned 2nd Platoon Leader, Lt. Roy Southerland. at that officer's call that night on English; he'd be dead before then next day's sunset. Donald Orsini, a brave and talented OCS officer who had enlisted in 1956, was our Captain when we flew in a brace of Hueys in the morning to a blocking position, then at midday were sent on a march to an attack position we never reached, contact with the 22<sup>nd</sup> occurring first. In a square formation – two platoons abreast, two in trail – Lt. Southerland's 2nd Platoon was left-front and took the brunt of the initial contact with the enemy. My 3rd Platoon was right-rear and unscathed; on order, we pulled back a bit to establish a perimeter for medivac, supply, and support.

After the initial contact, 1Lt. Southerland and Sp4 Lynch moved forward, toward the platoon's point element, which had gone down in the initial fusillade. As they did so, Lt

Southerland was killed by enemy fire (Lt. Southerland was posthumously awarded the Silver Star), but still Lynch continued, dashing over fifty meters of open, fire-swept ground, to the aid three of our wounded, who he moved to safety in the enemy's trench line, which he then cleared and defended from repeated attack.

Over the next three hours the company made repeated attempts to reach Sp4 Lynch and his comrades, without success, even when finally assisted by the arrival of armored personnel carriers of the 1st Battalion, 50th Mechanized Infantry. On one of these last attempts, Captain Orsini, who had personally directed the battle from the front, including the numerous attempts to reach Lynch's position, was wounded.

Orsini was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and would retire as a Lieutenant Colonel, then pass away after a 14-year battle with non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma in 1998. Captain Richard Kent, a West Point graduate who had been serving as the Battalion's S4, took command when Orsini was evacuated. Kent, who became one of our Company's best and most popular commanders, was wounded south of Quang Tri on February 1st 1968, returned to take the Company through Khe Sanh and A Shau Valley, and retired as a Colonel.

Finally, with the company – and the other elements of the 1/12th – continuing to take casualties, Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA) gunships were called in, firing scores of 2.75 inch rocket salvos to our front, culminating with strikes by Air Force F-100 Super Sabres. That remains one of the most vivid memories of that tour – laying on my back in that small defensive perimeter to watch a bombing run come in straight over the top of us, the pair of bombs released hundreds of meters behind us as the jet began his pull-up, the two black, finned projectiles seeming to float, silently on parallel paths toward, then over us, seemingly just clearing our heads, then that lazy silence rent by deafening thunder, the ground shaking and dirt thrown up and on us, one soldier screaming, restrained by his buddies. Then, for the first time, it was quiet.

Sp4 Lynch had remained in the enemy's midst, protecting his charges, first from the counterattacks of the North Vietnamese infantry around him – he killed at least five – then as best he could to shelter them from our own artillery and air strikes. Five hours after the battle had begun, after the last of the air strikes, he carried the wounded to cover seventy meters to the rear of the position in which he had defended them. Seeing to their comfort, he then returned to the company's defensive perimeter and led a rescue party forward to finally extract the wounded soldiers.

There were many more heroes that day in the 1/12<sup>th</sup>. Among many other awards were Silver Stars to D Company's Specialist 4 Richard Wilkos and Sergeants William E. Gorges and Rudolph H. Ford.

The Battle of Tam Quan officially ended at midnight December 20th after a final battle with the 2/8th Cavalry, and 1/50th Infantry (Mechanized) near An Nghiep. US casualties during the Battle of Tam Quan were 58 killed in action and 250 wounded in action. In the 1st Brigade After Action Report, estimated casualty figures for the 22nd NVA Regiment casualties are listed as 650 killed in action. According to the Commanding General of the 1st Cavalry Division, General Tolson, "the Battle of Tam Quan had a much greater significance than we realized at the time. In that area, it pre-empted the enemy's Tet offensive even though the full impact wasn't then realized. As a result, that

part of Binh Dinh was the least affected of any part of South Vietnam during Tet.”

The battle on December 15, 1967 between the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry, and the 22nd Regiment of the North Vietnamese Army at An My (2) in Binh Dinh Province, cost the lives of these 21 American soldiers of the 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry:

### **B Company**

SGT Juan S. Ozuna, Wapato, WA

SP4 Willie French, Pittsboro, NC

SP4 Ronald L. Klausung, San Diego, CA

### **C Company**

SFC Robert Levine, Jamaica, NY

SFC James E. Lynn, Kenosha, WI

SFC John D. Roche, Bay City, MI

SSG David P. Jewell, Owensboro, KY

SGT Richard J. Boeshart, Sioux City, IA

CPL Steven Matarazzo, Montgomery, NY

SP4 Wayne D. Ryza, Houston, TX

CPL Michael D. Sander, Oakland, CA

PFC James J. Koprivnikar, Cheswick, PA

### **D Company**

1LT Roy E. Southerland, Morristown, TN

SGT Robert L. Flores, Parker, AZ

SP4 Ramon Cortes-Rosa, Hialeah, FL

SP4 Charles W. Hicks, Butner, NC

SP4 Omar Lebron-Domenech, San Sebastian, PR

CPL James Tierno, Jackson Heights, NY

### **HQ Company**

CPL Richard A. Choppa, Hubbard, OH

CPL Riley C. O'Neil, Kansas City, KS

PFC Richard M. Proscia, New Hyde Park, NY

Few of the soldiers who died at My An (2) in December, 1967 appear anywhere on the web except in lists of casualties. The Vietnam Memorial Wall records each of their names on Panels 31E and 32E. Each has an entry at the Memorial's web site, most entries have three pages, one with basic personnel information (HOR, DOB, Marital Status, etc.), the second recording the details of the soldier's death, and one to be used for personal comments and pictures. There are other sources of information (*Virtual Wall*, Washington State's *Faces From the Wall*, the *Coffelt Database*). This D Company site lists our Vietnam War dead by date. Take a few minutes to visit their pages.