

## Battle of Loc Ninh, Oct - Nov 1967

**John McCoy's comments:** My memories of Loc Ninh are as strong as any from my tour in Vietnam. That said, I know there is an awful lot that I have forgotten in the 34 years since our experience at Loc Ninh in 1967. There is still more that I did not know until recently. Therefore, I will count on not only my memories, but those of others that were there, and use information gained while doing research for this website.

### **Here is what Colonel Kasik remembers -**

After 17 October there were only 2 effective rifle companies in the 2/28th: B and C. A and D were going through a massive rebuild. We had been moved up to Quan Loi in late October, the place of red laterite dust, to training and secure the area. On 29 Oct there was a major attack on Loc Ninh, 2/28 sent 90mm recoilless rifles with crews to blow the VC out of bunkers they had occupied on 30 Oct. VC bodies literally covered the runway after the battle that night. On 31 Oct B and C Companies were airlifted by Ch47's to the airstrip at Loc Ninh where we began to dig in and secure an artillery battery on the south end of the airstrip. B Company's positions were inside the rubber and had we stayed there, I believe there was a chance we would have been over-run. Before we finished digging in, we were ordered to airlift to An Loc as it was believed that a major attack would take place there. C Company shortened the perimeter outside the rubber.

At An Loc we dug in in a terrible place filled with prickly brush and the hardest dirt I ever saw.

### **Here is what John McCoy remembers of the area near An Loc -**

after being choppered in from Loc Ninh, Lt. Bracey, Platoon Leader of third platoon, informed our platoon they were expecting this area to get hit hard that night, so we were doing all we could to get dug in. I remember we used grenades under sandbags to loosen the hardpan dirt enough to dig a little, then we would use another grenade and sandbag. Eventually, we got through the hardpan and were able to dig in deep enough to make a respectable bunker. When we were done, I remember looking around and seeing some equipment I didn't usually see on an operation. We had truck-mounted rockets of some sort or another in our NDP, and we had some soldiers with listening devices set up on tripods. The soldiers operating these devices told me they could pick up movement outside our perimeter up to 500 meters, and could tell if it was two-legged or four-legged. I believed them (and still do). Then they told me they could tell if it was male or female. I knew the bull was starting up and my jungle boots leaked, so I headed back to my bunker before I got anything inside my boots. Fortunately, nothing happened that night. At least at our NDP. Loc Ninh Airstrip, where we had left earlier that day, got hit hard.

### **Here is what Don Koch remembers -**

My bunker was to the right of where the snake was being held. That is looking up the runway. I remember the first night we spent about 30 feet into the rubber trees. As soon as it was dark and we had just gotten to sleep, bugs started biting us. Big bugs -- they looked like ants, but much bigger. Maybe termites? But I sure remember how bad they bit us. I was glad when we came back from An Loc and our bunkers were no longer inside the

rubber trees and near those bugs.

Also I remember the jets coming in so low, close and fast dropping bombs. The V.C. hit the drum of fuel up the runway. Once it started burning things died down for a time. All I could think was that the fuel would run down the runway, and the flames follow. At that point I was more worried of that than the V.C.

#### **Back to Colonel Kasik's memories -**

On the night of 1-2 November there was a 2d major attack on Loc Ninh. C company and the Artillery Battery really raised havoc with the VC who appeared to not know they were there at the south end of the strip (part of their main attack went through the rubber were we had previously dug in). We returned on the 2d after being relieved by a Company of the 26th Infantry commanded by a dear friend of mine, Capt Len Tavernetti. We still joke about this as the command bunker we built collapsed as he was sitting on it (construction was a little weak). Tavernetti was later badly wounded in a battle in the rubber around Loc Ninh. His Battalion Commander was killed.

When we returned to Loc Ninh we took over part of C Company's perimeter and added extra bunkers. We stayed there for awhile -- perhaps a week -- during which time there were several more attacks. It is now believed that this was a cover for NVA forces moving south to prepare for Tet. Also, the famous snake capture took place.

#### **More thoughts from John McCoy -**

The famous snake capture! That is a story all by itself. It was a LARGE Python. I mean a really huge Python. It took about 8 or more men to pick it up. It was at least 12 feet long, maybe a lot longer. I have never seen a longer or bigger Python before or since. We were out on patrol, headed back in to the NDP at the south end of the Loc Ninh airstrip, when Lt. Fortenberry walked up, holding the front of the snake, followed by several men from his platoon trying to hold the rest of this enormous constrictor. He informed me that we had all just walked over the snake. That didn't make me feel too comfortable. The snake apparently had eaten recently, as it had a bulge about the size of a small pig about three or four feet back from its head. We all speculated on what it had eaten. Lt. Fortenberry managed to find a large cardboard box, about the size of a refrigerator, and put the snake in that. They named the snake "Lurch." [I used to have a picture of Lt. Fortenberry and half a dozen men holding Lurch. I lost that picture, and all my pictures, in a house fire many years ago. If anyone has a picture of Lurch, please let me know. I would like to put it up here.]

Either that night, or the next night, we came under attack again. I remember Fred Hill and I were heading for our bunker when the first mortar rounds started dropping in on the runway. Fred looked over at the box that had held Lurch, and realized the box had been tipped over somehow and Lurch was loose. When Fred brought this to my attention, I hesitated to jump in the bunker, as I figured Lurch just might be in there. The mortar rounds were moving down the runway, falling closer to our bunkers, so I opted to take my chances with the snake and jumped in the bunker. I may have let Fred go first. Lurch wasn't there, and we never saw him again. I hope he crawled out to the rubber trees and scared a few VC to death.

One thing I remember about Loc Ninh - we were trying something new so the jet pilots and gunship pilots could identify the perimeter of the NDP at night: we had been told to take an empty C-ration can and fill it 3/4 full of sand, then saturate it with either diesel fuel or gasoline. When darkness came and the attack started, we were to reach as far out of the firing port of our bunker as we could and place the can there, then light the fuel. The pilots could see the burning fuel in the cans from the air, but it was not visible to the VC on the ground. This trick seemed to work very well. Those pilots never fired inside our NDP, but sure hugged up close on the outside of the NDP a few times. I am convinced that those pilots saved our lives.

#### **What Fred Hill Remembers:**

It was my turn to sit guard in our defensive bunker. It must have been 0100 or 0200 hours. I was eating a Tootsie Roll and directly in front was one of the hugest explosions I have ever seen. Must have been about thirty yards to our front. The fit then hit the shan.

I remember looking at the crater when the Sun came up. You could have dropped 3/4 Ton Truck into it.

I also remember that we didn't have it too bad. For the most part we remained in the NDP and let the VC bring the fight to us. Which they did on a nightly basis for some time.

John McCoy:

Another thing I remember about Loc Ninh - I believe this was the first night that B Company was there when the NDP came under attack - I was a machine gunner, and I remember firing my gun so long that the barrel turned red. It was glowing in the dark. It became so hot it was transparent. Fortunately, M-60 gunners are furnished with a second barrel, so you switch barrels and go back to work. In the morning, when all was quiet and we came out of our bunkers, I remember seeing the tail fin of a 62mm mortar on top of the bunker. I remember thinking at the time that the sandbags did there job. I was also thinking it was just a coincidence that it landed on my bunker. In retrospect, I believe my bunker had been an intentional target for a VC mortar man or mortar crew that knew what they were doing. I am now sure they were trying to knock out my machine gun.

I didn't know it at the time, but there were three other American NDP's set up in the general area of Loc Ninh. We were all within a five to six kilometers of the town of Loc Ninh. Two companies of the 1/26, along with B battery of the 2/33 artillery were north of Loc Ninh, Two companies of the 1/18th, along with A Battery of the 2/33 Artillery were west of Loc Ninh, we (Bravo Company) along with Charlie Company and A Battery, 6/15th Artillery were at Loc Ninh Airstrip; the 2/12 (25th Division) was placed under operational control of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division and placed in an NDP about five miles to the northeast of us. The placement of the NDPs, in effect, made a box shape around the 272 VC regiment. This was by design of General Hay. The General also placed two companies of the 1/28 as a blocking force on escape routes between Loc Ninh and the Cambodian border. Having effectively boxed in the 272 VC Regiment, they had little choice but to attack to try to break out. Sooner or later, all of these NDPs came under attack during the general period that we were at the Loc Ninh Airstrip. In aggregate, 993 VC bodies were counted in the area of the four NDPs. Considering the VC did all they could to remove their dead, it is a safe assumption that more than 1,000

VC and/or NVA were KIA.

Dave Berry has donated an arial photograph of Loc Ninh. It is a large picture and takes a bit to load, but it shows a lot more than just the airstrip at Loc Ninh. If memory serves me right, Bravo Company was set up at the extreme lower right had corner of the picture in November of 1967. To see the picture,