

LOC NINH

VIETNAM BATTLES—39

ENEMY FORCES BECAME ACTIVE in northern Binh Long Province in the days prior to 18 August by increasing rocket, mortar and ground attacks against the local Special Forces camp near Loc Ninh.

Intelligence had credited enemy forces for some time with the capability of renewing pressure against Saigon. It appeared that the communists had committed a large force in the northern part of the Division's tactical area of interest to draw allied attention away from the capital city in order to infiltrate supplies and personnel in that direction.

On 18 August, elements of the 2d Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, under the operational control (OPCON) of the BIG RED ONE, moved into the area to begin counterattacks. They were joined later in the week by elements of the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry.

Sporadic contact was encountered on 18 and 19 August. Late in the afternoon of the 20th, cavalrymen from Troop G were passing through rubber trees on the way to their night defensive position (NDP) when they came under heavy small arms and automatic weapons fire. They engaged the force, then called in artillery and helicopter gunships which caused the enemy to break contact. Forty-four NVA bodies were left on the battlefield. In the next few days, the *Blackhorse* unit killed an additional 40 enemy soldiers in sporadic fighting.

On the night of 22 August, the village of Loc Ninh was burned by the NVA. In reaction to this, and because large numbers of the enemy were known to be

SP6 Jay G. Smith



A MEMBER of the 1st Bn, 2d Inf patrols the jungle near Loc Ninh.

in the vicinity, the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry (-), commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas E. Fitzpatrick, conducted a reconnaissance-in-force mission five miles east of the village. The *Black Scarves*, consisting of companies C and D and the Reconnaissance Platoon, moved out at 0730 hours and by 0900 made their first contact with the enemy. The unit had advanced through a valley and started up a hill located two miles east of the Loc Ninh airstrip when the Recon Platoon, commanded by First Lieutenant Alex C. Green, engaged an NVA squad. There was a brief skirmish before the NVA were driven off.

The BIG RED ONE troops continued to move up the hill and onto the crest when they came under fire from the hillside below. The enemy fire was heavy, with 60mm mortars landing directly on the *Black Scarves'* position. Company C, situated to the left of the group, was pinned down. Captain Oliver B. Ingram Jr., commander of Company D, placed his unit on line with the Recon Platoon. The mortar fire was so intense that it was decided the two elements had no choice but to assault. At 0930 hours they moved on line through the heavy mortar fire, then charged downhill toward the enemy's position.

Heavy fighting ensued. Specialist 4 Terrance Schafer, a member of the Recon Platoon, charged the NVA position. An enemy bullet knocked the M16 out of his hand. Bleeding and angry, he retrieved the weapon and charged again. Seeing that an enemy machinegun had pinned down several members of his platoon, Specialist Schafer rushed the enemy position and killed the gun crew. He then seized the silenced NVA weapon and continued the fight, killing two more NVA soldiers with the enemy's own weapon before the battle ended.

The fighting continued until late morning. After the smoke cleared, the friendly elements found 29 enemy bodies and captured a 60mm mortar, six rocket

121 Sig Bn



11TH ACR troops move into the Loc Ninh area to begin counterattacks.

launchers, 10 AK rifles and numerous hand grenades and B-40 rockets.

The *Black Scarves* moved back up the hill and Company D secured a landing zone (LZ) while equipment and casualties were flown out. Company C and the Recon Platoon proceeded to the overnight position (RON) which was approximately two miles east of the battle site. Moving around the north side of Hill 178 on the way to the RON position, they made no further contact.

At 1500 hours, after completing the evacuation and resupply mission at the LZ, Company D began its move to the RON position. Instead of following the route of Company C and the Recon Platoon around

AN M-79 grenadier opens up as the battle rages near Loc Ninh.

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ARTILLERY and airstrikes hit Hill 178 as the Black Scarves advance.

the north side of Hill 178, Delta circled to the south, then headed for the RON.

Approximately a half mile from the site of the first battle, the rear platoon engaged an enemy squad on its left flank, about 500 yards from Hill 178. Following the light contact, the unit continued toward the RON position.

At this time the Company D scout leader, Sergeant Richard Hines, called to First Lieutenant Lee F. Jones, Company D's 2d Platoon leader, that he had found communications wire leading up the hill.

Lieutenant Jones notified Captain Ingram, then advanced with his squad leader, Sergeant James E. Streite, to examine the wire. As Captain Ingram joined them, an NVA jumped from behind a tree 20 yards away and fired. Sergeant Streite returned fire, killing the enemy soldier.

As the three followed the wire a number of enemy were spotted on top of Hill 178. "Then they just started coming from behind every tree," Lieutenant Jones related. "A squad here, a squad there, they advanced downhill."

The trio jumped behind rubber trees for protection but held their fire. When six of the NVA soldiers were within 20 yards of their position, Captain Ingram gave the order to fire. "The three of us laid down a devastating base of fire and killed all of them," recalled the lieutenant.

Shortly after they opened fire they began to receive small arms and 82mm mortar rounds from three sides of their location. Captain Ingram directed that a heavy base of fire be laid down, then he crawled back to the company's position to adjust artillery and airstrikes.

Lieutenant Jones and Sergeant Streite remained in their position in front of the company and continued to fire. Artillery rounds from the 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery were adjusted on the enemy. One barrage knocked out an enemy mortar tube. Airstrikes also took their toll.

A 1ST BN, 2d Inf soldier carefully checks a VC bunker.

1st Div PIO



It was not enough, however, as enemy firepower became more fierce, and the NVA continued to advance on Delta's position. "They acted as if they were under the influence of drugs," said Lieutenant Jones, "and they just kept walking toward us." The lieutenant and Sergeant Streite pulled back to the main group and continued to fight.

At 1700 hours the fighting was still raging. Delta Company shifted 150 yards to a more advantageous position, then reorganized. Gunships, 105mm artillery fire and airstrikes continued to pound the enemy. "It looked as if we were going to be overrun," said the lieutenant, "because they were still coming down the hill. We were told to pop smoke, which we did, and air strikes were dropped within 50 yards of our position—so close you could feel the heat of the strikes." This checked the NVA charge.

A platoon from Company C was sent out from the RON position to act as a rear guard to allow Delta to return to the RON. This was accomplished at 1900 hours with Delta moving through the Company C position and into the RON. Every five minutes during the night of 23 August two rounds of 105mm fire blasted the hill.

The next morning Company D again moved up Hill 178, preceded by the Recon Platoon. Company A had been airlifted to the RON position earlier that morning and was programmed to follow Delta, with Company C in the rear.

Company D, the Recon Platoon and Company A were within 900 yards of the top of Hill 178 and had just entered a woodline when heavy sniper and 82mm mortar fire broke out.

MEMBERS of the 1st Bn, 2d Inf cut through bamboo vines near Loc Ninh.

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A 1ST BN, 2d Inf patrol skirts a woodline near Loc Ninh.

SP4 Ron Thornbrue



By 0930 hours all elements were in heavy contact and were slowly fighting their way up the hill. As they reached a short ridgeline overlooking a small valley directly across from Hill 178, the NVA came into sight.

Specialist 4 Evan Harr, the radio man for Company D, remembered that "as we looked into the valley below there seemed to be an enemy behind every tree. You could just about pick out the officers by their clean, starched uniforms."

The NVA laid down a heavy barrage of fire, then followed with a ground assault. The Recon Platoon, which was in the lead, was immediately hit. Delta Company was under heavy fire. Artillery, gunships and airstrikes were again requested. Colonel Fitzpatrick rushed forward to the lead element to direct the ground and air action. The hill top was pounded with airstrikes.

Heavy fighting continued until 1030 hours, when resistance stopped. Company D reached the top of Hill 178 at 1100 hours without incident. The enemy was beaten.

"There were dead NVA everywhere," recalled Lieutenant Jones. "We found a complex consisting of about 20 bunkers on top of the hill. The strange thing about the whole fight was that the enemy had excellent fields of fire in the open terrain, but we received very little AK rifle fire. Nearly all was from 82mm mortars. It was idiotic! It seemed as if they were trying to get close enough to throw RPG rounds at us."

The week-long battle cost the enemy 200 dead, plus many weapons, supplies and equipment. Allied losses were five killed and 75 wounded.

LOC C IV N I N H

VIETNAM BATTLES—40

LESS THAN 20 DAYS after the third major battle at Loc Ninh, the NVA and VC were again probing US defenses. Prior to 11 September, enemy elements increased the pressure with rocket and mortar attacks against the Special Forces camp, airstrip and friendly units operating in the Loc Ninh area.

Then, on 11 September, the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry (-), consisting of Companies C and D, was diverted to the rubber tree area east of Loc Ninh to establish a blocking position. Company D would sweep from Loc Ninh eastward, driving the enemy into Company C, which would act as the blocking force.

The original concept of the blocking force was not carried out by Company C, for the unit encountered heavy enemy fire from 75mm recoilless rifles, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs), and automatic weapons almost immediately after moving out. The company returned fire, and in the hour-long battle which followed, killed 10 NVA soldiers and captured a 75mm recoilless weapon. By 1630 hours the battle was over.

Company C then established an overnight position (RON) near this location, and was joined by Delta, which was completing an uneventful sweep from Loc Ninh.

On 12 September the two companies were to conduct reconnaissance missions further eastward but again heavy enemy resistance was encountered. Approximately 50 yards from the RON position Company D received heavy small arms and RPG fire. Sporadic to heavy contact continued throughout the morning with forward movement limited to a few hundred yards. With the help of artillery support from Battery B, 1st Battalion, 5th Artillery, enemy resistance slackened in the early afternoon and the units continued their move eastward. At 1600 hours the 1st Battalion, 2d Infantry encountered an estimated NVA platoon in bunkers. After calling light fire teams which were under the operational control of the 1st Brigade, artillery fire from D Btry, 1st Bn, 5th Arty, and F-4 fighter strikes, the contact

1ST DIV soldiers move out from helicopter in an assault near Loc Ninh.

SP6 William H. McGilbrey



was broken at approximately 2000 hours. The unit remained in the area overnight.

On the 13th, as the *Black Scarves* were preparing to depart the RON position, they again came under heavy enemy fire. The engagement lasted one and a half hours. They were supported by light fire teams and artillery while F-100 fighter planes expended 10,000 pounds of bombs in the engagement. The enemy broke contact and the 1/2 returned to Loc Ninh, from where they conducted battlefield sweeps and searches without further significant contact.

The 1st Battalion, 28th Infantry (-), consisting of Company A, B, D and the Reconnaissance Platoon, was airlifted into Loc Ninh during the morning of 12 September to conduct a sweep in the vicinity of Loc Ninh. On the afternoon of the 12th, Company D was to sweep to the north of Loc Ninh toward Hill 177, circle counter-clockwise, and return to Loc Ninh airstrip. Companies A and D were to sweep an area north of Loc Ninh and east of Highway 13 in the general direction of Hill 222. The Recon Platoon was given the mission of conducting an airborne insertion in the vicinity of a downed Cobra gunship and securing the site.

Delta's sweep was conducted without incident. The unit returned to the airstrip where it remained until 15 September.

The Recon Platoon met heavy resistance after land-

SP5 E.E. Cowart



A MEMBER of the 1st Bn, 28th Inf Recon Platoon advances on a suspected enemy position.

ARTILLERYMEN of the 1st Div are in support of the 1st Bn, 28th Inf while on operations near Loc Ninh.



SP5 E.E. Cowart

ing on a cold landing zone (LZ) at 1430 hours. It later withdrew to its point of insertion and was extracted at 1600 hours.

Companies A and C proceeded on their mission without incident until mid-afternoon when both units encountered a series of heavy contacts. During heavy rainfall Captain Jay H. Hagman, Company C commander, noticed movement about 600 yards east of his position. He advanced 300 yards to determine the nature of the movement.

"My point man reported it looked like a US infantry company moving across his front," recalled Captain Hagman, "possibly 250 to 300 yards away. I asked him why he thought they were US. He replied that the individuals appeared to be wearing hard hats and they all carried packs. I informed him that NVA elements had been known to wear such equipment.

"We were supposed to have 'friendlies' to our north and possibly to our northeast, and I wanted to determine whether these were friendly or not before I called in any fire missions. I instructed everyone to get down and not to expose our position."

Calling his artillery forward observer, the captain requested a fire mission on the element... "just in case." The forward observer called his support unit and found that the artillery was supporting so many other units that they could not assist Company C unless it was in actual contact. Just as the captain decided his position was tactically unsound without artillery support, and had decided to move to a more strategic location, information was received from his flanks that positive enemy movement was noticed to the north and east of his position. "We were down in some low ground. We did have some dirt berms around us in the rubber trees, but it just wasn't the kind of place I wanted to defend."

The *Black Lions* then moved to the northwest until they came to Highway 14A, just south of Hill 222. Thinking the unit could be air-extracted by using the road as a pick-up zone (PZ), Captain Hagman sent an element cross the road to secure it. They immediately came under fire from the north.

Using small arms and M79 grenade launchers, Company C succeeded in forcing the enemy to break contact. The company hurriedly placed itself in a defensive pattern with one platoon facing north, one generally east, and the other to the west, all on the south side of the road. A small security unit was then placed on the north side of the road for better visibility. As Captain Hagman was standing on a berm watching them take up their position, he spotted 20 NVA soldiers moving into assault position on the team. Wanting to get everyone back on the same side of the road for security, he yelled at the platoon leader that he was about to receive an enemy assault.

"As I yelled, the enemy to the north opened fire, and at the same time, we were also attacked by what appeared to be an NVA company coming at us from the east. This was the movement we had seen earlier. They must have followed us into position."

The artillery forward observer immediately requested a fire mission, reporting that the unit was in contact. As the artillery began to fall in, it was worked across the northern flank of the unit's position, then dropped down on the east flank. Tactical air strikes and gunships were requested. The gunships arrived first and by using the road which ran east to west, they had a perfect fire control line. The gunships broke up the assault from the north. The line on the east, however, was under heavy pressure. It had moved back some 40 yards from where it was originally stationed. Two medics were killed and a machinegun was knocked out of action. The platoon leader from the 2d Platoon recognized the problem and moved a machinegun accordingly. Along with the heavy artillery, this stopped the attack from that direction.

At this time tactical air support arrived and the captain proceeded to expend 16 sorties on the north side of the road. This was the location of the real threat, for the company was receiving heavy fire from that direction.

A MACHINEGUNNER from Co C, 1st Bn, 28th Inf puts out a heavy volume of fire as a sniper's shot cracks overhead.

SP5 E. E. Coustins



PFC David Pasquariello



A 1ST DIV soldier moves out quickly during reconnaissance-in-force operations near Loc Ninh.

SGT. Miroslav Pintomy



THE BLACK LIONS make their way through thick vegetation while on a reconnaissance-in-force mission near Loc Ninh.

Again the enemy tried to make an assault, but artillery and airstrikes broke it up. Finally, at 1745 hours, enemy fire ceased.

Company C dug in for the night about 800 yards from Hill 222. There was movement throughout the night, but there was no evidence of the enemy the following morning (the 13th). In sweeping the battlefield one dead NVA soldier with documents and two AK weapons were found. There were signs that there had been heavy casualties in the area but the enemy had policed the battlefield during the night.

At 1300 hours, Alpha and an element from the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment joined up with Company C. At approximately 1545 all three units again came under fire as they moved toward Hill 222. Mortar and RPG rounds hit nearby as they also took fire from three machineguns, one to the front and one on each flank. Airstrikes and artillery were called onto the enemy positions. Because of the heavy enemy activity it took almost an hour and a half to clear the area of the entrenched enemy. Finally, all units pulled back to the same RON position that Company C had occupied the night before.

During the early afternoon of 13 September, the command helicopter carrying Major General Keith L. Ware, commander of the BIG RED ONE, Command Sergeant Major Joseph A. Venable, and six others, crashed and burned due to hostile fire south and east of Loc Ninh. There were no survivors in the crash. The Assistant Division Commander, Major General Orwin C. Talbott, immediately assumed command of the 1st Infantry Division.

On the 14th, Company A took the lead and a combined effort was made to seize Hill 222. They moved forward four times during the day, and each time received extremely heavy fire. After the fourth attempt airstrikes were called in. Following the strikes, Com-

THE 1ST BN, 28th Inf move forward to engage the enemy during the battle of Loc Ninh.

SP5 E.E. Cousins



A RADIOMAN stands by as his commanding officer checks his map against information given to him by the command helicopter hovering above.

121 Sig Bn



SCREAMING OVER the target at almost treetop level, a B-57 Canberra turns loose its death-dealing cargo on Hill 222 to help defeat the large NVA force entrenched there.



pany A took the right flank. With Charlie on the left, they both advanced simultaneously on the objective. They received no fire and had advanced halfway before darkness caused them to halt. They remained overnight in this position, then moved on to the top of the hill on the 15th.

"On the way up," said Captain Hagman, "we walked through a complex that had at least 80 bunkers. Each bunker was interdefensible with other bunkers as the NVA build them. They were so well camouflaged that the first one I saw was the one I was standing on!"

The lead element on the day of the 13th had been within 10 yards of the bunkers, closer than they had originally thought. Indications were that the hill had been defended by a battalion-size force.

The 2d Battalion, 16th Infantry (-) was given an order to link up with the *Black Lions* north of Hill 222. They had been air-inserted northwest of the hill at about 1245 hours on 13 September and had met heavy resistance throughout the two days they were in the area. The link-up was effected without serious incident.

After two days of light action following the link-up at Hill 222, all units returned to their base camps and the fourth **BATTLE OF LOC NINH** was over.

The five-day engagement resulted in 216 enemy killed, and numerous weapons and equipment, including six machineguns and 13 AK-47s, were taken by allied elements. US casualties were 33 killed.

As **DANGER FORWARD** went to press, the **BIG RED ONE** continued Phase II of Operation TOAN THANG with aggressive reconnaissance-in-force missions and jungle clearing operations. ♣

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MEMBERS OF the 2d Bn, 16th Inf move in to linkup with the *Black Lions* on Hill 222 as the fourth battle of Loc Ninh comes to an end.