

The Battle of Sou Tre. (LZ-Gold)
March 22nd, 1967



Pen & Ink scanned from a letter sent home

Sou Tre is an abandoned hamlet located in the jungle of Tay Ninh Province.

This site was picked to build a fire support base code named LZ-Gold, since it also contained a large clear area to land troops by helicopter. This fire support base was part of operation Junction City II, a search and destroy mission.

To build Camp LZ-Gold, located in the middle of a large clearing, all equipment had to be flown in by helicopter. The 77th artillery flew in a battery of 105 cannons. They also brought in quad 50 machine guns for the perimeter defenses. The artillery and command post was set up near the center. The perimeter was protected by two infantry companies of the 3-22nd.

Both units came prepared to fight off any enemy attacks. The artillery of the 77th could fire deadly beehive rounds at point blank range behind its sandbagged defenses. The quad 50 machine guns could pour out a wall of lead. The 3-22nd. set up claymore mines to their front. They had a machine gun in every bunker.

Two battalions were conducting search and destroy operations nearby in case help was needed. The 2-22nd, a mechanized infantry unit, had a company of Patterson tanks with it.

On the night of March 21st, 1967, the 272nd NVA, crawled into position to attack LZ-Gold. While doing so, they were detected by an ambush patrol of the 3-22 which was also detected by the enemy. Neither side fired for fear of giving away their position. But, the firebase was now aware that an attack was imminent

Dawn, March 2nd. The enemy opened up with a mortar attack on LZ-Gold. Then, they launch a human wave attack from all directions at once.

The fighting was so intensive that the 3-22nd was forced to pull back to the artillery positions. They had to fight their way back with vicious hand to hand combat. Some of the soldiers of the 3-22nd even seized weapons from the enemy when their own weapons ran out of ammo. Officers and senior NCOs were forced to join in the battle. By 0800, a call for reinforcements was sent.

The 2-22nd came crashing through the jungle with the Patterson tanks in the lead. Coronal Garth, Flexible 6, who was observing the battle from his command helicopter, radioed the following message to the battalion commander, Fullback 6. "This is Flexible 6, have your men dismount and sweep the area. This is Fullback 6. Negative out." This one move changed the rules on mechanized armor in battle. The 2-22nd broke into the clearing with all guns blazing. The lead track had to fight off VC trying to climb in. The driver ran down some of them. Units of the 2-22nd fanned out mowing down VC as they went by. By 10 AM, the surviving NVA soldiers were on the run.

A spotter plane located the NVAs reinforcement. Air strikes were called in on their position resulting in that unit being destroyed.

After securing the area, the 2-22nd started clean up operations. By that afternoon, over 600 bodies were placed into 3 mass graves. Also recovered were some 60 RPG launchers with 400 rockets, 2000 hand grenades, AK47s, Soviet made machine guns, 82mm mortars, and some 200,000 rounds of small arms ammo.

Documents captured from the 272nd NVA commanders indicated that they had planned to attack the 3rd brigades base camp at Dau Tieng while it was out on operations.

After the battle an officer of the 3-22nd told a CBS news reporter, "One of my men was wounded. He had a VC sitting on top of him. His element had pulled back and, for some reason, the VC had stepped into his position. They (the VC) were swarming all over the place. They left people (US troops) behind them. They (the VC) must have been on narcotics or something." (John Flynn, CBS News, March 23rd, 1967)

US forces lost 30 men and had 109 wounded. Destroyed were 2-105 cannons, two HU1D helicopters, and a spotter plane. There were no casualties suffered by the mechanized unit during the mounted rescue attack.

The NVA had two crack regiments badly mauled by the battle. They also lost tons of valuable equipment. 2,500 well armed enemy soldiers tried to wipe out 300 dug in Americans by using, for the first time, textbook battle tactics and failed in that attempt.

General Westmorland flew in the next day to congratulate the soldiers for a job well done.

Note, official sources puts the number of American soldiers killed in action as 31. This includes 3 individuals that were killed as a result of friendly fire. This happened when Coronal Garth ordered ambush patrols out for the evening and brigade failed to notify line commanders that there were friendlies in the area. During the night, a forward unit spotted some motion with a radar detector and called in an artillery strike. The survivors were then told to come back in. They refused to do so and a rescue unit was sent for them.

Cleanup patrols discovered an unexploded 500 lb. bomb and proceeded to destroy it. Again, the line companies were not notified. I saw a huge fireball mushroom above the jungle about 100 meters in front of my position. There was just enough time to duck for cover before the shrapnel came raining down.