

Battle of Soui Cut, Fire Base Burt  
From : Dennis Adkins, C/3-22, 67 - 68

Dear John, I sit here in awe after reading the accounts of men I have never met but who were beside me and above me the night of January 1, 1968 at FSB Burt.

The dust kicked up by armored personnel carriers hung in the hot, still, humid air like a red veil. Upon arriving at FSB Burt you could feel the uneasiness of the area like some sinister, invisible force trapping you in its cloak. You knew this place was bad.

Charlie Company, 3/22 Infantry had come to join the rest of the battalion, as 3rd platoon leader I was assigned the last five positions on the south edge of the perimeter ending on the east side of the road that led out of the fire support base. The next position on the other side of the road was a platoon of APC's from the 2/22 Infantry.

The foxholes we inherited were poorly dug, lacking depth and overhead cover, due to the extremely hard digging conditions. Entrenching tools seemed to bounce off the cement-like earth yielding only a chip of dirt with each tiring heave of the shovel. The heat of the day increased the men's frustration and grumbling. "This is deep enough, lieutenant." No, it's not. We'll keep digging until dark if it's necessary. Besides, the dirt that comes out of that hole is needed to fill sandbags for your overhead cover." I was not a popular man that afternoon.

Heavy foliage encroached this section of the perimeter and even with brush cutting we were only able to clear a maximum of 15-20 meters field of vision before beginning to lose light at days end. Using the cover of dusk, the men put out a heavy concentration of trip flares and claymore mines in front of our five positions on the perimeter. Darkness would soon be upon us.

One by one, as the men rotated from their foxholes through the chow line several rounds of incoming mortar fire interrupted the evening meal. I remember the secure feeling I had during the massive counter-mortar fire barrage that encircled us for what seemed like more than a half hour. "That kind of firepower ought to settle things down for the night," I said to my platoon sergeant, SSGT Alfred Beebe, as I curled up for the night.

Just as I was about to fall asleep, around 2300 hr.'s, I heard the cries of "Incoming!" and the unmistakable "bloop,bloop, bloop" of incoming mortar rounds. Everyone was diving for cover in their foxholes. This time, instead of just a few harassing rounds of fire, there came a relentless rain of explosions and hot, jagged steel. As the bombardment began, the three man listening post one hundred meters out in front of our perimeter called in a report of massive movement all around them and then silence...this was the last radio contact we would have from them.

Fifteen minutes into the shelling the M-60 machine gun positioned at my left most bunker opened fire with a fury. Before I could check what was going on the radio crackled with a call from the company commander, Cpt. Fishburne, screaming to find out what was happening. As I looked out the ground level firing port of my command post, trip flares began popping to my front like popcorn, washing the jungle in a sea of white light. The foliage transformed into a moving wall of humanity as thick as any mob of shoppers in the mall the day before Christmas. In an instant, my middle bunker immediately in front of me went up in an explosion and the firing enemy soldiers poured through the gap the way a mighty flood races through a failed levee, engulfing everything in its path. As they swarmed over us, screaming and firing wildly into the night, some would stop and try to enter our bunkers from the rear

only to be met with a frantic hail of gunfire from the defenders inside.

The radio crackles again, Fishburne screaming for help! "The VC are on the roof of the CP firing down through the sandbags. They're trying to come in the back door! Help! Send somebody to get them off of us!..." The radio went silent.

All defensive integrity of the perimeter in my sector was gone. Each of my remaining four bunkers had become an isolated pocket of American resistance fighting for their lives, firing in every direction. There was no way to approach them. Since I was the only one in my CP who clearly knew the location of the Company command bunker I instructed Sgt. Beebe to take charge. I told my RTO, David "Smitty" Smith, to leave his radio, grab his weapon, bandoleers of ammo and some frags and follow me.

As we crawled out of the safety of the bunker we entered a world of darkness punctuated with bright flashes, red and green trails of tracer bullets zipping and cracking everywhere around us. The acrid smell of cordite singeing our nostrils and choking our every breath. Trying to avoid detection we only fired at the enemy soldiers that trampled over us as their hordes rushed to the interior of the base. In spite of the confusion our gunfire marked our position and the ground around us erupted in a hail of bullets from a nearby Chi-Com assault rifle. Smitty called out "Hey, there's a hole over here!" In the darkness he had recalled crawling through a shallow depression about four inches in depth a few feet to our rear. Oval shaped, it was large enough for us to lay on our stomachs and intertwine our legs. Smitty facing one direction and I facing the other we engaged an unseen enemy that zeroed in on our position. In an instant, with a blinding flash and a thunderous concussion, the night stopped...the only sensation was that of a great fire in my right leg, dirt in my mouth and nose, and the deafening ringing in my ears. Then nothing... From the depths of nothingness a distant rumble is detected. As though a volume control knob was being turned, the noise becomes closer and louder. As the mind's confusion begins to clear, a new sensation is felt. Something is bouncing off of my leg. Now the noise is hammering my ears and I realize that it is machine-gun fire. Spent cartridges are bouncing off my leg with every burst of fire. The VC are using me for cover like some fallen log! I lay motionless as in death, trying to conceal the beating of my heart, the function of my lungs. My left arm is trapped under my body and has lost all sense of function. Feeling the presence of at least two enemy soldiers my mind searches for a plan of action. The cacophony of the battle rages on. This time a new sound is added, the impact of incoming artillery rounds. We must have had to call in artillery on our own positions. All sense of time is lost. Somewhere in that timeless state, playing dead, wondering if, for the moment, I am the only American alive, I waited to die.

Again the world is rocked by a massive explosion, mere feet away. The force of the blast throws me into the darkness, again filling my airways with dirt and dust. And again, a force like I've never known delivers me into nothingness. The enemy soldiers that once had used me for cover had now shielded me from the deadly shower of shrapnel from an exploding 105mm round which landed ten feet away. As consciousness came back to me I listened intently for sounds of life and movement around me. Cautiously, I slowly moved my head. Nothing but the raging sounds of war. In the darkness I slowly surveyed my surroundings. Dead enemy, my helmet, my weapon, and Smitty's cold, lifeless body. I crawled in the direction that I hoped would be toward my platoon CP. Although bullets continued to fly everywhere there weren't any NVA in my path. Stopping a short distance from the silhouette I recognized to be my bunker, I watched and listened for clues that might tell me who occupied it. M-16 rifle fire was coming from it but I couldn't be sure if it was coming from GIs or NVA. From a position of cover, rifle ready to lay down fire, I verbally challenged the hole with our pre-determined emergency password. Thank God, I heard Sgt. Beebe's voice in reply, identified myself and scrambled to safety.

Beebe had given me up for dead hours earlier when I failed to make the company command bunker. The enemy trying to take that position earlier had been killed when the artillery had leveled their howitzers and fired bee hive rounds. He had been unable to leave the bunker and check on the other positions but a reinforcement element was on its way from the Battalion Recon platoon. The platoon medic was wounded but stable, Jimmy Pierce, the other RTO was okay and unknown to Beebe at the time, he had taken a flechette from a bee hive round through the stomach and out his back.

As darkness was beginning to give way to first light, 12 men from the Recon arrived at my CP. Starting with my first bunker position on the left we re-established our defense, leaving a couple of fresh troops at each bunker. The center bunker that had been blown up at the onset of the attack was still occupied by enemy soldiers. I maneuvered the Recon squad from one angle and had them open fire distracting the enemy while I crawled up on their blind side and pitched in a grenade I had let cook. By the time we had covered and re-established all five bunkers I had counted six MIA's including the three men out on the listening post. We had to fight our way out to the LP through the retreating enemy forces and recovered two seriously wounded platoon members and one KIA. During the reorganizing at dawn, the NVA melted back into the jungle. Through the smoke that covered the land in the morning I found my three missing men, away from their positions, dead on the battlefield.

Among the many brave men that were there that night, Mike Balser, 2nd platoon leader, Charlie company 3/22 is the lieutenant who made his way back to the perimeter up the road from south. He had lead an ambush patrol out the night before and was overrun by the advancing enemy forces. He too, has a story from Hell, that will be a part of him for the rest of his days.

As the dust off flights were taking men out I remember sitting on a log looking at the six poncho covered bodies of the men I lost that night. My tears streamed down my grimy cheeks at the loss of such fine men. Somewhere a chaplain appeared and placed his arm across my shoulder and assured me it was all right to let it out. As I made my way to one of the last dustoff birds out, I was eager to lift off and leave that place forever. The night before we had been a platoon of 29 men. That morning there were six KIA, 16 wounded, and seven left in the field to be the 3rd Platoon of Charlie Company, 3/22 infantry.