

# Battle of Trung Luong

by LTC. (Ret) Tom Furgeson

**18 Jun 66**

Late in the afternoon, I was ordered to the Battalion CP for a warning order. It seemed that a U.S. Marine Corps Regimental Landing Team was going ashore for a training exercise North of Tuy An, (Map Sheet 6835 IV, Series L7014, coordinates 100790). Our Battalion was to go into an area Southwest of their AO to see what they might flush out. It was also noted that the Special Forces Camp at Dong Tre (coordinates 900700) had been hit fairly hard the previous night and that "maybe" several NVA units with main force back up were in the area. No information received in that warning order indicated that our Battalion (-) could not handle the impending operation. In fact, I went back and briefed the platoon leaders on the operation and requested that no one harass the Marines when and if we run into them. The Company immediately set about preparing for this operation by briefing on LZs, formations to be used and order of movement. The Senior Aidman, Sp5 Cotton, checked those individuals that most likely would not be able to accompany the unit on this operation. Due to their medical conditions, two individuals specifically come to mind....Lt. Roberts, Platoon Leader, and Sp4 Salazar, Machine-gunner. During the evening, helicopter chinks were determined, and the order of movement into the LZ was established. The command group with FO party would land immediately behind the lead Platoon and the FO's Recon Sgt was to go in with the lead Platoon. Three LZs were picked out and the terrain studied by all. The primary LZ was Hill 96 (coordinates 023672), and the touch down time was 1230 hours 19 Jun 66. We knew the temperature during this time would be around 100 deg. F and water was of the essence. Therefore, salt tablets and at least 3 quarts of water per man was established. Double basic load for all weapons systems was the norm and four grenades per individual would be carried. Morale and spirits were high and all were ordered to get a good nights sleep. Major Hinkle and I would fly out to the Marine Corps CP on board a helicopter flattop early on 19 Jun to receive a final update on their situation and any additional intelligence they might have.

**19 Jun 66**

Early in the morning, Major Hinkle, S-3, and I flew to the Marine Corps CP. I can remember the sun was just coming up and it was a beautiful morning as the sun shown across the South China Sea. As normal for that area, it was hot and humid. Once aboard the carrier we were briefed, and established boundaries and no-fire lines in the event our units might run into each other or the enemy. I was not concerned and felt very confident that our Battalion could handle anything in our area of operation. The Marine units were just to the North of us and could reinforce our Battalion if necessary. Little did I know that the Marines were not prepared to do so. Upon completion of the briefing and coordination, Major Hinkle and I returned to Tuy Hoa base and went our separate ways. He to Battalion TOC and I to the Company. C Company was lined up on the PZ as we arrived, therefore there was plenty of time to prepare A Company for its deployment. Everything was checked and I felt very confident that all would go well. All leaders went over procedures on how we would handle a "hot LZ." However, we did not expect that because we were to land on the highest piece of terrain around. We did discuss routes of march to the North and objectives to be achieved by each Platoon. There was concern about the dust kicked up by approaching helicopters on the sandy PZ and how we would protect our weapons from this problem. Each Platoon leader had his own solution, therefore, I left it up to them to make that decision.....The lead Platoon though, was to ensure no weapon would malfunction because of dust, therefore their weapons were covered in plastic bags until airborne. This was never really a problem during my two tours in VN. Those GI s would find a way to make their weapons work and the officers and NCOs continually checked their men and equipment to avoid this problem. At approximately 1200 hours A Company lifted off for our assault LZ. The flight was uneventful and the artillery prep was on target; the gun ships made gun runs; and the door gunners on each ship put down fire suppression. The LZ was cold, however, all the fire support set the dry grass on fire and that added to the heat of the day. Once all Platoons were on the ground, combat formations were established and we moved quickly off the burning LZ. LTC Wasco, Battalion Commander, and Major Hinkle were with the Company but not with my command group. The heat was tremendous and we lost several men to this element, however, no one was medevaced. The individuals were doused with water from a stream and sent on their way. Throughout the afternoon, the Company moved to the North clearing the area. There was no contact with the enemy forces during this time. Also, I did not want to move too fast due to the heat and a sixth sense.....everything seemed to be too easy. There were reports from our

Platoon leaders of fire fights to the West where C Company had landed. Later the Battalion CO and S-3 left our unit to check on C Company. The more we monitored the communication between Battalion and C Company, the more concerned we became. Our unit moved through some isolated villages and came across a school in Dinh-Phong (coordinates 020698). In one of the classrooms there was a blackboard with drawings on it, and it seemed to be being used to plan defensive actions for the enemy. Evidently our operation had not been anticipated and everyone had left in a hurry and the blackboard was not erased. At the time it meant nothing, but looking back, the drawings were of a village and how it would be defended (possibly Trung-Luong). With the continuing fire fights to the West in C Company's AO, and no break in contact, a piece of high ground picked and a perimeter defense was established. All Platoon leaders were ordered to the Company CP. We had been monitoring Battalion transmissions with C Company for some time and knew this was a determined resistance against them. Based upon this information only two ambushes, in Platoon size units, would be sent out that evening after dark. Our three units....the two ambush platoons and the Company CP with weapons platoon and a rifle platoon would be mutually supporting. Each ambush platoon was to be prepared to return to the Company CP immediately after any contact. After dark the ambush platoons left the Company perimeter and headed for their assigned sites. We watched and monitored C Company's activities all night long, realizing they were in trouble. Shortly after midnight, 1st platoon sprung their ambush and killed several clean cut NVA. Once their ambush was sprung the other platoon was ordered back to the Company perimeter. The ambush platoon was ordered to remain in position and did not return until daybreak. All night long the XO, John Towers, and I discussed C Company's situation and what could be done about it. We both knew our Company would be ordered to attack in the morning and link up with them. We discussed all possible routes of advance with those Platoon leaders and Platoon Sgts in the Company perimeter. Spooky, Puff the Magic Dragon, artillery and small arms fire went on all night long....I had not experienced this before. It was normally hit and run....this was determined resistance. So ended 19 Jun with A Company, 2 Battalion, 327th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

## 20 Jun 66

Throughout the early morning hours we continued to monitor the Battalion Command Net and attempted to make something out of what was going on with C Company. At daybreak the 1st Platoon returned and was debriefed. The Platoon had set up in ambush along a North South trail (coordinates 016695) expecting the enemy to come from either of those two directions. What the Platoon did not know was that there was an East West trail which lead directly into the center of their ambush position and terminated on the NS trail forming a T. That's the way the NVA came. Neither end of the ambush knew the enemy was there until the firing broke out. One NVA jumped on Sp4 Housley's back saying "how do I get the hell out of here!" or words to that effect, in perfect English. Several enemy got away, but there were also several who didn't, the bodies, were searched and there were no documents or other information that might be of use to the S-2. Immediately after "Stand To," a warning order was issued, to be prepared to move West and link up with C Company, who by this time must be exhausted due to all of the fighting that had been going on for some 18 hours. Lt. Eddy's 2d Platoon was selected to be the lead element. Order of march was 2d Platoon, Command group, 3d Platoon, Weapons Platoon and 1st Platoon. The straight line distance between our two companies was a little over 4 klicks. At 0800 hours, just as expected, A Company received orders to move to the West and link up with C Company as soon as possible. I requested from the FO the location of the closest artillery and was told our DS artillery position was located at the cross roads. (Intersection of Routes 1 & 68, coordinates 072712) {Please note the terms used are descriptions of locations we all knew} I also asked the FO what other fire support could be expected. I just was not too satisfied with the Lt. probably because he was new and we had not worked together that long. Therefore I depended almost entirely on the Recon Sgt. Sp4 Pardick....he was good and I could always depend upon him being right there with me during the thick of it. The first order of business was water. 1st Platoon Sgt Calvert stated that there was water in the creek they had crossed that morning on their return. At 0830 hours we move to the creek and the Company provided security as each platoon filled their canteens. Even at this early hour the heat was tremendous. The Company continued West to the finger just North of hill 48, (coordinates 011699) which was about 2 klicks East of C Company. Since C Company was only receiving sporadic fire at this time we established a company perimeter. 1st and 3d Platoons were to cover 2d Platoon as it crossed the 500 meters of open area to Trung Luong (2). Lt. Eddy crossed without any problem and called back and said there was plenty of fresh water in the well at the village entrance. He was ordered to move further into the village and prepare for the remainder of the company to cross the open area and join him. Upon our arrival, there had still not been any contact. Lt. Eddy was ordered to

proceed and clean out the remainder of the village. Each platoon would fill their canteens, then form up and follow. The village appeared deserted and did not look like it had been inhabited for some time. The width of the village would only require one platoon on line to accomplish this mission. 2d Platoon moved out and 1st Platoon finished watering down and prepared to move out on the right when all hell broke loose. The automatic weapons fire was tremendous. The command group immediately moved forward as the battle grew in intensity. This was no hit and run action, we were in among them and they among us. It was close quarter fighting with rifles, pistols and grenades. Lt. Towers immediately set up a position for collecting wounded and dead as well as requesting resupply of ammunition, especially grenades, as soon as possible. Lt Eddy was one of the first to go down. Even without officers as leaders the NCOs and privates took over and we were able to dominate the fight. Dead and wounded were evacuated and resupplies arrived quickly. As the battle continued the command post was set up in a concrete house close to the front on the left flank of the Company. There we were Noonan, Hazeltine [Battalion and Company RTOs], the FO Lt., Pardick and me. As I was laying there sending in a situation report, pieces of concrete wall 3-4 feet in diameter came flying off walls as the rounds penetrated....this was heavy. The enemy was using AA weapons in direct fire against us. Someone said "let's get the hell out of here!" As we ran out the back door, an M-60 LMG open up right over our heads and we heard and saw an NVA body and an SKS rifle come crashing down from the roof of the building we were just in. Evidently an enemy soldier had been placed on the roof in a cut out chimney, and was picking off our men as they advanced passed him. (I remember thinking this is just like the cowboy movies I use to see in the local theater.) The reports coming in from the platoons were not encouraging, but everyone was doing his job and we were advancing slowly. I did hear several calls for "medic!" and just then Sp5 Cotton, our senior aidman, ran by me. I tried to grab him and yelled "no!" because the trail directly in front of us was zeroed in with enemy machinegun fire. He made it only to be killed shortly thereafter. The command group made its way around and settled in for a breather near a pig pen. I tried to put together, in my mind, our positions and tried to get some movement out of the platoons. By this time we had been fighting about an hour and a half and exhaustion was setting in. Somebody had to do something and get things moving again. I heard someone out in front of us yell "medic!" and that's when I said to myself "do it!" and get the men moving. I ran towards the enemy positions and all hell broke loose around me. I can still feel the impact of the rounds hitting around my feet and whipping past my body as I ran that 20-30 meters. I dove behind a log and was up and running again for another 20-30 meters and dove next to a hedgerow and yelled "where the hell are you?!" the trooper called back; he was only about 10 meters from me on the other side of the hedgerow. I asked him how bad he was hit and he said that he was hit in the head but could crawl. I told him to crawl to me and I'd help him back. Once I saw the wound I cursed him, because even though he was bleeding from the head he had only been scratched by a grenade fragment and could easily move without assistance and did not need a medic. I left him there and told him to move to the rear and I continued crawling along the hedgerow. All of sudden I saw a barrel of an AK-47 poke through and start firing into the left flank of 1st Platoon in the creek bed. I was close enough to feel the concussion from the weapon as the enemy soldier fired it. It seemed like I stayed there for hours watching the barrel poke through the hedgerow, fire a magazine, and then be pulled back to reload. I also heard Vietnamese talking right next to me as this was going on. I got a grenade, pulled the pin waited until the weapon was pulled back and I just rolled the grenade through the opening in the hedgerow. It felt like it went off right next to me, which it did. [To this day, I don't know whether or not I cooked the grenade off....I was just too scared and was reacting to each situation as I was taught.] There was moaning and crying from several enemy soldiers but I did not stick around to see what damage had been done. I crawled into the creek bed on the left flank of 1st Platoon. SSG Calvert and SGT Carter were standing at a bend in the creek bed and one of them said, "Where the hell did you come from?" I asked SSG Calvert his situation and was informed he had a number of wounded and dead but didn't know how many. He was also very low on ammunition and grenades. [This is something many individuals need to know. Grenade usage was enormous because no one could see the enemy and also due to the close quarter of the combat. So instead of shooting your weapon you lob a grenade. Lucky for us most of the enemy's grenades were duds or we would have had many more casualties.] SSG Calvert was ordered to be prepared to withdraw when the order was given and make certain he had a complete accountability of all the men in his platoon. By this time, I did not know how long I had been out of contact with the Battalion and the Company. The RTOs did not accompany me on this excursion. I had to find the RTOs and report to Battalion. I soon found Sp4 Pardick, the RTO for the FO, but did not see the FO. Sp4 Pardick said the RTOs were crawling in the direction I had initially gone. He also added it was a good thing we moved when we did because it wasn't too long after we left, that an RPG round landed right on top of that position. I could not see Noonan or Hazeltine. I yelled for them to get their asses back to me, they heard me and were back within minutes. They too had found the wounded GI who I had helped and he was reunited with his unit. Due to

the situation it was decided to request permission to withdraw to some high ground near Hill 48, which we had crossed earlier in the morning. Weapons Platoon was ordered to move back to the finger, secure that position for the remainder of the Company, which would follow. All three platoons were now committed and had suffered casualties. Battalion was called requesting permission to withdraw to the finger and reduce the battle area by artillery and air strikes. Permission was granted. The command group went back to the resupply point and found Lt. Towers wounded but still functioning. Resupplies of ammunition had been brought in and all wounded and dead had been evacuated. [As I look back, the enemy saw where the medevacs and resupply choppers were landing. On our second and third attacks they had the LZ zeroed in, causing us great difficulty in resupplying our unit and medevacing the dead and wounded.] Another problem we encountered was the absence of rifle slings in one platoon. It seems that the platoon leader decided that the slings would make noise on ambushes and during movement therefore he ordered them removed prior to departure. [Did you ever try to carry or drag a wounded man on an improvised stretcher and four to six rifles from other wounded at the same time without slings? It is impossible. During future operations all weapons had slings.] By the time the order was given to withdraw, both the NVA and we were exhausted. The battle had died down to just a few pop shots at each other and a grenade here and a grenade there. Lt. Towers accompanied us back to the finger that Weapons Platoon had secured. All ammunition was carried back also. The equipment that could not be carried was burned and rendered useless to the enemy. Yes, we licked our wounds but the morale was still fairly high. We had been hit but we were far from being knocked down. Time 1230 hours.

**20 Jun 66  
1230-1400 Hours**

The Company consolidated its defensive positions on the finger just North of Hill 48 and prepared for any eventuality. Artillery was first to be used extensively and the FO worked the fire missions from East to West through the village and then back again. Also air strikes were requested and arrived approximately 1300 hours. We placed an orange panel in front of our positions and brought the aircraft in, right over our heads, this we never did again. All the bombs and napalm landed right on target however these aircraft were F-100s and when they strafed all the empty shell casings fly over-board. These casing can kill individuals on the ground once ejected. As the 20mm casing came down we all took cover, however one of the men did get hit in the head.....lucky for him he had his helmet on and did not sustain any injuries. [Never again did we bring close air support perpendicular to our lines, unless absolutely necessary. They were always brought in parallel. There is also a possibility of an early release of a bomb or napalm canister...this could be catastrophic.] As these airstrikes were going on for our Company, C Company could not use the artillery positioned at the crossroads because the fighters had to fly through the gun-target line. The fighters were vectored in on a Southeast to Northwest line. After the first airstrike the FAC was instructed to vector all future airstrikes in from South to North for the remainder of the battle. As these airstrikes were going on reinforcements arrived. Lt. Bud Roberts returned to command his platoon; Lt. Abe Martin, who was about to DEROS, volunteered to come back out and take over his old platoon. LTC Wasco ordered Lt. Dan Hill, Assistant S-1 out also. As these officers and men arrived they were assigned to each platoon based upon platoon strength. This is when SSgt Synder, acting Platoon Sgt ordered PFC Kranig to take over his squad in the platoon. When PFC Kranig asked where his squad was Synder pointed to two new men that had just arrived and said, "That's your squad and I don't even want to know their names because they will be dead by tomorrow morning!" This comment scared the hell out of the two men and Kranig.

