

deepe

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august 19, 1965

AP CUONG, SOUTH VIET NAM--In describing the fierce fighting of the major U. S. Marine Corps operation near the Chu Lai enclave, a senior Marine officer explained, "This is World War II--with helicopters added."

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But it was much worse for a small band of thirty Americans Marines encircled and shelled and encircled for more than 24 hours by Viet an estimated 100 hard-core Viet Cong fighters. Fewer than 30 Marines escaped unscratched.

"It was like the Indians in the Old West surrounding and attacking a covered wagon convey, except we were in armored wagons," one Marine sergeant with 19 years in the service explained. "I was in the invasion of Okinawa--but I have never seen anything like this. I thought this was the end of all of us."

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August 19, 1965

Instead of fighting the U. S. Marine tanks and amphibious tractors with convention tanks and anti-tank weapons of World War II, ^{Common ST} however, the Viet Cong fought them with orthodox guerrilla tactics ^{Fire concentrated fire power} that repeatedly won them magnificent victories against the French during the Indo-China War more than a decade ago.

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Since the French forces were road-bound--and lacking the greater mobility of the Americans provided by helicopters--the ~~Via~~ Communist forces repeatedly ~~xx~~ bushwa cked the tanks, armored cars and trucks of the French supply and troop convoys.

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Instead of a neat road ambush, however, the Viet Cong fight against the Americans ~~was~~ ⁸ was a small battlefield one hundred feet by one hundred feet--half of it was a red clay field ~~surroundede~~ ⁸ surrounded by hedgerows and half of it ~~was~~ ⁷ slopp sloped downwards into a soggy rice paddy.

"It was a natural tank trap and we fell into it," one American officer explained.

It was a deathtrap for some of the American Marines who are called Poges--the non-infantry types such as supply sergeants, drivers and crews of tanks, and amphibious tractors.

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During the opening of the operation on August 18, one American Marine company passed ~~near~~ the tangled jungled area splotted with rice paddies one mile northwest of this Viet Cong-infested village. But the company received no fire; the second company sweeping through did. Three Marine amphibious tractors--called amtracs for short--were sent to help out. These hulking black square boxes, costing \$120,000 and weighing 35 tons--were also hit two of these were retrieved. With their capability of swimming, the amtracs are often used for amphibious assaults.

Young Marine corps troops call it a "swimming coffin."

One of the amtracs was to become become a flaming coffin for one American Marine ~~gun~~ burned inside.

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Then 17 tanks and amtracs were sent to relieve the trapped companies, but never reached their destinations. Five tanks and five amtracs were trapped; one tank was completely destroyed, one amtrac completely burned out, three of the tanks were still ~~missing~~ lost ~~25 hours~~ more than 30 hours after they were first lost.

~~Summary~~

Of the 17, one was a vague re-supply cove convey with two tanks bringing up the rear and the front of the six column and five amtracs carrying food, water and ammo to the 1st infantry unit in their front.

They never found their unit.

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When we came across the ~~riax~~ this red clay piece of land," the tired sergeant explained, "it was about 11 in the morning, just as the operation began. Suddenly, the ⁹ attacked from the hedgerows on our left and right flanks--the flanks were about 30 yards apart. It was the Viet Cong tank killer platoons.

"We started up here with five amtracs and two tanks--one in the front and one in the rear. First the lead tank was hit in the front and in the rear and then the rear tank was hit from behind. Maybe the rear tank got away.

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"Then the Viet Cong hit us with everything they had—57 and .75 recoilless rifles, small arms fire, mortars and automatic weapons. The One a mtrac acid accidentally slipped down the ~~it~~ slope into the rice paddy and two other amtracs ~~in~~ deliberately drove down into the rice paddy hoping to set up a perimeter. They immediately got stuck.

"There were more than 100 Viet Cong that had us encircled on the right and the left flanks and all around. They hit us so fast—it was coming from every bush—every way we looked they were there. They had one special round ~~about the size of a~~ that made a hole about the size of a half dollar, but the round burst inside the tanks throwing shrapnell everywhere.

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"Their first attack was at 11 and it continued until about four o'clock in the afternoon, and then it slowed up, but we received small arms fire intermittently throughout the night. By afternoon, one of the antracs was hit and burning and the people inside panicked, open the landing door and ran out. The Viet Cong started picking them off.

"Half of the dead and wounded were from either opening the door and leaving the ~~tax~~ vehicles or else the people were shot while peeping out of the upper doors.

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Sitting on the dusty dusty red checkerboard, watching helci helicopters ferry out the dead and wounded, the sergeant continued, "My amtrac was the only one that had a ^{and radio} machu machinegun that would work. I kept praying, don't let that machinegun and radio conk out. I just kept praying and splashing water on that machinegun w to cool it down when it got too hot."

2 A young lance corporal interrupted to explain, "Three sergeants stayed outside the amtracs all day and all night and kept firing their rifles and pistols. The rest of us were buttoned up in the amtracs. When I closed the hatch of mine mine, I took out my rosary and started praying.

"Earlier, the Viet Cong had taken over one of our amtracs, which its crew had evacuated. They used it as a shelter. It was only 15 yards from me and one Viet Cong and I kept playing peek-aboo, looking out the top hatches. Finally, I killed two of them with one shot--then another was killed on top of our own amtracs.

"The Viet Cong kept walking around us all night; they were well ^{am} camouflaged and we couldn't see them well. We killed 15 of them in one rice paddy alone; I suppose we killed fifty ~~all~~ in all."

The sergeant and lance corporal watched as the helicopter crews loaded the dead, which had been mummified by the red dust. One had died with a knife ~~in his~~ clutched in his hand; one had been ~~disembow~~ disemboweled. 2 One survivor, a young Negro private, watched wailing in ^{the} agony with tears rolling down his face.