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PLEIKU, SOUTH VIETNAM--Communist forces have committed battlefield atrocities against American soldiers, U. S. military sources report.

~~THE~~ One distasteful act in the eyes of the American sources was executing wounded American soldiers when Communist forces overran U. S. military units or positions. The confirmed evidence of the ~~many~~ atrocities is at least two U. S. Army soldiers in this area who were wounded when their units were overrun, shot in the head by ~~attacking~~ Communist troops--and miraculously lived to tell the story.

In addition, other eyewitnesses also confirm the atrocities, the sources said--but, in the fury of battle many eyewitnesses could not be sure if the Communists killed a wounded G. I.--or one already dead. Hence, the exact number of atrocities are difficult to ascertain, the sources said. But, in one of the worst actions, 50 to 60 of the 76 ~~and~~ <sup>four dead</sup> Americans had been shot in the head, the military sources said.

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In one other case, military sources said Viet Cong guerrillas—as distinct from North Vietnamese regulars—had mutilated the bodies of American dead and wounded, and taken all personal effects on the bodies. Intelligence sources report captured North Vietnamese Army documents order their units to send such personal belongings as letters, watches, dogtags and rings of the dead American soldiers back to anti-Vietnam protest groups in the United States or to the families of the dead in the United States, as a means to cause more ~~disa~~ disillusionment with the American involvement in the war here.

Many American troops, including officers, think the Communists have already started sending these battlefield ~~sou~~ souvenirs back to America, but there is no evidence to confirm this, official sources said.

The relatively few cases in which American units have been overrun offer one of the <sup>few</sup> times in which Communist forces can have the option of committing atrocities against American servicemen. These battles represent some of the bitterest, most furious close combat fighting in modern warfare.

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Few American officers ~~deny~~ deny, however, that in some instances American troops have also shot wounded Communists on the battlefield and the South Vietnamese army has been notorious for its mishandling Communists falling into ~~the~~ <sup>its</sup> government hands, even going so far as torturing Communists who voluntarily defect to the government side.

In this II Corps military zone, of which Pleiku is the Vietnamese headquarters, there have been four known cases of atrocities against American troops, U. S. military sources said. They are:

—On June 22, (1967), a company of the U. S. Army 173rd Airborne Brigade was overrun by the 6th Battalion, 24th Regiment of the North Vietnamese Army on a jungled ridgeline only two miles from the ~~far~~ frontier fort town of Dak To.

The American company--A Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry--suffered 76 killed in action and 28 wounded in action. Listening to the high casualty figures on the radio, the brigade's medics considered it very unusual to have three times as many dead as wounded. ~~Often~~ Normally, combat casualties are in the reverse--with three times as many wounded as dead.

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When American reinforcements went into the jungled battle area to retrieve the dead and wounded, the brigade chaplain, as he administered the last righ rites to the dead, noticed that many had head wounds and mentioned it to the brigade surgeons, who, in turn, tallied between fifty and sixty of the 76 dead had been shot in the head. Medical authorities say that normally in combat, based on statistics of World War II and Korea, 18 out of 100 battlefield deaths would be from fatal wounds in the heads. Many of the G. I. helmets cluttering the battlefield also contained bullet holes.

Later, the retrieving company found five American soldiers in the immediate battle area, who, though wounded, survived by hiding in the weeds. Some of these told stories of their wounded colleagues screaming 'Don't shoot! Don't shoot!' as the North Vietnamese shot them.

One of these<sup>4</sup> these five Americans already wounded was himself shot in the head by an North Vietnamese trooper, but miraculously the bullet followed ~~inside~~ the curvature of his helmet, grazed his ~~if~~ scalp and the bullet exited from the back of the helmet.

The Communist soldiers also ~~ser~~ searched the American dead and ~~to~~ took peronsl personal papers, watches and rings--some of these items were found on North Vietnamese soldiers who were killed later. The Communist units did not, however, seize all the ~~AMERI~~ M-16 rifles from the American dead; the Communists were armed with the <sup>1</sup>X Soviet-made AK-47 rifle, which they evidently considered better than the controversial American se weapon.

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--On March 10, a 25-man platoon from A Company, 3 Battalion, 12th Infantry of the 4th Infantry Division was perched in a fortified position on top of Hill 86 near Tuy Hoa, 230 miles northeast of Saigon. An estimated 100 Viet Cong--as distinct from North Vietnamese regulars--overran the American platoon.

"And then Viet Cong women and children mutilated the bodies," one military source said. "A Viet Cong woman would come along, lift the head of the G. I. by grabbing his hair and a kid would cut his throat with a knife." ~~One~~ Only six of the 25 survived by hiding in the bushes.

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--On May 18, near the Cambodian border, a company of the U. S. Army 4th Infantry Division was on patrol near the Cambodian border. The 4th platoon of the company—B Company, 1 Battalion, 18th Infantry—saw three North Vietnamese snipers, fired at them and they withdrew leaving behind three packs and documents. The platoon saw another North Vietnamese and pursued him, hoping to capture him, chasing up a draw near a small stream.

Then, a North Vietnamese unit opened up from both sides of the stream with a withering hail of machinegun and rocket fire. Seven American soldiers jumped into the nearby stream—and a North Vietnamese machinegun sliced down the ~~stream~~ waterway, killing six of the seven immediately. While the three other platoons in the company were held down by other Communist gunners, the remainder of the fourth 4th platoon hid in the thickets, firing at the North Vietnamese unit which had virtually surrounded them. Whenever the American soldiers fired at the Communists, which gave away their position amongst the sapling trees, the Communists returned a tremendous volley of fire.

The action started at noon and at 3:04 p.m., the last radio transmission from the 4th platoon was received, saying that it was surrounded, being overrun. ~~and in the process~~ The platoon sergeant requested American artillery to strike his own position, which is usually the final desperate ~~of~~ request before defeat.

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The final American casualties in the 29-man platoon were ~~20~~ 20 killed, seven wounded, one missing and one unscratched. According to the eight survivors, however, the firing continued until roughly 4p. 4 p.m., falling in crescendo-like patterns into the American position. Then, shortly before dark, the firing ~~ended~~ ceased and the North Vietnamese troops "came walking into" the American perimeter.

One of the survivors said he was laying wounded among five other American ~~bodies~~ troops, which he thought were all dead. He said the North Vietnamese sprayed the whole cluster of bodies with automatic weapons fire, he received another wound, this time a ~~graze~~ graze across the hear head. The North Vietnamese searched these bodies--including him--and took wallets, rings, watches, weapons and ammunition. This survivors said he heard a wounded American holler, then a gunshot--and the American stopped yelle yelling. Some of the American bodies had gunshot wounds through the back of head, which was distinct from spraying the bodies with automatic weapons.

Another survivors said that during the fighting his M/16 M-16 rifle jammed, but he ran to a small tree where an American sergeant was protecting himself and he and the sergeant took turns firing the sergeant's weapon. The sergeant was killed during the fighting and the survivor wounded and as the North Vietnamese troops walked into the American position "laughing and grinning" he saw another nearby wounded American riase u raise up his head and the North Vietnaes Vietnamese shot him. The survivors said three or four other wounded Americans were also shot.

The one Amerc American soldier who was unscratched said the North Vietnamese kicked him the ribs a few times and tied his hands back of him and then tied him to a small sapling tree, which he assumed would be the lure for a trap when the American reinforcing company would come to retrieve the dead and wounded. Communist ambush But, during the darkness when the American reinforcing company marched only fifty yards from the battle site, the American survivors refused to call you out for help, believing hoping to prevent this company from also being ambushed. The surivi survivors were not found until the next morning.

--On July 12, another platoon from the 4th Infantry Division, fighting in the same general area near the Cambodian border, also encountered another North Vietnamese unit which virtually annihilated it.

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The ~~platoon~~ B Company, ~~with~~ 1 Battalion, 12th Infantry became spl splintered into three lament elements, with North Vietnamese Vietnamese troops separating each. The one platoon, which was virtually annihilated, contained the company command element, including the company commander, the artillery and air forward observer. Only one of this g platoon survived.

This command platoon was off to the right of the other two platoons when the North Vietnamese opened up with mortars, the first of which hit the company commander. He gave several more commands and then lapsed into shock. More mortars poured in, with the American artillery officer giving commands, when he also was killed.



At this point, the only two who ~~thought they~~ were alive, thinking the rest of the platoon was annihilated, were both ~~radio~~ enlisted radio telephone operators (RTO's), who were laying back to back and were continuing to fire at North Vietnamese who were walking around in a casual manner in front and on two sides of them. Then, one of the RTO's slumped over and stopped firing, the other suspected suspecting he had died.

The solo survivors, already wounded, had his own weapon, another he had picked up and his .45 pistol, which he pulled out to fire at the approaching enemy. It wouldn't fire and he thought it was empty; he pulled out a grenade and threw it at the North Vietnamese about ten feet in front of him. Then, he slumped over as the North Vietnamese casually walked into the position of the immobile American unit. One North Vietnamese kicked the sole survivors three or four times in the ribs; the American attempted to hold his breath and remain motionless, but found he had to breathe despite his overt attempts to do otherwise.

The North Vietnamese turned him over, took all his personal belongings, including his watch and tied a rope around both of his wrist wrists. Several North Vietnamese began to drag him with the rope; he remained limp and the rope fell off one of his wrist wrists and they stopped pulling him.

The survivor then heard the North Vietnamese directing single shots at the bodies of the other Americans, which were thought to be dead.

The survivor told an American officer later;

"I wasn't really scared until this time and then I knew they'd shoot me too. The first thing they did was to take my own helmet and hit me on the head, but I still was not unconscious.

"Then they rolled me over on my stomach and I felt someone tap the back of my head with his finger two or three times. The last thing I remember was a deafening roar. They had fired my own pistol (which he had thought was empty) at the back of my head."

The survivor remained unconsci unconscious for a brief time-- the bullet had ~~swathed~~ swathed a one-quarter inch groove around the top of his head, but he had miraco miraculously survived.

Two-thirds of the dead had gunshot wounds in the head, and some of the ~~wounded~~ dead had ropes tied around their hands, the American medical authorities reported.