

Fw: 183rd SEAHORSE

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VC/NVA SAPPERS, 30 NOVEMBER 1969

30 November 69 actually began in October shortly after myself & the new Top reported for duty @ the 183rd RAC. The new Top could not keep his nose out of the COs doorway, always 'buddying' up. One particular day as I sat @ the desk working on the morning report & some orders, I listened to him tell the major he wanted to remove all the weapons & ammo from all enlisted personnel. He went on to tell the CO this unit had never had its perimeter probed nor attacked, we were not in a combat zone and we were "boys not men & not mature enough to have possession of loaded weapons". The major concurred & the next morning after roll-call all EM were ordered to return to quarters, retrieve all weapons & ammo, turn the weapons into the arms room & then proceed w/all ammo & deposit into foot lockers which will be in the Orderly Room. That effectively separated our weapons & ammo about 100 yards apart in case of an alert. (With that done, it didn't take our Vietnamese hootch maids long to recognize we were unarmed and 'Charlie' was quickly informed, effectively setting the stage for 30 November) Top explained to the major that the officers & NCOs would be the 1st line of defense in case of an alert since their quarters were closest to our perimeter wire & there would already be sentries on duty. That combination will allow time for the 'compliment' to be alerted, draw weapons, cover the distance across open ground w/out ammo, gather ammo from pad-locked lockers(SOG was to have key & have foot lockers unlocked by this time) & get into defensive position to repel attacks. He didn't take into consideration that those same 'quarters' are next to our perimeter & may be the 1st facilities destroyed which in turn would nullify the effectiveness from the "1st response team" (1st defenders he was counting on).

The evening of 30 November 1969 greeted our guard detail, Spec.4 Frank Robertson, Spec.4 James Dorough & Spec.4 Butch Graef. Our company cur dog, Jessie, was already on guard as she could scent the sappers prior to our guards being posted & she paced back & forth along the perimeter road, barking at that unseen threat until it erupted. She was a good little dog and she had done her best to alert us. @ 2300 hours Graef relieved Dorough from post & assumed his guard shift in the tower. This guard-post was the Tower/bunker combination that was @ the corner of the company road, adjacent to the NCO/Officer latrine/showerhouse. Butch settled into his post & roughly 30 minutes later he heard the distinctive sound of a rifle bolt chambering a round w/in our perimeter. Butch immediately rotated the flood lamp exactly on the area the sound came from & switched the light on. He had that sapper dead center w/the beam & the sapper unleashed a stream of full-auto AK 47 fire @ Butch, which riddled the tin roof covering the tower. While that was happening, the rest of the sapper squad rushed forward & began tossing C4 charges thru the gun slits into the bunker below & trying to toss grenades and charges into the tower to kill Butch Graef. Chicken wire, fashioned like an inverted umbrella, surrounded the base of the tower and deflected those grenades & charges intended for Butch, saving his life and in turn raining down on the sappers & severely wounding no less than one of them and disabling our generator next to the bunker. In the bunker, Robertson & Dorough knowing they were in trouble, reached for the clackers to crank off our claymores & as they did, the gooks grabbed the det-cords from outside the bunker, jerked them clear of the gun slits, rendering them useless to our guards and @ that same time C4 & grenades were being tossed thru the gun slits as Robertson & Dorough rushed the doorway to escape their entrapment. The C4 detonated & the blast hurled them out the door w/Robertson being slammed into one of the sappers & stunning Robertson. While this was happening, Butch, saw a VC crouched in the road immediately behind the Officer/NCO latrine/shower & shot him in the knee. The gook crumpled from the bullet, dropping C4 & grenades. In turn, a VC squad mate w/an RPG, fired a round into that shower thinking that was where Graef's rifle shot had come from. Jim Benoit was approaching that shower @ the moment it disintegrated in his face & the concussion slammed Jim to the ground. As he lay stunned, the sappers, thinking Jim was dead, ran across his prone body & immediately turned their attention to the nearest buildings, the Officer/NCO quarters & detonated the exits of the buildings. Of course, by this time, all EM are rallying to the arms room & our armorer, Orteiga, was tossing rifles out as fast as he could. From there we were all making that mad dash across open ground w/no ammo as the CO/XO quarters was split in half as it exploded in a bright yellow and orange ball of fire. Witnessing that, I was sure they were dead or seriously injured. 'Charlie' missed a great 'op' by not having placed a rifleman w/an AK-47 along our open ground sprint to the Orderly Room. A lot of us never would have