



The Lost Battalion: Controversy and Casualties in the Battle of Hue

Charles Krohn

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In 1968 in South Vietnam, a U.S. infantry battalion was ordered to charge a fortified North Vietnamese Army force 200 yards away over an open field with no artillery or air support. The defenders had every advantage. The Americans started moving across the field just before noon, every man a target. By the time they reached the tree line at the other side of the open field, nearly one half of the 400-man battalion was a casualty. Nine long, agonizing hours afterwards, U.S. artillery units began support fire, although the units remained desperately short of ammunition. The entrapped men saw their fate: death or captivity. Help from headquarters was neither offered or available.

The following night the battalion commander decided to make a run for it. It was a gamble with high stakes. But the battalion did make it through enemy lines to a mountaintop where the NVA could not follow. When the Lost Battalion finally escaped encirclement, after nine hours with no artillery or air support, and 30 hours of fighting against an enemy that outnumbered them three to one, the tragic episode disappeared from official memory and relevant U.S. Army records--as if nothing had happened. Krohn tells the whole story--and it tells it with the words of those present. That some of the testimony comes from those responsible is remarkable.

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