

Gallant and Intrepid:

U.S. Marines of Fox 2/5 in Operation Union II, May 30 - June 2, 1967

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On the morning of June 2, 1967, in the Que Son Valley of Quang Tin Province, United States Marines were engaged in what would turn out to be one of the deadliest battles of the Vietnam War. This article is about the Marines of Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, Fifth Marine Regiment, First Marine Division, who distinguished themselves conspicuously by gallantry, intrepidity and extraordinary heroism on June 2, 1967, during Operation Union II.

In 1967, the Que Son Valley, southwest of Da Nang, was the most frequently used terminus to the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the northern part of South Vietnam. The valley was a heavily populated, rich rice-growing area and viewed by the communists as one of the keys to controlling South Vietnam. There were at least two regiments of the 2nd North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Division in the area, the 3rd and 21st Regiments. The U.S. military also recognized the strategic importance of the Que Son Valley and made plans to drive the North Vietnamese from the area.

During Operation Union I, which took place from April 21 to May 16, 1967, the 1st Marine Division lost 110 Marines killed in the fighting north of the town of Que Son. Although the NVA had sustained hundreds of casualties and had lost territory around Nui Loc Son, a hilltop in the middle of the Valley, they remained in control of much of the rest of the Que Son Valley. There was a need for a follow on operation.

Operation Union II was launched on May 26, 1967 as a search and destroy mission to wipe out the NVA in the Que Son Valley. The plan called for the 1st Battalion of the 5th Marines to establish blocking positions in the northeastern portion of the valley while the 3rd Battalion of the 5th Marines was to make a helicopter assault into the southern part of the valley and sweep northeast. The first day of the operation, Lima and Mike Companies of 3/5 engaged the NVA, sustaining losses of 38 Marines killed and 82 wounded. For the next three days there were only sporadic exchanges of fire and it appeared that the 3rd NVA Regiment had withdrawn from the valley.

Colonel Houghton, the Commander of the 5th Marine Regiment, however, did not believe all the NVA forces had left the Que Son Valley. He decided to change the direction of the attack towards the hills along the southern rim of the Que Son Valley, southeast of 3rd Battalion's initial battle at LZ Eagle on May 26th. On the morning of May 30th, three rifle companies of the 1st Battalion (Alpha, Delta and Fox 2/5) were inserted at LZ Robin about 20 kilometers southeast of the hill, Nui Loc Son. Fox Company of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines was reinforcing the 1st Battalion since 1/5 only had Alpha and Delta Company available and the Battalion needed another maneuver company and to act as a reserve force. Fox Company 2/5 had a reputation as one of the most aggressive rifle companies in the 5th Marines and were picked to round out the needs of the 1st Battalion.

Three companies of the 3rd Battalion (India, Lima and Mike) were inserted at LZ Blue Jay about one kilometer northeast of LZ Robin. The Marines of 3/5 had orders to follow in trace of 1/5. The 3rd Battalion had been in combat since May 26th and had been beat up bad on that first day when the three rifle companies landed in a hot LZ. The 3/5 Marines simply sucked it up and flew into another LZ four days later. Locked and loaded and ready for bear.

“During the first phase of Union II from May 26-27, we were up at An Hoa pulling perimeter duty. Then we were told to get our shit together, that 3/5 had gotten the shit kicked out of them, and that we were going in to reinforce them,” recalled Lance Corporal Dennis Sheehy, a radioman with the Second Platoon of Fox Company who had arrived in country in March 1967.

The popular image of Vietnam is that troops rode into battle on “Huey” (Bell UH-1 Iroquois) helicopters, but the Marines in 1967 were primarily using UH-34D and CH-46A helicopters.

“We flew into the LZ on CH-46’s. The crew chief on the helicopter was literally throwing us off when we landed, which really pissed us off. We talked about finding the SOB after the operation and beating the shit out of him,” recalled Sheehy. “During the flight from An Hoa, the LT told us to take off our flak jackets as we wouldn’t be needing them. That was hard to do with the radio I was carrying and the other gear, plus we were already starting to come into the LZ.”

The Marines were loaded down when they ran off the helicopters. “I carried my usual gear including rifle and ammo, water, etc., plus the 25 pound PRC-25 radio, so I was probably humping around 100 pounds,” said Sheehy. “I didn’t bring my utility shirt, and since I had to leave my flak jacket on the chopper when we came into the LZ, the only thing I had to wear for the first two days on my upper body was the radio. I finally stole a T-shirt from a grunt in 1/5.”

Fox 2/5 was well led. Lance Corporal Brent Mackinnon, who joined Fox 2/5 in the first week of January 1967 as a rifleman in the 1st platoon and was transferred to the command post (CP) as company radioman in March, recalled the Fox Company Commander, Captain James Graham, “During that time while in the field and until the day he died on June 2nd, I was his constant companion, shadow, and relay voice to our platoons and weapons people. We came to know each other well. Respected, courageous and popular he continuously studied sit reps, maps, and personnel and was cognizant of the stream of intelligence flowing from various sources. He was, as the saying goes, ‘Born Ready’.”

“Captain Graham inspired total confidence. We saw other companies come and go and suffer casualties through horrendous mistakes. He was disciplined both professionally and privately. He carried a Bible and toilet articles in the field when no one else did. He cleansed himself in the mornings. He had a change of fatigues in the middle of nowhere. We were grungy and he would wash, shave, brush his teeth, put on pressed fatigues and there he was – always ready and at his best. We all felt he was the best possible commander in the most difficult of times. An aggressive and tactical leader, he enabled

Foxtrot to gain a few victories in the midst of chaos and attrition. We had pride in our company and in ourselves,” noted MacKinnon.

“Not wanting to leave my friends I was on my second tour with 2/5 and had been in country for 15 months when Union II rolled around. Being short on officers and NCOs, Captain Graham made me platoon commander of weapons platoon, even though I was only a Corporal. Although assigned to the command group, I was with 2nd platoon when we crossed the rice paddy that day. I have often wanted to write a book about that day in Vietnam because it was one of Fox Company’s and the Corps’ finest day,” said Corporal Louis (Rick) Barnes.

Leaving the LZ, the Marines of Fox Company and the accompanying Marines of Alpha and Delta 1/5, moved cautiously northeast up a small valley with the forested slopes of Nui Hoac (352m) on their left and the higher ridges of Nui Vu (488m) on their right. This was familiar territory to the U.S. Marine Corps.

Nui Vu was the mountaintop where an 18-man recon platoon of 16 Marines and two Navy Corpsmen from the 1st Force Reconnaissance Battalion was inserted, almost a year before the Foxtrot Marines marched past on June 13, 1966 to observe enemy activity in the region and to call in artillery missions on targets. After two days of successfully calling in fire missions the NVA became aware of the recon team and attacked them in force. Six of the Recon Marines were killed and all of the rest were wounded before they were finally rescued. The recon platoon earned the distinction of the most highly decorated small unit in the entire history of the U.S. military. Four Navy Crosses, 13 Silver Stars and 18 Purple Hearts were bestowed on the men and Staff Sergeant Jimmie Howard, the leader of the recon platoon, was awarded a Medal of Honor for his heroism during the battle on top of Nui Vu.

Fox Company’s first contact with the NVA on UNION II came at noon on May 30th, three hours after they had been inserted and about three kilometers northeast of the LZ Robin. The Marines suddenly received about 100 rounds of enemy fire from an estimated 6-10 NVA, firing from a position about 400 meters north of them. The Fox Marines returned fire and called in an airstrike. To ‘search and destroy’ the enemy was their mission on this operation. They were already doing both.

Communications were critical to the operations on Union II. Radios were the lifeline for the Marines. Each combat platoon had at least three radios, one for every squad and there were also radios for the company commander for battalion communications and for the artillery forward observer. The PRC-25, often referred to as “Prick” for short by the grunts, was about the size and weight of a case of beer. With its battery “can” included, it was like a case of beer sitting on top of a six-pack and weighed about 24 pounds. In addition to the basic gear of a rifleman, the radio-telephone operator, or RTO, packed the radio as well as usually a spare battery, adding another five or six pounds. RTOs also usually carried smoke grenades to mark locations for gunships and medevacs.

Brent MacKinnon, the Fox Company radioman, said, “The society around radiomen is little known outside of combat. During fire fights it was necessary for platoon and company leadership to communicate and the radioman stayed close to leadership. On patrol, the radioman was shunned and avoided. The antennae not only became a target itself but identified officers walking next to the radio. Snipers shot the officer, the radioman and machine gunners in that order. A thousand times on patrol I heard the familiar lament, “Get the fuck away from me!”

But there were advantages to carrying the radio too. “Radiomen were the switchboard for the platoons, the company, battalion, artillery and air communications. We enjoyed a larger perspective of the events surrounding conflict. Many of us are alive today as radios took the hits and shielded us from gunshots and shrapnel,” said MacKinnon. “A little known transcendental benefit was that when you removed the radio and then the flak jacket, you momentarily felt as though you might float straight up and drift away.”

“And after forty years I now confess that as a conduit for Captain Graham, passing along tactical order to three platoons for many months, I often anticipated him and initiated orders when he was otherwise occupied,” recalled MacKinnon. “He caught me once during a sweep along the Thu Bon River. ‘What the fuck is the 3rd Platoon doing!’”

Late in the afternoon of May 30th, both the 1/5 Command Group and Alpha Company 1/5 received sniper fire. They returned fire and searched the area, but found nothing. The Foxtrot Marines heard this exchange of fire and tightened the grips on their weapons.

The Marines had humped through the hills for about six kilometers that first day and in the evening established their night defensive perimeter, digging foxholes and preparing for a long night with little sleep deep in enemy territory. Harassing and interdicting fires fired periodically throughout the night kept the Marines awake. Wide awake, alert and quietly waiting with senses other than sight finely tuned, hoping they wouldn’t be attacked.

“Nights in the jungle were so dark we couldn’t see shit, might as well as had our eyes closed. We’d be laying out on ambush, all in a row and side by side. Our other senses became alive, mostly hearing and smelling. I guess blind people must feel that way every day,” recalled MacKinnon about the nights while on an operation. “The forest got so hot and humid and still at night we began to sort out different scents and sounds, kinda like dogs. Pitch black, no sounds, no forward recon post to warn us....just laying there in some kinda blind man’s Hell, waiting. Everybody got nervous out there at night; us, them, monkeys, everybody. So plus the heat we sweat that nervous sweat.”

At 0920 hours on the morning of May 31st, Fox Company Marines received about 30 rounds of small arms fire from about 350 meters to the north of their position. Marines returned rifle fire and fired M-79 grenades. While searching the area, they encountered one NVA, who was shot and was observed hitting the ground and rolling downhill. His body was not found.

In the afternoon at 1515 hours, a Fox Company squad security patrol encountered two NVA at close range, killing one and capturing a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). Searching the area, the Marines found heavy blood trails and followed them but no bodies were found.

By late in the afternoon of June 1st, after searching the hills to the south for three days with only sporadic contact with the enemy, both battalions (1/5 and 3/5) had reached the Que Son Valley again and began to move northwest towards their objective near the site of the original UNION II May 26th battle at LZ Eagle. They had circled in a counter-clockwise fashion the complex of mountains positioned to the north of the LZ's they were inserted at. Many of the hills were over 400 meters high -- the highest at 479 meters -- with streams of cold water coming down from the forested slopes. The lower rugged slopes the Marines had to traverse were often thick jungle, interspersed with narrow valleys of tall grass and paddies.

In three days of difficult marches across tough terrain, the Marines had covered 15-16 kilometers as the crow flies. It had been a hard hike. The Marines had been weighed down with gear, extra ammo and water and were under constant threat of enemy attack. Their final objective now was only about four kilometers away, across relatively flat land, but it was not going to be an easy stroll across the paddy fields the next day.

In the last three days the Marines of both Battalions had been shot at and had engaged small groups of the NVA, had called in artillery and airstrikes and had a number of NVA killed-in-action confirmed. Six Marines had been wounded (3 from Alpha 1/5, 1 from Delta 1/5 and 2 from 3/5), but they had suffered no KIAs yet. After three days in the boonies, the Marines of Fox Company were unscathed. Although they had suffered cuts from brush and sprains from the rocky ground and been bitten by leeches and bugs, nobody had been wounded yet from enemy fire. That was soon to change.

On the morning of June 2nd, the Marines of Fox Company saddled up, moving towards their destination, Objective Foxtrot, near the village of Vinh Huy(2), 4,000 meters to their west. Delta 1/5 was about a kilometer north of Fox Company, also heading west toward their objective, the hamlet of Chau Lam (5). Alpha 1/5 was in the reserve to the rear. The three Marine rifle companies of 3/5 were to the southwest about two kilometers away also moving west to take the southern portion of Objective Foxtrot.

One peculiar fluke of the battle on June 2nd was that the objective was the same name as the Marine Company that would later pay such a heavy price. "I don't think any of the grunts knew the name of our objective, except maybe Lt. Kelsey. I don't remember anyone commenting on it then or later. One of the most frustrating things about being a grunt was not knowing anything - where you were going, where you were, where you had been, when you were going and for how long, etc.," Sheehy said.

At 0620 hours, Fox 2/5 Marines received about 10 rounds of small arms fire from an undetermined number of enemy 500 meters to their northeast. The Marines returned fire

from their M-16s as well as firing 10 60mm-mortar rounds. The enemy fire ceased and the area from where the NVA had fired was searched, but no bodies were found.

About one and one-half hours later, Delta, to the north of Fox, received 50 rounds of enemy small arms fire from an estimated 15 NVA approximately 700 meters to their northwest. Delta Marines returned fire and called for an air strike.

At 0930 hours, about one kilometer south of Fox Company's position, the Marines of I Company 3/5 had their advance held up by NVA fire. They pulled back and called in 20 minutes of artillery and an air strike to prep the battlefield.

It was starting to get hot on the morning of June 2nd and not just from the rising sun. With battles erupting to their north and south, the Marines of Fox Company were located right in the center of all the action. And for them it was soon going to get real hot.

At 1035 hours, Fox Company received about 20 rounds of small arms fire from five NVA. They responded with a volley of M-16 rifle fire and grenades shot from M-79 grenade launchers. The enemy broke contact and fled to the southwest.

Delta Company, to the north of Fox walked into trouble an hour later. As two platoons advanced on line across the large rice paddy in front of their objective enemy fire from 100 well camouflaged NVA in heavily fortified positions in a tree line to the southwest swept across them, catching the Marines in a crossfire. Delta's reserve platoon attempted to roll up the enemy's flank but they also came under heavy automatic weapons fire.

The Marines of Fox Company could hear the fight Delta was in, 1,000 meters to their north and halted at the base of two small hills on the edge of the paddy they were to cross, the same paddy where Delta was now engaged further to their right. At this point, the Fox Company Commander, Captain Graham, sensing that the enemy was in the tree line on the far side of the paddy near their objective, requested air and artillery support before advancing. For whatever reason, his request for prep fire was denied and Captain Graham was given a direct order to move across the paddy and seize the objective.

Captain Graham instructed his 1st Platoon, led by Second Lieutenant Schultz, to advance across the paddy on the right side. Second Lieutenant Kelsey, in charge of 2nd Platoon was told to move forward on the left. Both platoons were to make their final assault on line. Third Platoon, led by Staff Sergeant Marengo, would be in reserve.

As the Marines of 2nd Platoon's second squad climbed over some rocks and rounded the base of the hill to enter the paddy, an AK-47 opened up on their left. Private First Class Werner was hit in the chest. Dropping next to Werner, Corporal Barnes yelled out for cigarettes, wanting the cellophane from the cigarette packs to plug the bullet holes in Werner's chest. "With the three blood-soaked holes across his chest the cellophane made a good seal over the bullet entry wounds," said Barnes. "He was able to breathe again through his mouth and not suck air from the holes into his lungs. I'm not a doctor but it sure seemed to bring him to life that day."

“I helped carry Werner out from the pile of rocks and called in the medevac,” recalled Sheehy. “The medevac came in just before we started our main assault across the paddy.”

After the medevac, Fox Company continued down into the flat paddy land. As they entered the paddy, a Kit Carson scout (a former VC or NVA who had switched sides and was now allied with the Marines) started shooting at flat mats of rice straw laying in the paddy. The NVA had concealed themselves under the straw mats in spider holes and 31 NVA were killed as the Marines advanced.

As the 2nd Platoon began to move across the rice paddy, NVA soldiers were spotted on the left. “I remember seeing about 10 NVA coming out of the tree line about one hundred yards away, which we shot at, and then we started the assault across the rice paddy. The platoon sergeant, for whom I was carrying the radio, finished off one of the wounded NVA as we walked across the paddy,” recalled Sheehy. Second Platoon’s 1st squad, led by Corporal McDonald assaulted the fleeing NVA and captured some prisoners.

At 1420 hours, as the Fox Company Marines of the 1st and 2nd Platoons continued their assault on line across the open paddy, each of them with two squads forward, an estimated 300-500 NVA opened up from dug-in positions on the tree line to their west, delivering deadly fire. Fifty-one caliber machine guns, AK-47s, B-40 rockets and 82 mm mortars raked the Marines caught in the middle of the rice paddy. Machine gun fire also hit them from the hills behind them. Within minutes, many of the Marines were hit by enemy fire from two machine gun positions.

“While pinned down in the paddy, I got up and made a mad dash to Lt. Kelsey’s position with the lead squad in front to replace his dead radioman,” remembered Sheehy. “Two Marines before me had tried to move up and been shot. Running forward, I was shot in the arm by the .51 caliber machine gun as I hit the ground beside Lt. Kelsey who dove for some cover behind a paddy dike when his M-16 jammed.”

“The Platoon Sergeant, Gerry Ackley, tried after me to come up to our position and was killed. Ackley had been in country for 18 months and that day was supposed to have been the last day of his tour,” said Sheehy. “The only mobile members of the 2nd platoon remaining in the paddy were Lieutenant. Kelsey, Corporal Dirickson, who was my fire team leader before they made me a radioman, and three others. When Lieutenant Kelsey continued the assault, he left me in the paddy since I was wounded and took my rifle and went into the tree-line with some others and was soon killed.”

While the 1st and 2nd platoons were trapped in the paddy, Marines of 3rd platoon, positioned to their rear, maneuvered to take out the NVA with the machine guns on the hill behind the paddy. Corporal Long, 2nd squad leader, although wounded, moved his squad in an enveloping movement and attacked the NVA position from the rear, killing six enemy. He then led another assault on a second machine gun position and silenced it, thereby taking some of the pressure off the Marines trapped in the paddy field. For his

outstanding courage and valiant fighting spirit that day, Corporal Long was awarded the Navy Cross.

Gunnery Sergeant John Green, the Fox Company Gunny, with complete disregard for his own safety, led a fierce frontal assault across the paddy to attack an enemy machine gun position, personally killing ten enemy soldiers. He continued to brave enemy fire by carrying wounded Marines to safety. For his daring initiative, valiant fighting spirit and selfless devotion to duty, which saved many of his fellow Marines, he was awarded the Navy Cross.

Marines are trained to attack. First Platoon was also pinned down in the paddy to the right of 2nd Platoon and facing unrelenting enemy fire, but their training kicked in and they quickly began to 'fire and maneuver' to gain the advantage on their opponents. With his platoon commander wounded, Corporal Lloyd Woods rallied his men and took the fight to the enemy. His gallantry and intrepid fighting spirit resulted in him being awarded a Navy Cross.

Private Moser, a radioman with 1st platoon, realizing that the lead squad in front of the platoon had no communications with the platoon leader, ran hundreds of yards across the exposed paddy under heavy enemy fire to bring the lead squad communications. After arriving at the lead squad's position he saw a wounded Marine lying in the rice paddy and, subjected to intense enemy fire, ran to the wounded Marine to offer first aid. As he was carrying the wounded Marine back to the squad's position, he was killed. For his daring actions and devotion to his fellow Marines, Private Moser was posthumously awarded a Silver Star. He was 20 years old when he died.

Ordinary men did extraordinary things that day in the rice paddies to help their wounded comrades. So many courageous acts occurred simultaneously across the battlefield that most survivors of Fox Company had no clue what actions their fellow Marines were undergoing. Ken Kreader, when finding out only recently about all the medals the Marines of Fox Company received for actions on June 2nd, told me, "I had no idea so many medals were awarded. You wonder why it takes so long to find these things out. I didn't even know we got the Presidential Unit Citation until I went to the Fox reunion in 2002, thirty-five years after the battle took place."

Steve Byrd, whose brother Arthur Byrd, a Lance Corporal in Ted Varena's 2nd Platoon, was killed on June 2nd, told me, "I think there were so many acts of uncommon valor that day that will never be told because they were witnessed by Marines who were later killed fighting."

During the battle, the newly issued M-16 rifles were jamming, adding to the Marines' problems. "I never had any trouble with my personal M-16, but the reason Lieutenant Kelsey dove for the rice paddy dike just before I was shot was because his M-16 jammed. I was hitting the deck beside him when I got shot. Looking back, the Lieutenant's jammed M-16 probably saved my life because if I had made it to the tree-line, I'm almost certain I would have been killed there," said Sheehy.

“About an hour after I got hit, Captain Graham came through the paddy with his command group,” Dennis Sheehy remembered. “Since I was wounded and unable to move up with them, one of the group came over to me and took my radio and went into the tree-line. All I remember was a lot of shooting, noise and screams.”

Captain Graham bravely led a fierce attack into the tree-line, forcing the enemy to abandon the first machine gun position, thereby relieving some of the pressure on his second platoon, and enabling evacuation of the wounded to a more secure area. While trying to take out the second machine gun, Graham was slightly wounded. Running out of ammunition, Graham gathered his remaining men behind some cover near a small pagoda. Gunnery Sergeant Green, who had been in the tree line fighting valiantly against the entrenched NVA, regrouped with the Marines that were with him around Captain Graham’s position.

“Captain Graham ordered Green to get his guys back across the paddy,” Barnes told me. “Green questioned Graham’s order to leave him and the wounded men, but Graham said we can no longer hold the position against these odds. We had used all our ammo and were taking rifles and ammo off the dead Marines and Viet Cong to keep fighting; not to mention all the problems we were having with the new M-16 rifle from malfunctioning bolts.” Barnes said. “Graham’s order was well founded,” said Barnes. “I could see at least 200 Viet Cong within 200 meters of our position. I had numerous holes throughout my body from gunshot and shrapnel and wasn’t able to move.”

Running out of ammunition and realizing that they were about to be over run by an advancing enemy force, Captain Graham ordered Thomas Donovan, the medic, who although was wounded himself continued to take care of the other Marines, to take the remaining men that could move to the rear, choosing to remain behind with Corporal Dirickson who could not be moved because of his wounds. “By the time Doc Donovan was ordered to get the wounded out it was too late,” said Barnes. “The enemy were within 20 yards of our position in assault lines.”

“Lying next to Captain Graham I heard him talking to the jets overhead before he was killed.” Barnes told me. “Captain Graham asked one of the pilots, ‘How does it look from up there?’ Pilot to Captain Graham, ‘It doesn’t look good. I see hundreds of NVA forming to assault your position.’ Captain Graham to pilot, ‘When they get on top of us, drop your heat rounds right on top of us.’ Pilot to Captain Graham, ‘I repeat, you said on top of your position?’ Captain Graham to pilot, ‘Affirmative. On top’.”

“Captain Graham then turned to Corporal Dirickson lying next to me -- Dirickson had been shot through the gut and couldn’t be moved – and picked up his rifle and threw it on Dirickson’s lap and said, ‘They’re coming. Do the best you can Marine.’ Captain Graham then pulled out his pistol and began firing into the VC starting to overrun our position. The jets then dropped their heat on top of us. I was the last man to see Captain Graham alive before he was killed,” said Barnes.

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty, Captain James Graham was awarded the Medal of Honor. He was twenty-six

years old. "If a man ever deserved the Medal of Honor, Captain Graham did. If not for this man and his actions on June 2, 1967 all of us would surely have died," wrote Corporal Thomas Searfoss.

"Captain Jim Graham was courageous when the time came; not with guns blazing to assault and destroy but in a doomed effort to save our people in the Second Platoon who had been ambushed in the dry rice paddy. He is an authentic hero, a caring person who did the right thing at the right time and sacrificed himself in an impossible situation," said MacKinnon.

Artillery and air strikes continued to pound the NVA positions throughout the late afternoon and evening. "During the day, the jets were coming in right over the top of me as I lay wounded in the rice paddy. They were dropping 250 or 500 pound bombs. One of the bombs blasted a mortar base plate about 500 feet into the air, which I tracked as it went up and down. It landed about 4 feet from my head," remembered Dennis Sheehy.

"I figured that the napalm and Puff the Magic Dragon that flew around for a while took care of a lot of the NVA. I do remember hearing a lot of NVA screaming after they were napalmed. The napalm and Puff were the main reason I moved myself away from the tree line during the night. With my arm shot up and my web belt wrapped around it for a tourniquet, I laid on my back and crawled for hours to get out of that paddy," said Sheehy.

While lying wounded on the battlefield after the jets dropped their napalm on Captain Graham's position and with Vietnamese soldiers checking out the dead and wounded Marines, Corporal Barnes recalled, "Lying next to Doc Donovan, I heard an NVA soldier walk up and shoot Doc through the back of the head with a pistol. I was lying three to four feet from Donovan's head when this took place. He then kicked me to see if I moved. I kept waiting for a bullet through my head that never came."

Corporal Barnes, for his courage, aggressive fighting spirit and steadfast devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger was awarded a Silver Star. Petty Officer Thomas Donovan was also awarded a Silver Star, posthumously, for his heroic conduct, selfless courage, and resolute devotion to duty in taking care of wounded Marines.

While Fox Company was locked in combat with the NVA, Marines of Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, were also engaged in an intense firefight with a separate concentration of NVA troops about one kilometer to the northwest of F/2/5's position. As the afternoon progressed, Colonel Houghton called for the commitment of the division reserve, the 2nd Battalion 5th Marines (2/5) commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Mallett C. Jackson, Jr. At 7 p.m. Echo 2/5 and Delta 1/7 were inserted by helicopter northeast of the enemy position, planning to drive south into battle. Landing unopposed, they quickly moved to relieve the Fox Company Marines in the rice paddy, encountering a PAVN force and engaging it in battle. By nightfall, they had been unable to reach the Marines they had been sent to relieve and set up a night defensive perimeter.

To the south, 3/5 had been engaged all day with a fierce enemy. Their advance was stopped early in the morning and in the early afternoon a medevac took a direct hit from a 75mm recoilless rifle. Attempts later in the day to move towards the southern portion of Objective Foxtrot were also repulsed by overwhelming enemy forces.

By late the night of June 2nd, a severely battered Delta 1/5 was holed up to the north of where Fox Company had been fighting. They had lost 17 Marines killed and 22 wounded during the day's fighting. Another D1/5 Marine of his wounds. An even more battered Fox 2/5, with the men that were left, was in a night defensive perimeter on the eastern edge of the paddy. They had suffered 32 Marines killed and 39 wounded. Alpha 1/5 was dug in to the southeast of the battle site, having been unable to reach Fox 2/5 during the day. They had 5 dead and 10 wounded Marines. Echo 2/5 and Delta 1/7 were on the northeast side of the village. They had lost four Marines. The Marines of 3/5, to the south of Fox Company's battle, had been fighting all day too and had suffered 12 Marines killed and 40 wounded. It had been a bad day for all the Marines, but Fox Company had sustained the highest losses.

The 5th Marines on the battlefield spent the night regrouping and evacuating casualties when helicopters could land. The next morning they swept the battle area. The Marines had suffered a total of 71 men killed and 139 wounded during the fighting on June 2nd alone.

A large majority of the Marines who died were not old enough to buy a beer back in 'The World', as the United States was known then. Of the 32 Marines killed in Fox Company, 23 of them, or 72 percent, were 20 years old or younger.

Ken Kreader recalled helping to load dead Marines on helicopters the morning of June 3rd, "That is a smell that just does not come off for some time. I also had a confrontation with a member of the media as we were loading our dead Marines on the choppers. He needed some encouragement to get his camera out of my face."

"I was med evac'd out on a UH-34 chopper that was probably piloted by a guy from my home town, after talking to him a couple of years ago. The chopper was so overloaded with casualties that it didn't make it off the ground the first time. The crew chief made one of the casualties get off, and then we were able to stagger away. The only thing keeping me from falling out the door the entire trip was the guy behind me kept his legs wrapped around me. I was sure we would get shot down because we flew right over the ambush paddy, and I knew the NVA had an anti-aircraft piece situated on the hill because I had seen it firing at Puff and the A4's dropping napalm. A4's must have got it," recalled Sheehy.

"On June 2nd I volunteered to go into the field and was part of the command post (CP) with Captain Graham. As it happened I was with him shortly before he died. I think about that day often and wonder how so many of us survived," said Private First Class Tom LaBarbera, the Fox Company Unit Diary clerk from April 1967 to April 1968.

“The last time I saw Graham he was dead on a poncho. He had given his all in the face of certain death. For me, our family died that day. Our Captain was gone and with him 31 others - the heart and soul of Foxtrot,” said Brent Mackinnon.

Total Marine losses on Union II from May 26th to June 2nd were 110 men killed and 241 wounded. It was the sixth deadliest battle of the Vietnam War. During the month long battle for Hue City from February 2nd to March 2nd, 1968, which was the fifth deadliest battle, there were a total of 119 men killed. In the siege of Khe Sanh from January 20, 1968 to April 14, 1968, the second deadliest battle, a total of 205 men were killed in action.

With 32 Marines killed and 39 wounded on June 2, 1967, Fox 2/5 reportedly lost proportionately more of its men for a single day of combat than any other American infantry company during the entire Vietnam War.

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