

31 January, 1968 0252 hours

The SPs had passed T.J.s' jeep through the main gate, and he parked next to the

bunker to wait for Mortenson to get off duty. He expected Sanders and Torelli to show

up any time now, and figured they all could go for coffee together. A couple of minutes

later, Vince drove in, saw T.J.s' jeep parked by the bunker, and pulled up next to him.

"How's it goin', Vince?" T.J. asked, as he pulled up.

"OK, T.J.," he answered. "You copy the call at the Cherry Bar?"

"Yeah. Got a little hairy in there, did it?"

"You ain't kiddin'. I thought Sanders was going to blow that Sergeant's head off!

Man, I'm sure glad it turned out all right. This has been a really strange night! Must be

something in the air, 'cause we've been real uneasy all night."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. You guys seen any PFs around town? The ones

usually hanging out around plantation and the north side of town haven't been there all night."

"Same with us. No PFs downtown, either."

Sanders broke in, saying, "We checked Cambo Alley, but didn't find anyone. Did find

some blood, though we don't know where it came from. I don't like this at all."

"Sanders has got me all nervous, now," Vince said, grinning at T.J.

"That's good, Vince," T.J. replied. "It'll keep you awake tonight."

"Hey, guys," Mortenson called from the bunker. "One of our dog handlers is reporting unidentified personnel inside the east perimeter not too far from here. Wanna

go check it out with us?"

"Sure," T.J. said. "We'll go with ya. How 'bout you and Sanders, Vince?

Wanna go

along?"

Sanders declined the offer. "We'll meet you at the mess hall in a bit. There's somethin' else I wanna do first."

"OK. See ya in a little while."

The SP jeep drove off, followed by T.J.s' jeep, heading toward the reported contact

area.

"Let's drive over to the flight line, Vince. I wanna see if a friend of mine is working

tonight."

Vince started the jeep, and drove off into the air base along the main road. Rockets began falling all along the flight line, ammo dump, fuel dumps, and aircraft

park areas. A direct hit on a jet fuel storage tank caused a tremendous, fiery explosion.

Two cargo planes were destroyed and several others damaged in the initial attack.

More than 30 122mm rockets struck the air base in the first few minutes, followed by

almost a dozen 82mm mortar rounds.

T.J. was following the SP jeep, approaching the reported contact point when the first

rockets struck the air base. The explosions were deafening, and the SP jeep veered

away from the perimeter, and sped up, heading for a bunker a couple hundred meters

away. T.J. followed as Mortenson's jeep screeched to a stop by the bunker, and they

ran inside. T.J. slammed on his brakes, sliding to a halt next to Mortenson's jeep. He,

Gilchrist, and Jackson jumped out, grabbed their weapons, and followed them inside.

There were two other SPs on duty there already, so their group, plus Mortenson and his

partner brought the total occupants to seven.

Vince was driving north near the east end of the flight line when the rocket attack

began. The concussion of the first two rockets, landing 100 meters away, caused him

to jerk the steering wheel away from the explosions, probably saving both their lives.

The third rocket exploded close enough to lift the jeep onto its left wheels, almost

causing it to overturn, and throwing Vince out of the driver's seat. He hit the ground on

his left shoulder, hip, and knee, shredding his uniform, and scraping away large patches

of skin where he hit the pavement. He bounced twice and rolled off the road into a

shallow ditch. His ears were ringing so loudly he could not hear the other explosions,

and his shoulder and knee burned fiercely, bleeding freely where the skin had been

abraded.

He lay on his back for a minute, dazed, trying to gather his wits. He rolled over and tried to stand up, making it to his hands and knees before the dizziness and nausea overcame him, and he fell onto his uninjured side. He lay there another half minute until the feelings passed, then gingerly felt his knee and shoulder. His hand came away wet with blood, but he was reasonably sure nothing had been broken, and he could feel no unusual bumps or protrusions. He slowly flexed his knee, and though it hurt, it seemed to work OK. He worked his shoulder with the same results. Though the pain was bad, everything seemed to function normally, and he again got to his hands and knees, then slowly stood up. Another wave of nausea and dizziness rolled over him, but quickly faded this time, and he was able to stand upright, though he swayed side to side.

As he looked around, he could see several fires burning around the air base, and figures running in the distance. He saw the jeep 50 feet away, near a small shed. He could see there was no one in it, and wondered where Sanders was. He began to slowly limp to the jeep, dreading what he might find when he got there. When he got close enough, he could see his M-16 was still in the back. He grabbed it and a bandolier of ammo as he walked past and turned toward the shed. He could see a darker shadow against the wall and stopped, bringing up the M-16.

"Sanders, that you?"

The figure waved at him, and Vince limped over, lowering the rifle. He saw that it was Sanders, sitting on the ground, leaning against the shed. He was holding his right side, and Vince could see his shirt and hand were wet. There were several other small bloody spots on his right leg, arm and shoulder. Vince carefully sat down next to him, leaning back, resting against the shed.

"You all right, Sanders?"

"I think so. Took some shrapnel in the side, though I don't think it's too bad."

It sounded like Sanders was talking from a long distance away, and Vince had to lean

toward him to hear over the ringing in his ears.

"Messed up my shoulder and leg a bit," he said. "Nothing's broken, though. Can't

hardly hear, and I've got one hell of a headache. You got your weapons with you?"

"Yeah, but only one magazine for my '16. Couldn't find the bandoliers.

Must've been

tossed out when you were."

"I found one in the jeep. You feel like looking for help?"

"In a minute. I gotta rest a bit first."

Neither could hear the rattle of small arms fire from other areas of the air base.

T.J. and the others waited a minute or so after the last explosion before emerging

from the bunker. They could see fires burning in the distance, in the area of the aircraft

park and flight line.

"Man, that was one bitch of an attack!" Mortenson exclaimed. "I never seen nothin'

like it the whole time I been here."

"What now, Sy?" T.J. asked.

"Guess we better check out that infiltration report. Don't seem so unlikely now, does it?"

Sy and his partner had climbed into their jeep, and started the engine when the first

bullets struck. Sy was hit in the upper arm, his partner struck in the side, shoulder, and

neck, and one of the SPs from the bunker was hit in the hand. Gilchrist had his ribcage

furrowed by a bullet, and the M-79 was knocked out of TJ's hands by an AK round.

Sy rolled out of the jeep onto the ground, and quickly crawled the few feet behind the

bunker where the others had taken cover. His partner remained seated in the jeep, his

body jerking to the impact of other bullets. He slowly fell out of the jeep and lay

motionless, a pool of blood quickly spreading on the ground.

"I think Snyder's dead, T.J., and I've been hit. I'm bleedin'."

"Take it easy, Sy. I'll fix you up," T.J. said, pulling a field dressing from his first aid pouch.

Bullets continued to whip through the air above their heads, thunking against the two jeeps. One of the SPs had started to return fire from the bunker with the M-60,

shooting toward a field between them and the east perimeter. T.J.

recognized the

heavier thump of the machine gun, interspersed with the rattle of an M-16.

He quickly

tied off the dressing on Mortenson's arm. The wound bled freely, but was through and

through, the bullet missing the bone. Jackson was laying behind a wheel of the jeep,

firing his rifle at figures running through the field. T.J. could see the muzzle flashes of

the VC rifles as they ran diagonally in front of him. There was another burst of fire from

the M-60, and several of the figures fell like rag dolls.

T.J. reached into the jeep, and grabbed Mortenson's and Snyder's M-16s. He handed

one to Sy, saying, "They're gonna be comin' after us, Sy. We gotta stop 'em."

Sy nodded slowly, taking the rifle. He rolled over to the front wheel of the jeep, and

began a controlled fire at the running figures.

T.J. reached back into the jeep, and felt around until he found the extra magazines.

He grabbed several, tossing a couple to Mortenson, and placing the rest in the thigh

pockets of his fatigues. When he looked out over the field, he saw a group of four VC

break away from the main force and charge the bunker, firing their weapons. He fired

a magazine on full auto, knocking three down. One continued the charge, apparently

unscathed, pulling a satchel charge from a pouch he was wearing. He got to within 10

meters of the bunker when a burst from the M-60 on T.J.s' jeep almost cut him in half.

T.J. slammed home another magazine, then looked up and saw Gilchrist standing in the

back of the jeep, firing the machine gun, screaming at the top of his lungs. Gilchrist was suddenly knocked from the jeep as if a giant fist had punched him in the chest. He landed flat on his back on the ground behind the jeep, but immediately jumped to his feet, climbed back up on the jeep, and resumed firing. T.J. could see a dark stain spreading down the back of his uniform. Several more VC were cut down by Gilchrist before he was again knocked out of the jeep. This time, he had difficulty getting to his feet, and he staggered as he walked. As he tried to climb back into the jeep, he collapsed in a heap. Jackson crawled over to him, grabbed a handful of his collar, and dragged him behind the bunker, where he was out of danger for the moment.

T.J., Mortenson and the bunker M-60 provided cover fire, and T.J. saw more figures fall. They were having a devastating effect with their combined fire. T.J. could see over a dozen bodies laying in the field by the dim light of the parachute flares that had been dropped over the air base. He heard Mortenson yelling at the others, directing their fire at the attacking figures. Suddenly, the enemy fire slacked off as the VC melted into the ground.

"Hold your fire, guys," T.J. shouted. "Stay alert, something's up."

T.J. used this time to crawl to the jeep and grab the bandolier of grenades out of the back. He looked for the grenade launcher, and saw it on the ground a few feet from Jackson.

"Jackson, toss me the '79."

Jackson flipped it to him, and he broke open the breech. Though the stock was splintered, the firing mechanism seemed to be OK. He loaded a parachute flare, and fired it into the air over the field. As it burst and slowly floated down, he saw crawling figures coming toward them. He quickly loaded a grenade, and fired, immediately

loading and firing another. Both exploded among the figures, causing a group of ten to jump to their feet and run toward them, firing their rifles. Bullets struck all around T.J., clanking against the jeep. Mortenson and Jackson were firing steadily, and the M-60 in the bunker opened up again. Several more VC fell dead or wounded from this withering fire, and after a few more steps, the charge broke. The remaining VC retreated back into the field, and the fire from the enemy stopped. Silence lay over that corner of the war.

31 January,