

Hard Fighting Hurled Back VC at Airport

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SAIGON—A small band of air policemen and their sentry dogs are credited with smashing a suicidal attempt by the Viet Cong to cripple Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Air Base last Sunday.

Both men and dogs died in the

bitter fight which raged through the night, but the VC attack was crushed.

Air Force men of the 377th Air Police Sq. and their German shepherd sentry dogs discovered the VC. During the battle, which lasted nearly six hours, they killed 17 of the VC.

It began when the VC launched a mortar attack on the base in the early morning hours. At the time no one knew that the enemy had infiltrated the perimeter in force and was about to attack.

No human could tell where the VC were that night, but the sentry dogs found them.

A2C Tommy Poole was wounded in the first rush of the VC near his post. Although hit in the cheek and neck, he played dead until the VC overran his position. Then for two hours he stayed there, keeping the Air Police alerted by radio on the movement of the VC around him.

A1C Tommy Shahan was driving a truck to the outposts with coffee for the sentries when his truck was hit by two grenades. Seriously wounded, he played dead as one VC attempted to strip him. His buddy, A2C Thomas Handler, had wounded the VC before taking Shahan out of the truck and placing him on the ground alongside another AP, who had been killed.

Handler called for an ambulance and rushed to reinforce other AP's fighting nearby. Once more Shahan had to play dead as the VC came back and attempted to strip him.

At another post A2C Walter Hargis killed three VC and ran out of ammo. He gave his weapon to a buddy and started back to get more.

When he discovered that there were five Viet Cong behind him, he jumped into a ditch filled with water. The VC passed and he got up, then a VC jumped into the ditch beside him.

Hargis said, "I was in shock and didn't know what to do, so I held out my hand and said, 'friend.' The VC held out his hand automatically and I kicked him in the face and got the hell out of there but the VC threw a grenade that hit me in the back and bounced off. It went off, wounding me in the legs and back."

One of the sentry dogs, named Rebel, was killed after he attacked a VC by the throat. "When I turned him loose, I had a notion that he might get shot, explained his handler, A2C Leroy March.

Two other sentry dogs were killed attacking the VC.

Sunday night another battle took place, with VC who had slipped through the defenses.

A2C Robert Thorneburg said, "My dog Nemo and I were on post when Nemo started acting up and headed for some bushes nearby. I knew it had to be a VC, so I turned him loose to see if he could find the enemy. Nemo went in and I heard a scream. I thought that I had better get in there and give him a hand. I ran into the bushes and was amazed to find not one, but four VC there. They were as surprised as I was, what with Nemo going round and round with one of their pals. I grabbed one of them and was hitting him when I was shot myself."

A buddy of Thorneburg's charged the remaining VC and managed to kill them both. Meanwhile, Nemo had killed the VC he had attacked, but was seriously wounded during the fight.

TSgt. Scott Linney, NCO in charge of the sentry dog section, said, "As far as I know this is the first time that a unit of this type has held off a VC attacking force."

He added, "I had one young fellow, A2C Marvin Elderman, who is credited with killing two VC and capturing another two. What makes this more outstanding in my mind is that it was his last night of duty. He is due to go home this week."