

Stars & Stripes

Articles regarding the NVA/VC occupying the caves of Dong Bo Mountains Surrounding Nhat Trang AB. Interesting! George Bruce Thompson, NT 1968-1969

How ROKs Kicked Reds Off Grand Sommet

By KIM KI SAM
SAS Staff Correspondent
NINH HOA, Vietnam — The helicopter touched down carefully on the little platform of logs that had been laid over the great rocks. The pilot kept the power on in case the tiny, mountaintop "LZ" collapsed.

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We could hear the gunfire from the caves just under us.

Far below us to the northeast, things looked normal at Nha Trang. You could see the big C130s lifting off the runway and other planes circling, waiting to land. And here we were, standing on top of a communist hideout, just five miles away.

This was "Grand Sommet," a 3,000-foot mountain overlooking the big Nha Trang allied military complex and a fortress for more than 400 enemy soldiers. It was under attack for the first time in the war.

It was Friday morning. The day before, there had been a

series of air strikes with 500- and 2,000-pound bombs. It looked like the NVA had been making a break for it when the bombs hit. The rocks were splattered with blood and 20 yards down from the helicopter lay the lower portion of a man's leg.

The fight had been going on almost two full days. The South Korean White Horse Div. had circled the general area of the caves on Wednesday, then heli-lifted troops onto the mountain peak to move down the mountainside and into the caves.

The first try had to be called off. The NVA were set up in rock crannies and more than a dozen cave entrances, spread over several acres, with nothing but the muzzles of their weapons showing. The enemy fire was so intense the ROKs pulled back and called in the American jets from Cam Ranh Bay.

The planes had hammered the mountainside for hours, finally driving the Reds deep into

SAIGON—South Korean soldiers killed 25 communists Monday near Nha Trang and Phu Cat, ROK military spokesmen said.

Elements of the White Horse Div. sweeping the mountainous Dong Bo Area, overlooking the allied military complex at Nha Trang, reported killing 22 enemy soldiers, bringing the five-day total to 372 Reds slain. Spokesmen said the ROKs destroyed the mountain fortress Tuesday morning with no further contact with the enemy.

No Korean casualties were reported Monday. A team of Rangers from the Tiger Div. killed three Reds about 15 miles northeast of Phu Cat in a clash with an enemy force of unknown size, again with no ROK casualties.

the huge, connected caves. On Thursday the ROKs went in after them.

It was a tough job. Although some of the caves were 10 feet high and big enough to house a company or more, the entrances—even the main one—were tiny. Some were just big enough for a small man to slip through, and the Korean soldiers had to take off their packs to crawl inside. While they removed their gear, enemy snipers popped up from holes in the rocks and peppered them.

The main entrance was about

half the size of a normal doorway. I crouched and followed a path from 9th Co., 30th Inf. Regt., inside.

It was a natural cave, a big one, with room for maybe 100 men. In the blackness at the far end was a passageway that led to another room, which in turn led to other caverns. The ROK troops were working through them now. Shots echoed off the rock walls.

Of the estimated 420 NVA lurking in the tunnels and caves, at least 300 were already dead.

As our eyes got used to the

dim light, we picked out a stack of about 15 bodies. The Reds had apparently dragged their dead in after the air strikes.

Near the pile of dead men was a fireplace and some wooden benches. It looked like the Reds had been there a long time. They had. An officer later told me there was strong evidence that the NVA, and before them the Viet Cong and the Viet Minh, had occupied the mountain "apartment house" caves since the late 1940s.

Most of the dead were mature men, not the teen-agers found in so many other NVA units. They apparently had done little if any ground fighting. This had been their first and last major action.

Back outside, a cordon of infantrymen still ringed the cave area and patrols searched the rocks and forest clumps for snipers and escapees. The night before many of the communists had tried to sneak through the dragnet by twos or threes. Apparently none made it.

One of the last enemy troops killed before we landed was a sniper pinned down in the rocks to the left of the main cave. A Vietnamese interpreter had pleaded with him over a bull-horn, asking him to surrender and save himself. The NVA's reply, as translated, was, "Come and get me."

A ROK soldier did, with a hand grenade.

Just above the main cave entrance is a 12-foot-wide flat rock. On it the Koreans had found an 82mm mortar with a clear field of fire toward Nha Trang. It must have been meant for use Thursday night, but the Reds never had time to use it.

By the time the helicopter lifted us off the mountain the ROKs had gotten to the deepest parts of the subterranean maze. You could hardly hear the occasional bursts of fire, coming from the bowels of the mountain. The Reds had lost their longest lease of the war.



KOREAN RECOILLESS RIFLES BLAST COMMUNIST TARGETS DURING BATTLE ON MOUNTAIN NEAR NHA TRANG.

ROKs Continue Push Into Red Peak

By KIM KI SAM
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NHA TRANG, Vietnam—Korean 9th Inf. Div. soldiers continued to fight their way through the jungled mountains overlooking this allied military complex

Saturday, hunting down North Vietnamese company bases hidden in rocky caves.

The number of enemy dead in the fighting that has raged through the Dong Bo mountain area since Thursday rose to 305

late Saturday afternoon. Among them were two girls, both described as "hard core" red fighters.

The many caves on and around "Grand Sommet" the tallest peak on the Nha Trang area

skyline, have been Communist havens for years. Those on the mountain itself have been infested with Viet Minh and Viet Cong for 20 years.

An enemy document found Friday indicates that the Dong Bo base camp itself, near the foot of the mountain, has also long served as an enemy hideaway.

Early intelligence reports say the camp was apparently the base of about 250 members of the NVA 5th Div.'s 18B Regt. Their objective was apparently to attack Allied installations in the Nha Trang and Cam Ranh Bay areas.

Korean spokesmen say the three days of fighting has probably destroyed the enemy chain of command.