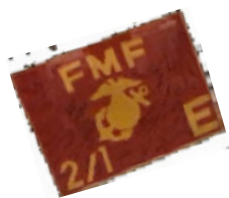


First Person Account: Operation Union

The Phantom of the Rice Paddies



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In April, 1967, as an artillery forward observer, I was transferred from **Echo** to **Golf Co.** and soon we were on

Operation Union southwest of **Danang**. It was the beginning phase of a regiment-sized attack on a suspected **Viet Cong** battalion headquarters.

The plan as briefed was that we would infiltrate by platoons by night, then link up with the rest of the battalion and assault near dawn the day after. During our movement, we could tell that the enemy was watching, moving parallel to us in the tree lines about 400 meters away. **Foxtrot Co.**, ahead of us, hit a large booby trap and it was a monster. It was a **155mm Howitzer** round suspended in the trees and it killed more than a dozen Marines and wounded several more. I won't describe what I saw.

Some time mid-morning the other two battalions were in their blocking positions on the far side of the objective, which was a long thin tree line on the

edge of a long open field of tall yellow grass. I was in the center of our company, which was in reserve,

right behind the two assaulting companies, so I had just broken into the open when the lead companies ran into the enemy defenses. The VC opened up with several machine guns, including one heavy machine gun, and we took casualties immediately. The leading companies recoiled and returned fire. It was obvious that it really was an enemy battalion, and they were staying put.

I lay down flat in the grass and tried to send an artillery fire mission, but the medevacs were

going on because of all the wounded and that stopped all artillery and mortar fire in our area until the evacuations were complete.

We



were pinned down and it looked like it was going to be really tough to cross that 300-400 meters of open ground to get to the VC when it was our turn to attack.

While I was lying there, a single U.S.

Marine F-4 Phantom approached and crossed over me, very low and heading straight for the enemy line. Echo's **Forward Air Controller (FAC)**

must've had him under control because the F-4 made his pass and then came back once more, then passed directly over me again to make his bombing run.

We were on one edge of a small triangle bordered by three Marine battalions, separated by only a few hundred meters, so the Phantom had

to drop whatever he had with extraordinary precision or he would kill some of us. He was flying very low and slow, so slow that the plane was making that distinctive moaning sound Phantoms usually made when they were slowing for landing.

Then I saw a whole, solid wall of muzzle flashes coming from the enemy tree line and the enemy was standing up, at least a hundred of them, pouring fire at the oncoming Phantom.

Without flinching, the pilot kept coming and dropped four **SNAKEYE 500 pound bombs** directly on the enemy position.

The Snakeye had a tail fin assembly that popped open upon release to form a broad cross at the rear of the bomb, slowing it drastically to allow the bombing aircraft to escape the blast.

Huge clouds of dirt, debris, rooftops, and trees soared high in the air after the stunning

concussions of

the bombs faded. All the enemy fire ceased and we raced up and forward to get them. When we got into their position, we discovered that the VC had built concrete and sandbag bunkers, plus barbed wire and mines, but

the four bombs killed many of them and those that

escaped ran into our two blocking battalions. We could hear the gunfire from that direction as what was left of the VC were torn to pieces.

I saw that Phantom turning towards Danang. There was smoke trailing behind him but with Phantoms always smoking it was hard to tell if he had been badly hit or not.

I would love to find out who the pilot was and buy him a case of whatever he wanted to drink.

— Lt. Colonel Rick Lindsey, USMC (ret)



Operation Union

