

Army Officer Describes Fierce Gunfight in Vietnam

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Description

2nd Lt. Conrad Braun describes being one of the few survivors from his platoon which suffered a fierce attack from Viet Cong forces that occurred during Operation Sam Houston in the Kon Tum Province of Vietnam. Braun would later be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions during the engagement. This news report contains strong language that may be offensive to viewers.

Keywords

Vietnam War, Operation Sam Houston, Kon Tum Province, Kon Tum, Central Highlands, Vietnam, War, 4th Infantry Division, Cambodia, Platoon, 8th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Lieutenant, Second Lieutenant, Conrad Braun, Grenade, Soldier, Warfare, Military, Viet Cong, Vietcong, North Vietnamese Army, NVA, Vietnam People's Army, Battle, Attack, Assault, Communists, KIA, Killed in Action, Dead, Wounded, Injured, Injuries, Combat, M79, Ammunition, Valor, Bravery, Witness, Eyewitness, Interview, Survivor, Survival

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Transcript

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BILL RYAN, anchor:

Last week in Kon Tum Province, in the central highlands, elements of the 4th Division took part in Operation Sam Houston. Enemy units, perhaps two regiments thought to have crossed from Cambodia during the Lunar New Year's Truce, were in the area. The 1st Platoon, C Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, engaged the enemy in Kon Tum. Lieutenant Conrad Braun spoke with correspondent Howard Tuckner.

HOWARD TUCKNER reporting:

What'd you lose?

2nd Lt. CONRAD BRAUN: I had thirty-six when I started. We got twenty-one killed, fourteen wounded, and one man not a scratch on him.

TUCKNER: Did they try to overrun you at any time?

BRAUN: First two assaults they made, they made two assaults in the platoon perimeter just coming at us screaming and yelling. We knocked them down with small arms fire and M79 fire. Then they stopped assault and we could hear their officers down there. We were trying to get them to come out again and come at us. Then they didn't assault us anymore. They just tried this sneaky stuff. They crawled out one, two men at a time, threw grenades inside the perimeter, then crawled back. We killed quite a few of them doing this. One time, one dink crawled up on the platoon perimeter and Owen Mapes shot him, shot him in the leg and just left him out there. And dink's two buddies came up to help him out and Mapes just emptied a magazine automatic fire and killed all three of them.

TUCKNER: By dinks you mean North Vietnamese?

BRAUN: Yeah. Dinks are NVA, North Vietnamese, communist, Charlies, anything. Dink has a-- a lot of my KIAs were right in the head and he definitely can-- he knows where to hit you if he wants to kill you.

And it was-- it was tough.

TUCKNER: What were you thinking about?

BRAUN: I was thinking of getting support in there, and I was thinking of the company that was coming to help us, and I was thinking of-- Like, I was talking on the radio trying to get help, but I was thinking of my wife, and my baby that I haven't seen, I guess. I got a baby coming in June and that was on my mind. I was-- I just knew we were going to get overrun. I didn't think the company-- the company was so far away, I didn't think we could hold long enough to be relieved in time, and I knew we were getting hit with a couple companies, of course the mortars were all over us, and well, when we did get relieved, Sergeant Brown had six rounds left and I had a hand grenade.

TUCKNER: That's all? No ammunition?

BRAUN: Uh-huh. There was ammunition around. Couple-- couple more people had a few more rounds left in their magazines, but there was ammunition around, but if you wanted it, you'd have to go after it, you were going to get yourself killed. Most of the time I just talked on the radio and had one hand grenade ready if-- if it got close I was just going pull the pin and let it go right in front of me and get me and a couple more dinks. Right before the company got there I got started-- everybody who died around me or was too wounded to move, I started getting all their mail and their pictures and I was just going to light a bonfire so dink wouldn't get that stuff. Myself, I had my watch off and my wedding band off. I was about to just blow it all up with me rather than let dink get it. He definitely wasn't going to get us.

All around me, there's just G.I.'s who's dead or wounded or dying or some of us that were lucky, I still don't know how me and Brown ever got out. I know all I got is a little nick in the arm of shrapnel. A mortar piece hit me in the arm. Brown's not touched and-- There were dinks in threes and fours piled up outside that platoon perimeter. Spec-4 Jones asked me if he could, if I could tie a tunicate around his knee, he was hit in an artery, and you could see this stuff spurting out, blood all over the place. I'm trying to talk on the phone, trying to get to him to tie a tunicate. At the same time he just told me "to hell with it." He said, "I'll fire all my ammunition then I'll just die." So he got about three snipers out of trees for us, just cut them in half with canister rounds from M79s and just put his head down and died on me. Then there was-- there was Sergeant Smith. He-- he got hit with rockets and he was bleeding out his eyes and ears and he was still calling the shots for us. He-- well, I wasn't doing shooting. He was calling shots for the rest of the men who were actually firing. He-- "There's one over there. Get 'em. Get 'em." He'd kill about ten, eleven, twelve dinks I think, out there. I think I personally can account for three. I did little shooting and mostly just talking trying to get that stuff in to help us out of there.

TUCKNER: What do you think of this war?

BRAUN: War stinks, I think. I'd like to go home, but I'll stay it out. We'll win, no sweat. I'm just-- just hanging on over here. We got-- They say we fought crack NVA troops, well we lost some crack troops ourselves, but there's no doubt in my mind about winning. We'll never be whipped over here. But, just a, just a funny thing. I have the greatest respect in the world for the NVA. They've got their fine soldiers. They're good shots, they come charging at anything. And without thinking. If they do think, it doesn't show. The body count now, I think, is eighty-three. One platoon killed eighty-three, and you can bet that they drugged double that off during the night after the fight. We found a couple stuck up in hollows of

trees and everywhere else. They're all over the place, out there.

TUCKNER: What if you had to go back out there right now?

BRAUN: Back out? I'd like to go back out. I'll have a platoon again soon. They'll get replacements in for me. I'll be back out, about three, four days, whenever they get this out of my arm and got to play cool though. Take the shrapnel out and maybe I'll rest for a day or two, then they'll send me back out. They'll have my replacements to me then I'll be back out. Sort of like bloodlust for Charlie Company now. We got to avenge our dead now. So we'll go out and kill some dinks.

RYAN: For all the American men who fight in Vietnam, it may be like a blood lust, but they fight for their buddies, for their units, and in doing that, they fight for their lives. There is little taught by the line soldier of the politics of this war. These men, whether they be two-year draftees or career military men, have raised American military tradition to the highest level in our history and they have done it by becoming thoroughly professional soldiers. They could not do less than that and have a reasonable chance to survive in this strange land in a type of war strange to American military experience. Last week, 172 Americans were killed in action in Vietnam, 802 were wounded, and one is missing. Bill Ryan, NBC News.