

Medal of Honor Recommendation

1 L/T Albert Clark Welch

(written by Brigadier General James Shelton, U.S. Army (Ret))

Narrative description for award of Medal of Honor to 1 L/T Albert Clark Welch, Company D, 2n Bn, 28th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division, Republic of Vietnam, for actions on October 17, 1967

1. Terrain and Weather:

On 17 October 1967 the action took place in heavy jungle west of the Village of Chon Thanh (Highway 13) in Binh Long Province. Although considered the dry season, it was humid and moist with daytime temperatures in excess of 90 degrees. The double canopy jungle was in relatively flat ground surrounded by intermittent streams (such as Suoi Ong-Thanh), which flowed south and west.

2. Enemy conditions:

It is believed that two battalions of the 271st VC Regiment (300-400 soldiers) were in the immediate vicinity. They had been bloodied in previous actions, and they were low on foodstuffs (primarily rice). They were in the base camp called the Long Nuguyen Secret Zone to refit and rearm. They did have plentiful supplies of ammunition for AK 47 rifles, RPD machine guns, some captured .50 caliber machine guns, perhaps some 12-7 mm Chicom heavy machine guns, Chicom claymores, and many RPGS. They had suffered approximately 30 casualties in a heavy firefight with 2/28 Inf on 16 Oct 67. In earlier engagements with 1/18 Inf during 6-10 Oct 1967, they suffered heavy casualties ambush and during the act the enemy deployed to ambush and surround two companies (approximately 150 men) US force. US casualties after the 2 1/2 hour battle were 56 killed, 75 wounded, and 2 missing. Many enemy were killed and wounded, with eyewitness accounts of 1 L/T Welch killing over 12 VC personally. 1 L/T Welch's personal actions the enemy saved many US wounded, as enemy soldiers were moving through US wounded systematically killing them. 1 L/T Welch killed two of these enemy execution team soldiers. Following the ferocious 2 1/2 hour firefight, the enemy withdrew deeper into the jungle to the west, dispersed into smaller groups, and broke contact.

3. Resume of Action:

The 2/28 Inf had been operating in the immediate vicinity of the 17 October action for nine days after having been airmobile inserted to the west on 8 October 1967. From 8 Oct to 16 Oct the 2/28 had conducted two-company search and destroy missions daily, with the third rifle company left behind to secure the battalions mortars, command post, supplies in their tactical field position, called the NDP (Night Defensive Position). The Battalion had A Co, B Co, D Co, and elements of Headquarters Company, including the reconnaissance platoon. C Co was securing a fire support base along Highway 13 and detached from 2/28 OPCON. Rifle company strengths were approximately 100 men in the field. Minor contacts occurred daily from 8 through 15 October. On 16 October D Co, with LT Welch commanding, and B Co with CPT Jim Kasik commanding, engaged a large size force directly south of the Battalion NDP. LT Welch and his D Co, which were leading in column, did all the fighting. D Co had four wounded, and a US captain advising a Vietnamese Province reconnaissance unit attached to D Co was killed. D Co killed 30 enemy soldiers using artillery, mortars, and small arms fire. 1 L/T Welch personally killed 5 or 6 enemy soldiers. As nightfall was eminent, the 2/28 withdrew back into its night defensive position and prepared to resume the offensive action on 17 October. Before dusk on 16 Oct 1967 BG William Coleman, acting division commander of the 1st Infantry Division (in the absence of MG John H. Hay, who was at a meeting at MACV HQ in Saigon) flew into the NDP by chopper for a briefing on the 16 October action.

The Plan for 17 October 1967 approved by LTC Allen with tacit approval by COL. Newman and BG Coleman was for a two-company search and destroy force led by company A, 2/28 Inf, CPT. Jim George commanding, followed by company D, 2/28 Inf, 1 L/T Albert Clark Welch commanding, in column, with a battalion command group consisting of LTC Terry Allen, Jr., two RTOS, battalion operations SGT Plier, CSM Francis Dowling, and captain Jim Blackwell, the battalion S-2 traveling inside the protection of Company D. The battalion would use artillery "marching fire" to its front and flanks.

At 0802 on October 17 1967 Company A with a total of 65 men departed the NDP traveling south in column with Company D, with 73 men and the command group following. After approximately 2 hours, the battalion had traveled 1200 meters - very cautious movement - employing Clover Leaf patrols to the front and flanks. All knew that contact with the enemy was eminent. The A Company point reported sighting a small group of enemy soldiers moving across their front. CPT George, the A C commander, ordered a hasty ambush. As the ambush force moved forward they were engaged by a heavy volume of automatic weapons (machine gun) fire and claymore mines. The friendly force was not so much surprised by the enemy fire as they were overwhelmed by it. Two platoon leaders were immediately killed, and within 15 minutes, after trying to regain control of the situation, CPT George was blinded, deafened and wounded by an enemy claymore while attempting to personally attack an enemy machine gun with hand grenades. A company 1st Sgt. Valdez moved forward, retrieved CPT George, and led CPT George east away from the enemy fire which was most heavy from the west. This action, while saving CPT George, left A Company leaderless. practically every man in A Company of 65 men (an 11 man ambush patrol that had been employed by A Company on the night of October 16 had been left behind in the NDP for rest) had been killed or wounded in the first 30 minutes of action.

D Company, commanded by 1 L/T Welch, formed a perimeter around the battalion command group. LTC Allen had no radio contact with A Company. The battalion S2, Captain Jim Blackwell, had been hit by enemy fire, which was now also cutting through D Company. LTC Allen asked 1 L/T Welch to move forward to check the status of A Company. By this time Company D and the battalion command group were receiving heavy enemy fire, to include sniper fire from trees, RPGS, and heavy machine gun fire. 1 L/T Welch moved forward to his connecting files with company A. He saw many A company men dead and wounded. he assisted a number of A Company wounded back within the d Company perimeter, helping to bandage their wounds and at the same time being hit himself by either enemy fire or shrapnel in the chest. LTC Allen was on the radio requesting air strikes. Welch reported to LTC Allen that it appeared that A Company had ceased to exist as an effective fighting force. Welch then moved among his men along the perimeter (approximately 60 feet in diameter) urging them to fire their weapons and helping to bandage a steady number of increasing wounded. The enemy fire was heavy with machine guns, claymores, and RPGS chopping through the underbrush into the beleaguered Company D and the Battalion Command Group. As both enemy and friendly fire chopped through the underbrush it became apparent to 1 L/T Welch that the enemy was now maneuvering around both sides of his tiny perimeter intent on destroying the Battalion Command Group, which already had several dead and wounded. 1st Sergeant Clarence A. Barrow, the D Company 1st Sgt, had been hit in the back and legs, and he was immobile, but armed with a M-60 machine gun. He watched LT Welch running from man to man, encouraging the redistributing ammunition, and directing their fires toward the maneuvering enemy. Although already wounded, Welch ignored the withering enemy fire, standing up to better observe the enemy movement then moving a machine gunner for a better field of fire. 1st Sgt Barrow shouted to LT Welch to "Get down, the fire is too heavy". Lt. Welch replied, "If I die I'll die on my feet", and continued to move among his men. The heavy firefight was now in it's hour. LTC Allen was desperately trying to direct air strikes against the enemy but they were ineffective due to the nature of the close combat. LT Welch, through his artillery FO, 2/LT Durham, brought artillery fire closer in to his position, carefully avoiding the area to the front where A Company's dead and wounded were laying in the jungle. Enemy soldiers were already maneuvering through that location, killing any A Company wounded they found. 1st SGT Barrow observed LT Welch run out into that area and dragged several wounded A Company men who had crawled back to Company D's perimeter. He treated the men as best he could. When bandages ran out, LT Welch used socks and torn tee shirts to bandage wounds. He completely ignored his own personal safety while encouraging his men and comforting the wounded. 1 L/T Welch had personally killed a number of enemy soldiers with his M-16 rifle. Seeing that one of his men's weapons had been hit and destroyed by enemy fire, he gave his M-16 and ammo to the soldier. Welch

continued to fight with a captured enemy .45 cal Thompson sub-machine gun and his .45 caliber pistol.

Practically all the D company radios had been destroyed or damaged by enemy fire. LT Welch ran through the heavy enemy fire to gather radios so they could be cannibalized into working order. 2 L/T Durham, the artillery forward observer was protecting his artillery net radio with his body while operating his radio handset to talk with the stub of his wrist, as his hand had been blown off by enemy fire. He continued to adjust the artillery fire more closely in, still smiling and calling to both 1 L/T Welch and 1st SGT Barrow. A VC perimeter penetration team of two men charged through and penetrated the perimeter, 1 L/T Durham was the first to see them. He shouted and 1st SGT Barrow killed one and 1 L/T Welch killed the other. By this time, 1st LT Welch had taken two additional wounds, an enemy round blowing the bicep off his left arm.

His left arm became unusable and hung limply by his side. He saw an enemy RPG gunner fire a rocket at the Battalion Command Group killing command Sergeant Major Francis Dowling. Welch ran at the enemy soldier and killed him with his .45 pistol. Lt. Welch was now weakening from loss of blood, but he remained active. He ran to LTC Allen, who was still on his radio trying to direct supporting elements to assist what was left of his battalion. He ordered 1 L/T Welch to withdraw his men back along the route they had come, back to the NDP. 1 L/T Welch made an estimate that he had too many badly wounded men to move, particularly since the enemy fire was so intense and accurate. Everything that moved within the perimeter was being hit by enemy sniper fire from the trees. Without commenting he chose to ignore the order. LT Welch helped a company medic distribute the last of the morphine to the most severely wounded, and gave his canteens to the wounded. He fell to the ground and crawled nearer to 1st SGT Barrow. Barrow called to him that two VC soldiers were moving among the American wounded summarily killing them. LT Welch climbed to his feet, observed the enemy soldiers, and killed them both with his .45 pistol.

Welch fell back to the ground crawled to a tree facing 1st SGT Barrow, and put his back against the tree. His entire body was sticky from the blood of five wounds. He drifted off unconscious due to loss of blood. Suddenly he felt jerks against his shoulder harness. He opened his eyes to see 1st SGT Barrow swinging his M-60 machine directly pointed and opened fire. It was the last thing LT Welch remembered that day.

In the early afternoon, around 2:00PM, a relief force found their way to the D Company perimeter. LTC Allen and everyone in the Battalion Command Group was dead. 1 L/T Welch was found unconscious but still living, and he was medevaced to Ling Binh for stabilization, and then to Japan. Later, in Japan in the hospital, 1 L/T Welch saw 1st SGT Barrow, who was also recuperating. Welch asked Barrow why he had fired the M-60 at him. Barrow replied, "Sir, a VC had you by the harness. He was standing behind you trying to pick you up, and the belt and harness pulled up over your chest but you were still on the ground. I cut him in half with the M-60."