

# BRAVE MEN of DONG

**T**HIS IS THE STORY of a small group of U. S. fighting men at Dong Xoai, Vietnam. During a short period, when they were attacked by the Viet Cong, they fought a heroic battle against great odds.

Dong Xoai was a small encampment in the jungle, consisting of about 14 buildings, approximately 50 miles north of the capital city of Saigon. Here a tiny force made up of Vietnamese soldiers, plus U. S. Army Special Forces personnel and Navy Seabees, were posted on the night of 9 Jun 1965. The Americans numbered less than 20 men, about equally divided between USSF and Seabee personnel. With them were an Army medical technician and a Navy hospital corpsman.

Before the attack ended some 14 hours later, the Army-Navy-Vietnamese team had been subjected to a continuous attack from the enemy. Every American fighting man in that battle was wounded, and a fourth of their number were killed in action.

Two of them received the Medal of Honor, an Army 2nd Lieut., Charles Q. Williams, and a Seabee, Marvin G. Shields, CM3. Dozens of additional awards went to the men at Dong Xoai, many of them posthumously. They included seven Silver Stars, eight Bronze Stars, a score of Purple Heart Medals and the Army Combat Infantryman Badge. The entire Seabee Team 1104 was awarded the Navy Unit Commendation for its action.

The full story of Dong Xoai can be told when all the official reports are in from the Vietnamese and U. S. units. This account is derived from a portion of the Construction Battalion files, and is seen primarily through the eyes of the Seabees who were involved.

**T**HIS IS A STORY not only of heroism, but of teamwork. To set the scene, here is a brief description of the Dong Xoai compound. It was surrounded in part by a protective ledge of earth—called a berm—that served also as bunkers for gun positions. The headquarters

building was located in the northeast section, and the district headquarters facilities, along with Special Forces and Seabee billets, were located in the southwest section.

At Dong Xoai half the CBs and half the United States Special Forces (USSF) were split, half of the combined group being in the Ranger Compound and the other half being in the District Compound.

The purpose of the division was to provide control in the event of attack on both compounds and to minimize the possibility of a large concentration of artillery destroying the entire U. S. element.

In charge of the small American group was Captain William M. Stokes, III, USA, Armor Detachment Commander, Special Forces "A," Detachment A342. The senior Navyman present was Lieutenant (jg) F. A. Peterlin, officer in charge of Seabee Technical Assistance Team 1104.

At 1850 on the night of the attack, 9 Jun 1965, a report was received that 100 VC had been observed three kilometers south of Dong Xoai. The information was relayed to High Headquarters and the District Chief advised to bring the VC forces under artillery fire. This was not an unusual sighting for the Dong Xoai area. There were no indications of a mass attack.

Each night after dark all Special Forces and Seabee personnel were instructed on their duties in event of attack—where to go, what weapons were to be manned, and what actions were to be taken.

The following account, excerpted from official reports, will serve to piece together the partial picture of that night and the following day—a period of bitter fighting and great heroism. Some of the material has been paraphrased for greater clarity.

*We'll start off with the statement of Chief Equipment Operator Johnny R. McCully, USN, at Dong Xoai, Republic of Vietnam, on 10 Jun 1965. Chief McCully was*



#### SEABEES OF TEAM 1104

*Standing Left to Right: J. C. Klepfer, EON2; D. B. Brakken, BU1; W. C. Hoover, SW2 (deceased); LTJG F. A. Peterlin; D. M. Mattick, BUH2; J. M. Keenan, HM2; L. W. Eyman, UT1; J. R. McCully, EOC; and M. G. Shields, CMA3 (deceased). Kneeling: R. S. Supczak, CE3; F. J. Alexander, EA3; J. D. Wilson, CMI and J. L. Allen, EO1.*

*Klepfer, Supczak, Alexander and Allen were on duty elsewhere and were not in the action at Dong Xoai.*

**ALL HANDS**



## **BRAVE MEN OF DONG XOAI**



**BERM BUILDING**—Earthen berm shown under construction is typical of fortifications at Special Forces camps.

He was shot by LTJG Peterlin. All this time we had been receiving heavy grenade action. My weapon was knocked out of my grasp by a grenade which also was set afire by a flamethrower. I moved around the berm and went to the east side of the CIDG camp for reinforcements and weapons. Two CIDG troops moved up with me; one had a 30-caliber rifle and the other a carbine.

We commenced moving up toward the north berm toward my original position. At this time I heard Americans shout on the south side of the CIDG camp toward the District Building. We received heavy VC fire from my original position.

At this time we pulled back to a fence near the village. We escaped through a fence, taking the machine gun and carbine with us. We hid under a house and fired at the VC in camp until our ammo was expended. At this time the house caught fire.

We moved from the house and commenced escape and evasion tactics. I tried working my way toward the airfield approximately one kilometer away, but we ran into a heavy concentration of VC fire.

One Vietnamese soldier and I moved along a road south of town, where we made contact with a Vietnamese civilian. The civilian took us to a sawmill where there was an underground bunker. We were strafed and napalmed, and also fired on by the VC. We moved into the woods until night, and then returned to the sawmill. We stayed in the sawmill all night, and just before daylight we moved back into the woods.

*This is a portion of the narrative of Captain William M. Stokes, III, USA, Armor Detachment Commander. He was seriously wounded while leading the combined USSF-Seabee unit during the thick of the fighting, and was awarded the Silver Star for this action.*

**A**T THE TIME of the attack, at about 1130, I was in the Command Post Building in the Ranger Camp with Construction Mechanic Third Class Shields, Steelworker Second Class Hoover, and the camp commander, Captain Do.

A mortar round hit the building, wounding Hoover. The USSF medic was dispatched to Hoover.

I ran for the communications center to report to Higher Headquarters that Dong Xoai was under attack. When I reached the radio equipment, I found that the equipment had been destroyed by a mortar round. I then heard an American calling for help from within the building that housed both the radio equipment and the balance of the CBs and Special Forces in the Ranger Camp, but I could not find the person.

While attempting to pull a wounded Vietnamese medic from a portion of the building serving as the dispensary, a 60-millimeter mortar round struck the ground about 20 feet to my rear, knocking me to the ground and damaging both legs. I crawled to the outside of the building and another mortar burst wounded my right arm and shoulder. A Special Forces medic, SGT Taylor, carried me to the firing position and gave me a grenade launcher.

I then dispatched the U. S. medic to establish liaison with the District Compound. I called to Chief McCully who was with LTJG Peterlin delivering fire against the enemy. I instructed Chief McCully to reestablish control, redistribute ammunition as required, redeploy

### ***Indomitable Fighting Spirit: An NUC for Seabee Team 1104***

Seabee Team 1104 received the Navy Unit Commendation for action at Dong Xoai. Here is the citation:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while deployed to Dong Xoai, Republic of Vietnam, for construction of a Special Forces camp. On the night of 9 Jun 1965, when the camp came under attack by an overwhelming Viet Cong force employing mortar, rocket, recoilless rifle, machine gun, and small arms fire, the nine members of Seabee Team 1104 immediately took up assigned defensive positions and, together with Special Forces and Republic of Vietnam forces, coolly and effectively defended the camp throughout the attack.

"When the north end of the camp was overrun by the enemy, two members of Seabee Team 1104 assisted in carrying a badly wounded Special Forces

officer to safety under heavy fire, while two other team members successfully employed escape and evasion tactics to escape the overrunning enemy until the morning of 11 Jun 1965, when they were evacuated by a relief force. The remainder of the team, located in the west area of the camp, assisted in the defense against an intense enemy attack throughout the night and following morning.

"Although two of their members were killed and the rest of them wounded during the action, they gallantly persisted in their efforts until they were evacuated by helicopter early in the afternoon of 10 Jun 1965.

"Seabee Team 1104, through the fortitude and indomitable fighting spirit of each of its members in the face of overwhelming odds, upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

troops as necessary to fill up firing positions, and continue to fire the mortar.

I saw Construction Mechanic Third Class Shields on numerous occasions moving back and forth among the troops in his alert position—firing, controlling, encouraging, and carrying ammo to mortar positions. He displayed great courage during those early hours of the battle when incessant mortar, recoilless rifle, and small arms fire were falling into the camp area. Later—time unknown—the VC employed a flamethrower against the position in which I had formerly seen McCulley and Peterlin. At this point it was necessary to withdraw as many of our elements as possible before becoming decisively engaged.

I could not walk. My right leg was broken in two places and my left ankle was broken. Despite intense firing, Shields and SGT Taylor carried me to the District Compound.

During the Ranger Camp phase of the attack there was never any panic. Everyone engaged in the initial phase displayed great valor under unusually intense fire. I feel that all should be decorated for valor, that Shields is deserving of one of the highest awards, that LTJG Peterlin and Chief McCully surely must qualify for the Silver Star.

*The full report of LTJG Frank A. Peterlin, CEC, USNR, praised the heroic teamwork of the men caught at Dong Xoai. The excerpts that follow relate specifically to that section of his report in which a number of Seabee personnel were recommended for awards by their officer in charge. LTJG Peterlin was still hospitalized when the Silver Star was pinned on him.*

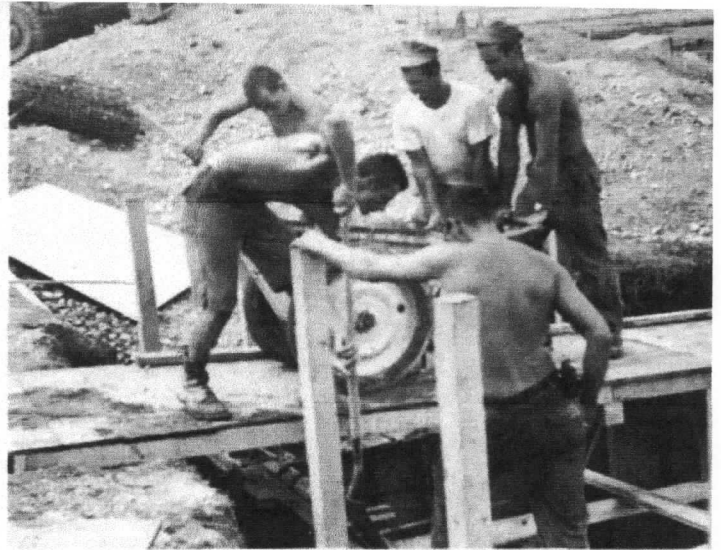
**A**T ABOUT 2345, 9 Jun 1965, I was awakened in the Special Forces "A" Team Camp at Dong Xoai. I grabbed my gear and ran to the west berm. When I arrived at the berm I saw Construction Mechanic Third Class Shields. He had been previously hit in the head by shrapnel and was bleeding from the head.

A few minutes after I arrived someone yelled that they needed ammunition. At this time Shields departed from the berm and went back into the camp which was being heavily bombarded with mortars and returned with two boxes of ammunition.

Shields then returned to the berm and continued firing at the enemy. In about an hour I left Shields and went to the west corner of the north berm where Steelworker Second Class Hoover was located. Hoover was hit by the initial mortar barrage also and had shrapnel in his leg, back and arm. Although he was in some pain, he continued firing both his M-14 and M-79 at the enemy from his post.

During the period of 0030 to the final attack at about 0245 I noticed Shields jumping from position to position firing at the enemy and he also went back for more ammo, at least two more times. At about 0200 he came to Hoover's and my position with more needed 7.62 and M-79 ammo.

At about 0215 SGT Dedmon came in support of Hoover's and my position on the west corner of the north wall. He had blood all over him and said he was hit three times. SGT Taylor had already patched him up and he was moving around agilely and yelled encouraging words to everyone. Previous to his coming to



**LINE WORK**—Seabees pour concrete for reinforced bunker at U. S. Special Forces camp up front in Vietnam.

my position he was on the north end of the west berm exposing himself to continued enemy fire.

When the final attack came at about 0245 I lost contact with everyone except Dedmon and Hoover when a flamethrower and many grenades came over the north corner of the west wall. I thought I saw the others fall back when I opened up on the wall where the VC were coming over.

I believe both Hoover and Dedmon opened up on the wall at the same time. Dedmon said, "Let's go," and as we got to the bottom of the berm I was knocked on my face by what seemed to be an explosion beneath me.

I crawled to the east side of the Headquarters Building where Dedmon and Hoover were waiting. Dedmon immediately said, "Try to get through the barbed wire while I hold them off." Hoover and I got through the wire around Headquarters Building and helped Dedmon through. The three of us then continued crawling the width of the camp past the Cambodian barracks to the north end of the east berm.

As the VC were storming the camp and fire was going over our heads, we rolled over the north corner of the east berm where we rested for a few minutes. We then continued crawling through thick weeds, concertina and barbed wire in a northerly direction parallel and between the east berm and the north-south road. The VC then took the east berm and there was heavy firing over our heads.

*Builder First Class Dale B. Brakken, USN, takes the story from another vantage point. Wounded in action, Petty Officer Brakken received both the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.*

**A**T APPROXIMATELY 2345 the VC launched a mortar attack on the Special Forces Camp at Dong Xoai. At that time I was in bed asleep; one American was on watch in our compound (District Headquarters Compound).

There was no alert sounded and we had no previous warning of the attack. When the first round hit, I got out of bed, put my boots on, grabbed a shirt, ammo belt, and my M-14 and went to the District Chief's office.

All Americans were told to report to the District

## BRAVE MEN OF DONG XOAI



Dale Brakken, BU1

Douglas M. Mattick, BUH2

James M. Keenan, HM2

James D. Wilson, CM1

**BACK HOME**—Fighting CBs of Dong Xoai answer questions at press conference after their return to Port Hueneme.

Office in case of attack; from there the District Chief would assign us positions on the wall or wherever the main point of attack was taking place.

We were assigned to the southwest corner bunker. When we left the office we had our personal weapons plus one M-79 and a 3.5 rocket launcher, which I carried to the bunker. At this time mortar rounds were still falling all over the compound and there was a lot of small arms fire with tracers going every which way, even straight up.

At the bunker I took the southwest gun port, Builder Second Class Mattick was at the west port and Construction Mechanic First Class Wilson on the north port, Specialist Fourth Class McLaughlin and Hospital Corpsman Second Class Keenan were at position just outside the entrance where McLaughlin could fire the M-79 and 3.5.

The VC were building up and had set up a machine gun, possibly a 30-caliber, in the school building about 200 yards to our southwest. McLaughlin killed at least one gun crew with M-79 rounds that he fired through the school windows.

**A**T THIS TIME the only light we had was from burning buildings and occasional illuminating rounds from our mortars. After an hour and a half or two hours we received a flare ship which was a big help; I think this was about 0130 or 0200.

**AERIAL PHOTO** shows CB-built Moc Hoa Strike Force camp. Seabees play big part building camps in Vietnam.



Keenan had been taken to District Headquarters to treat the wounded and I went outside to load the 3.5; I had been outside only a short time when our bunker came under concentrated mortar fire. One 60mm round hit about eight feet from McLaughlin and myself. The round knocked McLaughlin on his face and threw me a few feet against the bunker. McLaughlin received a small cut on the neck while I got nothing more than eyes and ears full of dirt. Hits were taken on all firing apertures and vision through them was impossible. Wilson had been thrown across the inside of the bunker when a mortar round hit his firing port. I believe he was hit with shrapnel at this point.

About 0230 Sergeant First Class Johnson ran to our bunker and told us that the east position of the camp had been overrun, that VC were all over that area and to fall back to the District Headquarters to make our stand. I grabbed an armload of grenades and took off. Mortars were falling all over the compound, but we all made it to the HQ without being hit.

Inside the building I saw that a few of the people had made it out of the other portion of the camp as it was overrun by the VC. They were Captain Stokes, USA, who was badly hit in both legs and unable to move or take command, Staff Sergeant Crowe who was on the PRC 10 radio maintaining contact with our air support, Private First Class Hand who was firing from one of the southeast windows, and Staff Sergeant Taylor who was in the east part of the building. All these men had been wounded several times.

**T**HE SEABEES that made it to the HQ were Utilitiesman Second Class Eyman who had a large shrapnel wound in the left arm and shoulder and Construction Mechanic Third Class Shields who had been shot.

At this point I believed that all the other people in the east part of camp were killed.

We still had flare ships and fighters in the area but the flares were dropping about one kilometer to our east and were doing no good at all. Several times Crowe managed to call the planes back into position where they could bomb and strafe the walls. All through the remainder of the night and into the next afternoon we had wonderful air support. I believe the fliers did a real good job. There was everything that could fly around our camp; even the observation planes joined in and were firing at the Viet Cong.

**ALL HANDS**

At about 0300 the VC launched a heavy mortar and hand grenade attack against our position. All Americans had been wounded at this time, but they were all firing and throwing grenades through the windows and doors. All men were fighting except the captain who was unable to move.

The VC were on the walls all around the camp, firing and throwing grenades.

Between our building and the berm there was a tin-roofed barracks. The VC would stand on the berm and throw grenades over the barracks trying to get them in our doors or windows. We were shooting from our building through the barracks and knocking the VC off the berm as fast as they could stand up. I believe the VC thought we couldn't see them. I estimated at least 20 VC were killed in this way.

Eyman, even though badly hit, was putting up a good fight from his window. Wilson had taken a hit in the hand but was too busy to stop fighting. Shields was popping in and out the side door, throwing grenades back at the VC.

**I** HAD TAKEN A BULLET which went between the fingers of my left hand, taking a little meat with it. It glanced off my rifle, hit my right thumb, breaking the skin and spraining it, then bounced off and hit me in the groin and dropped on the floor. The round was still hot when I picked it up and put it in my pocket.

Through the remainder of the dark hours we were under constant small arms fire and an occasional grenade or mortar would hit the building and shake us up some.

I believed that if we could hold out till daylight that the VC would give up and go home, but when daylight came at about 0600 the VC didn't leave even though the air strikes got heavier.

The VC would mass for an attack time after time near our northwest wall. The planes would bomb, strafe and napalm them till they broke up, but 15 minutes later they would mass again.

By daylight the only heavy weapon we had left was the 3.5 rocket launcher. No mortars, no M-79 ammo and the 105 howitzers had expended their ammo long before daylight. All men were low on ammo. We tried to get an airdrop for resupply but we were unable to do so. Even if ammo and supplies had been airdropped,

we never would have been able to reach them without the VC killing us.

During the morning (about 0930 or 1000) the VC had set up another machine gun in the school building and were firing through the gate into our building. LT Charles Q. Williams, USA, asked for a volunteer to load the 3.5 for him, and Petty Officer Shields went with him. They ran to the wall near the front gate where they fired three or four rounds before knocking out the VC gun.

On the way back to the HQ building they were taken under fire by another automatic weapon from the west wall. LT Williams was shot in the lower arm and Shields took two in the right leg, breaking it and almost tearing it off.

**P**PRIVATE HAND AND I went out to get Shields. When we reached Shields, he had pulled himself into a building and started to place a tourniquet on his own leg but had passed out. Private Hand was too shot up and weak to be of any help and I couldn't lift Shields myself. The VC was firing an automatic weapon into the building and things were flying all over the place. About that time Sergeant First Class Johnson showed up and Private Hand and I loaded Shields on his back and made it back to the HQ building.

Through the remainder of the morning Shields was laughing and joking and taking things real good.

The VC decided they wanted us dead so they began firing on the building with a 57 recoilless rifle but only one round came into the building.

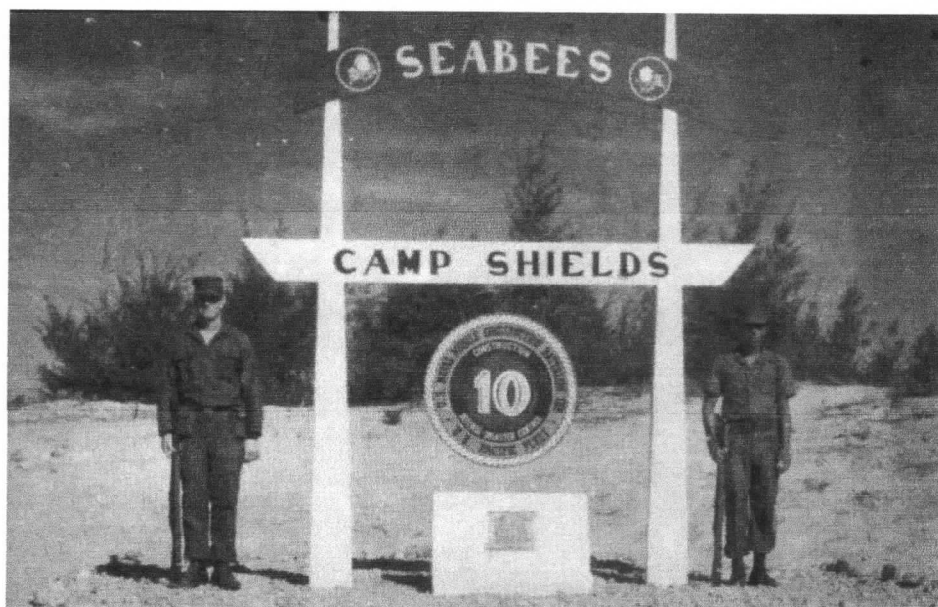
At about 1300 the VC started massing for an attack, so LT Williams had us fall back to the nearest 105 positions where about 20 South Vietnamese were holding out. The aircraft were called in to hit everything in camp except the 105 positions; we were still trying to get choppers in to evacuate us.

LT Williams took command after the captain was hit; it seemed to me he was the calmest man there. He constantly exposed himself to enemy fire without any regard for his own life. He was the bravest of the brave men at Dong Xoai.

*Let's hear part of the report of Second Lieutenant Charles Q. Williams, USA, himself. He was awarded the*

**AT WORK**—Sandbag bunker is constructed by Seabee construction unit working in forward position in Vietnam.





IN HONOR—MCB Ten named camp in memory of (Rt.) CB Medal of Honor winner Marvin G. Shields, CM3, USN.

*Medal of Honor. Navyman Shields was also a recipient of the Medal of Honor. Here's what LT Williams had to say of Shields:*

**I**N THE MORNING (10 Jun 1965), I asked for a volunteer to assist me in manning a 3.5" rocket launcher to neutralize the machine gun position to our immediate south. Petty Officer Shields immediately volunteered even though he had previously been wounded in the neck, face, and back.

He accompanied me on this mission with three rounds of 3.5" rocket ammunition. We had to move across an open area for approximately 100 meters under intense hostile fire. Upon arriving at our firing position, he acted as leader and we succeeded in destroying the machine gun position. Even though he had never functioned in this capacity before, he did an outstanding job.

Our return route was generally the same. Upon reaching a point approximately midway between our firing position and our initial position, we came under machine gun fire. Shields was hit in the leg and again seriously wounded. I managed to get him out of the line of fire and later evacuated to our strong point.

I consider this man a credit to himself, to the country, and to the military service.

*Next we turn to Construction Mechanic First Class James D. Wilson, USN, for his action report. Petty Officer Wilson was awarded the Bronze Star.*

**S**OME TIME AROUND midnight, possibly an hour earlier, a mortar round landed in our District Headquarters compound. I was on my cot asleep. This was the first I knew of any action taking place. To my knowledge, there had been no advance notice of an attack, or any indication of the massing of VC troops in the immediate vicinity.

I grabbed my shoes, weapon, and ammo and ran to the District Headquarters office, which was our pre-assigned assembly point.

A few minutes later we took positions at the southwest corner bunker of the camp berm as recommended by the District Chief. At this corner there were nine of us (Special Forces and Seabees).

During the next two hours we held this position and the entire camp was heavily showered by enemy small arms, machine gun, and mortar fire. Specialist Fourth Class McLaughlin, with Builder First Class Brakken loading the 3.5 rocket launcher, wiped out a VC machine gun position that had been set up in the old school building south of the camp.

We took one very close (within 10 feet) and two direct mortar rounds on our corner bunker. Looking back into the camp I could see that nearly all of the buildings had been damaged by mortar fire and some were burning.

Flare ships had arrived by this time and were dropping parachute flares for us but visibility was still very limited; because of the low ceiling the flares were burning above the clouds.

LT Williams ordered us to take cover and hold the District Headquarters building. Construction Mechanic Third Class Shields and Utilitiesman Second Class Eyman, who had been over in the Ranger Camp, showed up to help us move out and back into the Headquarters building.

During the first couple of hours the other camp had been overrun by the VC. The VC had set up mortar positions over there and were shelling us from that compound.

Once we were back to the Headquarters Building I saw that several of the Americans from the other compound had managed to get out and join us. Included in this group was the Army Team captain who had been seriously wounded. Shields and one of the sergeants had carried him from the other side. The executive officer took full command of all U. S. troops.

We took positions throughout the building; McLaughlin, Hospital Corpsman Second Class Keenan and I were at the north door. A grenade exploded just outside the doorway, wounding all three of us. Keenan helped me get a tourniquet on my left arm, then Builder Second Class Mattick and I took positions at a window on the north side of the building. VC were coming over the walls but not in any great numbers. They had massed outside the north and east walls of the camp but never charged in force.

About daybreak we began getting air support that

continued until we were picked up by helicopters early in the afternoon.

By the time we got out of Dong Xoai, every American had been wounded, killed or was missing. Some had been seriously wounded early in the battle, but continued to fight to the last minute.

Many examples of courage, bravery and heroism were shown. Second Lieutenant Williams, though seriously wounded, continued to fight, aid others and command the U. S. troops.

Shields exposed himself to heavy enemy fire many times to aid the wounded and resupply others with ammunition, even after he had been shot in the face. Keenan and the Army medic worked tirelessly on countless wounds under extremely dangerous conditions and still managed to aid in fighting, too.

Our radioman maintained contact with reserve units, armed helicopters, flare ships, rescue helicopters, and directed the strafing and bombing of our air support.

I don't know the names of all these—I was only at Dong Xoai one and one-half days before the fighting started and didn't get to know all of the men.

*This is the statement of Builder Second Class Douglas M. Mattick, USN. Along with his Purple Heart he too wears the Bronze Star Medal.*

**I** SLIPPED MY BOOTS ON, grabbed my shirt, rifle, and web belt and ran to District Headquarters Building. Mortars continued coming in and the men could be seen taking their positions, by the light of the mortar explosions.

All the Americans in the District Headquarters Compound (DH) mustered at the District Headquarters Building. Then we tried to raise radio contact with the old Ranger Camp where the other Americans were.

After determining the direction of attack, all the Americans in District Headquarters went to that point, which was the southwest corner. The other Americans brought 3.5 ammo and the 3.5 rocket launcher, and I carried two 3.5 rounds over and Specialist Fourth Class McLaughlin carried the M-79 along with extra ammo. I would guess this to be about 2355.

VC were spotted in the schoolhouse to the south of District Headquarters. McLaughlin would shoot M-79 rounds into the school and as the VC would run out, Hospital Corpsman Second Class Keenan would shoot them with the M-14.

Construction Mechanic First Class Wilson was looking out the north firing hole and I was at the west firing hole of the southwest bunker when, by the last seconds of flare light, I spotted one VC and Wilson spotted two VC coming up to about 20 yards from the berm. McLaughlin fired three M-79 rounds at them but they were too far out. As we never received fire from these men, I believe they were forward observers for mortar. I don't know what kind of communication gear they had. We lost them when the flare burned out.

Builder First Class Brakken was loading the 3.5 for McLaughlin when a 60mm mortar fell about six feet from them. It slammed Brakken into the bunker wall and threw McLaughlin. McLaughlin had a cut along the side of his neck.

Before this, Keenan had been called back to District Headquarters Building to treat some wounded.

Right after the mortar round that wounded Mc-



**ALL IN THE JOB**—Unidentified construction team hits dirt with weapons ready as Viet Cong attacks job site.

Laughlin, another landed on top of my firing hole, caving it in and throwing me back. One dropped on top of Wilson's firing hole which was approximately three feet from mine, caving it in and throwing both him and me back. Another round made a direct hit on top of the bunker. Several others landed within a few feet of our bunker.

Wilson and I continued to pick VC off the berm as they would come up to throw a grenade in or to come over the berm to get into the camp.

Some time after this a flamethrower came in from the west. I saw the flame twice out of my window. Wilson finally was able to shoot him four times. The flamethrower also received carbine fire from the room to the west of us.

Keenan had taken up a position just outside our door, watching the door on the north side of the building.

I saw Private First Class Hand in the southeast corner of the building at a window. He had come from the other camp and, though wounded, was using a carbine.

A 57mm recoilless rifle opened up from the northwest. We took three direct hits in front of the window and one came through and put a hole in the wall above Wilson's head.

I couldn't begin to count the number of mortars and hand grenades that went off in front of our window. The water tower stopped many grenades from coming in and this undoubtedly is what saved Wilson's and my life.

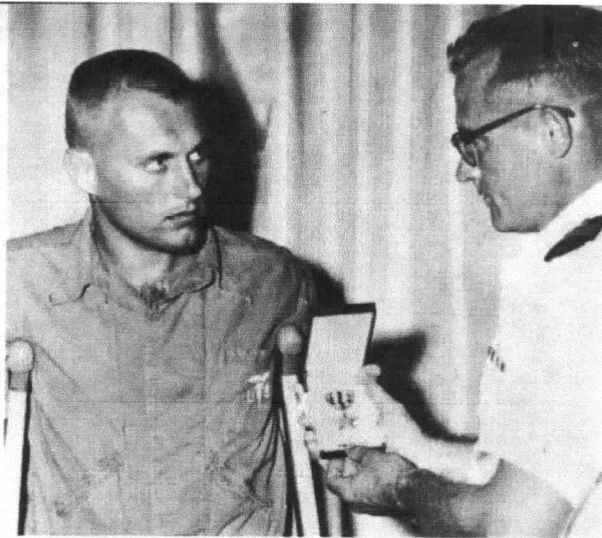
In the morning I saw Utilitiesman Second Class Eyman; he was wounded pretty bad. He needed more ammo, so I gave him a magazine. He, too, had come from the other camp.

During the day things were halfway quiet on my side of the building. VC were periodically coming over the berm and a few grenades coming in, also occasional mortars, but pretty slow compared to the night before.

Some time during the fight I received several slight wounds from fragments. Every American there had a wound ranging from a scratch to fatal.

*The wounded kept the United States Special Forces medic and Hospital Corpsman Second Class James M. Keenan, USN, very busy. Both were wounded in this action and both were decorated for valor. Keenan, who*





A STAR—Navy LTJG F. A. Peterlin, USNR, is presented the Silver Star for heroic action at Dong Xoai.

*received the Bronze Star, reported the following:*

I WAS AWAKENED by a loud explosion in the District Compound. Though not positive, I believe it was a 60mm mortar. Everyone was up immediately all over the camp. I got my gear and ran to the District Chief's office. We were told to take up positions in the southwest corner bunker and we did so posthaste.

Specialist Fourth Class McLaughlin and I were last to arrive at the bunker. Since there was not room inside due to South Vietnamese casualties already there, plus U. S. personnel, McLaughlin and I took positions outside and behind the berm. We were getting mortars and small arms fire all the time. At approximately 0020 we observed machine gun fire from the school and raking the camp.

VC ran out of the front of the building. One VC ran the other direction. Each time we fired, the mortars would drop near us, covering us with dirt, but no direct hit was scored at this time.

At approximately 0100 I was called back to the District Headquarters to attend to more injured there. I went back to the District Chief's office and noted much mortar and small arms fire coming into the camp. At the District Chief's office I found several wounded South Vietnamese—one already dead, two serious and one critical who later died.

I continued dressing wounds for about 45 minutes or an hour and people (American) started coming from the Ranger Camp, and I knew they had been overrun. Captain Stokes, USA, was seriously wounded, Construction Mechanic Third Class Shields hit in the face, Utilitiesman Second Class Eyman hit in the chest, PFC Hand hit in the arm; everyone was hit by fragments including myself. The people were pulled in from the bunker and we took up stations in the District Chief's office, covering all windows and doors.

The first grenades started going off shortly after this. The VC came up on our northwest berm and began throwing grenades over an outbuilding at the District Chief's office. We fired through windows and killed many of them. The flamethrower hit us around this time, but he was quickly killed by rifle fire from the house. Throughout the night we were hit by grenades, mortars, 57mm recoilless, .50- and .30-cal. machine guns, and heavy small arms fire. At this time the Sea-

bees were all low on ammo and we then all fired semi-auto only.

I don't know when the flare ships first arrived. I got most of my light from burning houses nearby, although there were lots of flares dropped and fired by mortars. We had communications at all times and had good, close air support. When flares came down I saw debris all over the District Chief's office; blood was all over the walls and in pools on the floor. We had no food and very little water left, so I tried to save it for the seriously wounded.

After dawn the VC did not leave; they resumed attack and again had machine guns in the schoolhouse.

Second Lieutenant Williams, USA, had command after Captain Stokes was wounded and he and Shields went out to the berm with a 3.5" rocket launcher and knocked it out.

Coming back, LT Williams was hit again, and Shields was critically wounded in the right upper leg. They were hit at around 0700. Builder First Class Brakken and PFC Hand went out and brought Shields back. There was very little I could do for Shields as all medical supplies were exhausted or destroyed. I made dressings and tourniquets from bedding in the house, and gave him morphine since his pain was severe at this time. I believe that if Shields could have been evacuated within three hours, he would have lived, but he suffered massive hemorrhage and shortly went into deep shock.

This rest of the day was a fire fight with snipers on our berm. The VC dropped mortars sporadically all day. At times they would mass on the berm but would be driven off by air support. At 1330 they began massing in great numbers and we were driven from the house to the artillery for a last stand. We called again for helos and called for an air strike on everything in camp except the artillery positions.

The distance from the District Chief's office to the artillery was approximately 50 meters. We had to cross a ditch and go under barbed wire. I carried Shields across the yard and across the ditch but I was unable to get under the wire with him on my shoulder and was forced to drag him the rest of the way. Builder Second Class Mattick helped me in getting him to the artillery from the ditch.

In the meantime the jets arrived and dropped bombs and napalm. While the jets were keeping the VC down, the choppers arrived.

When the choppers landed, Brakken, I and someone else carried Shields out to the aircraft. Shields was alive when we put him on the chopper but he was sinking fast. We were under mortar and small arms fire at this time. I was assigned to the second chopper but I just barely made it on the third. McLaughlin was hanging by his hands and was pulled aboard after takeoff. The wounded were evacuated to Saigon and Mattick, Brakken, and I came down later.

*Of the small group of Navyman at Dong Xoai two were listed as killed in action: Construction Mechanic Third Class Shields, and Steelworker Second Class W. C. Hoover. Rounding out the lists of awards previously cited for the Navyman are two more Bronze Stars, one for Hoover and the other for Utilitiesman Second Class L. W. Eyman, USN.*

*They were all brave men at Dong Xoai.*