

The next hour and a half was quiet and void of visible Viet Cong activity. Rorie then heard the dull thump of mortar tubes in the woods to his front and at 12:30 a.m., March 20, the Viet Cong launched a fierce, coordinated attack along the entire 1,200 meter perimeter. The 75 cavalymen of Troop A simultaneously received enemy mortar, automatic weapons, recoilless rifle and anti-tank fire.

The incoming rounds triggered an attack in which, more than half the defending cavalymen were wounded and all the vehicles hit by enemy rounds, during the first half hour of battle.

"They Were Like Zombies"

"You could see them walking down the road from the south," said Rorie. "Some had weapons and some did not. They were like zombies. You could fire at them and they would not fall until they were dead."

A critical gap of 240 meters was ripped into the perimeter by the destruction of two of Troop A's tracks. Troop A's Commander, Captain Raul Alcala, San Antonio, Tex., immediately moved his vehicle up to the right of an exploding mortar carrier, and directed the ground surveillance team's track to cover the opening on the left. With machine guns blazing, the two armored vehicles moved into the perimeter and the Viet Cong attempting to overrun them were cut down. The sector was once again stabilized.

As enemy pressure increased, the dauntless courage and decisive leadership of the individual vehicle commanders and crewmen violently repelled assault after assault. Ignoring their wounds they stubbornly fought off the determined attacks of the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 273d Viet Cong Main Force Regiment and several guerrilla local force companies.

In the early morning hours, an armed helicopter light fire team arrived

"I Fired Every Available Round"

Staff Sergeant George Hua, Bailey Mills, Tex., was scanning his sector of fire through the tank's rangefinder when the vehicle sustained three simultaneous anti-tank round direct hits. The driver was wounded but, miraculously, the hull was not penetrated. "The white sand in front was turning black with crawling Charlies," Hut said. "I fired every available round in the ready rack, then turned to the coaxial-mounted gun and emptied its ammo box."

The crew continued to fight gallantly, though sustaining nine direct anti-tank hits which destroyed the searchlight and the caliber 50 machine gun and partially incapacitated the tank, wounding the entire crew.

At 1:15 a.m. the Squadron Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Sidney Haszard, Needham, Mass., granted Troop A permission to reinforce the perimeter with the platoon at Combat Outpost 3. He also placed the 1st Platoon of Troop B and the 3rd Platoon of Troop C under Troop A's operational control. Troop A's 2d Platoon moved at top speed, south on Highway 13, toward the battle area. The platoon knifed through the attacking Viet Cong, inflicting heavy casualties.

Alcala committed the 2d Platoon to the southern half of the perimeter, where most of the vehicles had been damaged or destroyed.

First Lieutenant Harlan Short, Carthage, Mo., 2d Platoon leader, was maneuvering his tank into the perimeter when it received two anti-tank and one recoilless rifle direct hits. The loader was killed; the other crewmen wounded and Short blown from the tank.

Short scrambled back into the turret and attacked the perimeter which was swarming with Viet Cong trying to seize the position.

It was 1:45 a.m. when platoons