

R.S. CARLSON

Cabrini's Run — '71

The North moved down a couple regiments of rocket artillery and a heavy mortar battalion to put 122s and 120s in on the ARVN 105s on the hill and gave us 72 hours of incoming that eventually took out all four of the 105s and dug through the sand bags to blow all the ammo bunkers.

We did get some suppression fire from Camp Carrol, a few VNAF runs against the VC infantry companies massing for assault on the fourth day, then some napalm drops to deepfry the approaches, and, once Charlie's grunts started pushing up the hill, HQ did manage to squeeze out a B-52 strike. It hit wide, so most of the load plowed up the valley and gave the VC more earaches than KIAs.

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I got on the horn and screamed enough that we did
get another strike before Charlie
worked all the way to the wire, and my broken
eardrum is worth a few dozen
VC being stopped half
way to the night defensive positions. Still,
our ARVNs ran low on ammo and started
taking it in the shorts. Charlie hit
the wire, some scattered to claymores, some
playing Colonel Sanders in the phu gas
with their buddies climbing over the corpses, grabbing
the weapons to squeeze off one more round
before they fried, too.

Eventually,
the wave assaults wore our complement
down. Night before last, a couple
Hueys sneaked in some more ammo
and pulled a few wounded, and HQ
was trying to connect with the ARVN HQ
on whether to evacuate or reinforce,
but didn't get back with anything definite.

Last night, it got down to a couple
rifle squads, a mortarman, one
machinegunner, and then Đại Úy Tân
and me with .45s and M16s.

The ARVN Major was gutshot, so
we wrapped him and pulled him into the ops bunker
with his pearl-handled .38 and a couple
grenades for company, then made for the bunker
line facing the east flank trail.

The machinegunner stalled the advance about thirty meters from our position while his ammo lasted. Once he switched to his rifle, he bought the farm, and then the mortarman stalled Charlie briefly about twenty meters out. Charlie moved up two or three machinegunners then, and sprayed the hell out of the line. That took the mortarman and all of the riflemen I could see.

Tân and I held fire and waited. Charlie waited a while, sprayed some probing fire again, waited some more, then started cheering and marching up and over what was left of the perimeter, waving flags and rifles.

Tân and I looked at each other. Charlie's ranks clawed hand and foot up the slope and trail toward us. We ducked low to the bunker line and shucked our gear, edging toward the wire the first of them were just trampling down, then bolted right for them, no weapons, nothing but knees and elbows pumping.

The first rank stared, too surprised to shoot, and once we passed them, the others didn't fire on us for fear of hitting the first. Tân and I plowed straight down hill. Between following orders to take the top and holding on to brush to keep from falling Charlie mostly gawked at Tân and me skittering down through their ranks — and laughed.