



1ST LIEUTENANT BRICE H. BARNES

THIS SOLDIER RESCUED MORE THAN 50 CIVILIANS DURING A BATTLE

By David T. Zabecki

On Jan. 30, 1968, all U.S. combat units in Vietnam went to alert status when the Viet Cong violated the Tet Cease-fire by attacking Da Nang and eleven other cities in the center of the country. The 9th Infantry Division's 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry (Mechanized) deployed to overwatch positions around the sprawling American logistics base at Long Binh, which was also the headquarters of U.S. II Field Forces. Early the following morning, Jan. 31, the rest of the coordinated VC/NVA attacks erupted

HALL OF VALOR

countrywide. The 2-47's B Company, along with the Battalion Scout Platoon, led by 1st Lt. Brice Barnes, moved into the Long Binh base perimeter when it came under

direct attack. Just after they arrived, VC sappers using satchel charges blew part of the American ammo dump.

Widows' Village, located directly across Highway 15 from II Field Forces headquarters, was a motley collection of shacks occupied by the widows and families of ARVN soldiers. When a company-sized VC unit attacked through the hamlet on their way to assault the II Field Forces compound, a platoon of four M-113 armored personnel carriers (APC) from B Company was sent across the road to block the attack. But the American platoon immediately ran into fierce resistance. The platoon lost two of its APCs and

took heavy casualties, including the platoon leader. Ordered forward by the 2-47th's battalion commander, Barnes left two of his APCs to provide security for the battalion command post and took his other eight M-113s across the road and into the village. Assuming command of all the American troops in Widows' Village, he organized and led the counterattack.

According to his Distinguished Service Cross citation: "Repeatedly disregarding his safety, [Barnes] braved withering fire to direct civilians in the battle area to safety. Bullets struck all around him, but he refused to take cover and led a house-to-house sweep, personally destroying a recoilless rifle and an automatic weapon position." In the course of the battle the scouts rescued more than 50 civilians and led them to safety. At one point Barnes himself ran directly into enemy fire to rescue an old woman and two small children. As the heavy fighting progressed and the scouts were starting to run low on ammo, Barnes was able to attract the attention of two AH-1 Cobra gunships orbiting low overhead. Since he did not have the radio frequencies or call signs for the gunships, he had to stand exposed on top of one of his APCs and use hand-and-arm signals to direct the gunship fire against the dug-in VC positions.

After Widows' Village was secured and the Scout Platoon was resupplied with ammo, the platoon was ordered to proceed two miles west to Bien Hoa City, where the 2-47th's C Company had been heavily engaged all day. But they never got there. The Scout Platoon ran into a heavy ambush while passing through the village of Ho Nai on Highway 1. The murderous crossfire by heavy machine guns and RPGs broke Barnes' column of eight APCs into three groups. During the fighting Barnes was hit by fragmentation from an RPG round that struck close by. Meanwhile, he was able to call in support from two UH-1B gunships to finally clear the ambush.

For the combined fights at Widows' Village and Ho Nai, Brice Barnes was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Later during his first tour in Vietnam Barnes commanded Headquarters Company of the 2-47th. During his second tour in Vietnam he commanded Company A, 5th Battalion, 12th Infantry, 199th Infantry Brigade. After he left active duty, Barnes continued to serve in the Texas Army National Guard, where in later years he commanded a mechanized infantry battalion. He finished his military career as a colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve. From 2010 to 2012 he served as the Honorary Colonel of the 47th Infantry Regiment. ▼

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