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“Ozzie” Conners, BSC, ’65 and Operation Attleboro, Vietnam, ’66

Mike Hughes ‘65
November 1, 2012

Thomas J. Conners, a graduate of Bridgewater State College, class of 1965, was destined to be involved in combat in one of the first major U.S. Army campaigns of the Vietnam War, Operation Attleboro. “Ozzie”, as he was known to his family, football teammates, classmates, Kappa Delta Phi fraternity brothers, and army buddies, was a history major who decided he wasn’t ready to teach after graduation. Knowing that he might be drafted, the twenty-one year old, Belmont, Mass. native, voluntarily joined the U.S. Army.

Ozzie completed his basic training at Ft. Gordon, Augusta, Georgia, and his advanced infantry training at Ft. Jackson, Columbia, South Carolina. He then spent a short unsuccessful period of time in Signal Officer Candidate School, back at Ft. Gordon, Georgia.¹ “When he washed out of Signal OCS they offered him the opportunity to train as an infantry officer. Ozzie refused as he didn’t want to be responsible for sending other men to their deaths.”² As a result he was back as a Private First Class.

Three U.S. Army units that were to play a large role in Ozzie’s life in Vietnam had already been deployed there by the time he left OCS. The 25th Infantry Division (Tropical Lightning), had been deployed in stages from 1963 to mid-January 1966.³ The 2nd Battalion of the 27th Infantry Regiment (Wolfhounds) had been in Vietnam since January, 1966.⁴ The 196th Light Infantry Brigade had been there since August, 1966.⁵

The 196th Light Infantry Brigade was formed at Ft. Devens, Massachusetts, on September 10, 1965. It was one of four brigades formed to build up the U.S. Army’s reserves after the United States began deploying troops to Vietnam. On July 15, 1966 the

¹ “Fort Gordon.” Wikipedia. Accessed June 22, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Gordon

² Conners, Elaine. Email message to the author. August 18, 2012.

³ “25th Infantry Division (United States).” Wikipedia. Accessed October 30, 2012, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/25th_Infantry_Division_\(United_States\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/25th_Infantry_Division_(United_States))

⁴ “27th Infantry Regiment (United States).” Wikipedia. Accessed October 30, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/27th_Infantry_Regiment

⁵ “U.S. Merchant Marine Military Transportation Service, and Military Sealift in Vietnam,” American Merchant Marine at War. Last modified April 27, 2012. Accessed June 13, 2012, <http://www.usmm.org/vietnam.html>

USNS troopships, *William O. Darby* and *Alexander M. Patch*, left Boston for Vietnam carrying the 196th. After what has been described as a, “gut-wrenching month at sea” and what ended up being the longest troopship voyage in U.S. history, the 196th reached Vung Tau, Vietnam, on August 15th.⁶

Upon arrival the troops of the 196th were surprised to find out that their brigade was placed under the control of the 25th Infantry Division and that their commander, Colonel Francis S. Conaty, had been replaced by order of General William C. Westmoreland, Commander of U.S. Forces in Vietnam, with Brigadier General Edward H. De Saussure. De Saussure, an artillery officer and missile expert, had never had an infantry command. Colonel Conaty was downgraded to Deputy Commander.⁷

About the time that American troopships carrying the 196th were making their way to Vietnam the commander of the Viet Cong forces in South Vietnam, General Nguyen Chi Thanh, after a bitter argument, succeeded in convincing North Vietnamese leadership that he could lead an offensive in Tay Ninh Province, “using the 9th Viet Cong Division, to protect hidden VC storage and supply facilities in Tay Ninh, disrupt South Vietnam’s efforts to win over the rural population and destroy a vital element of enemy forces in the III Corps Area”.⁸

From Vung Tau, U.S. Air Force C-130s transported the 196th LIB to Tay Ninh, the largest city in the province of the same name. The temperature was 125 degrees and the bivouac area was two miles from the airfield. The troops hiked to their new base camp area, a manioc field, with duffle bags, full gear and weapons. It was monsoon season which made vehicular transport next to impossible so food, water and supplies had to be hauled by the troops themselves from the airfield to the new base camp site. The men had to erect tents to live in because of the total lack of any other facilities.⁹

By this time the commander of the 9th VC Division, Senior Colonel Hoang Cam, picked the newly arrived 196th as the “vital element” to be destroyed. Cam was well

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Lowe, Karl H. “4th Battalion: Fort Devens and Vietnam, 1965-1971,” (Chapter 17), *American’s Foreign Legion: The 31st Infantry Regiment at War and Peace* (book in progress). p. 2-3. Accessed April 29, 2012, <http://31stinfantry.org/Documents/Chapter%2017.pdf>

⁸ Paschall, Rod., “Operation Attleboro – From Calamity to Crushing Victory.” *Historynet.com*, July 20, 2011. Accessed April 29, 2012, <http://historynet.com/operation-attleboro-from-calamity-to-crushing-victory.htm>

⁹ Lowe, p. 3.

experienced and battle-savvy. He decided to use a local force battalion (VC), two of his division's regiments and the 101st North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regiment in his offensive against De Saussure's 196th.¹⁰

Meanwhile, on September 14th, while two battalions of the brigade continued to build their base camp, General De Saussure, launched Phase I of Operation Attleboro (OA), which was named after the town in Massachusetts. He decided, in this initial phase, to utilize small units, no bigger than battalions, to scout and probe sparsely populated areas around Tay Ninh to search for hidden VC supply caches. By doing this he hoped to give the brigade some experience by familiarizing the men with the landscape in the area and to give them some light combat training.¹¹

To implement Phase I, De Saussure decided to fly three battalions into locations by helicopter, east and south of Tay Ninh, including the Michelin rubber plantation outside of Dau Tieng. Although contact with the VC was light and sporadic, huge amounts of rice and other stores were uncovered by these soldiers.¹² “The search took place in densely forested areas among large, open expanses of savanna and elephant grass, the latter ranging from waist high to higher. Many of these caches were hidden in sheds under camouflaged roofs. One such storage facility contained some 843 tons of rice – enough to support several of general Thanh's campaigns. The 196th began gathering, bagging and transporting the rice out to be given back to the peasants from whom it had been seized by VC authorities. Among the weapons, ammunition, food and medical supplies were documents, one of which drew De Saussure's attention. It described a substantial concealed depot complex where a stream, the Suoi Ba Hao, flows into the Saigon River, about seven kilometers northwest of the 196th Brigade's forward command post at Dau Tieng.”¹³

After leaving OCS, Ozzie went home on a thirty-day leave. In October, before leaving for Vietnam, he engaged in some serious partying with college friends. Ozzie was

¹⁰ <http://historynet.com/operation-attleboro-from-calamity-to-crushing-victory.htm>

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Nulsen, Charles K. “Operation Attleboro: The 196th's Light Infantry Brigade Baptism By Fire in the Vietnam War.” Historynet.com, June 12, 2006. Accessed March 3, 2012, <http://www.historynet.com/operation-attleboro-the-196th-s-light-infantry-brigade-baptism-by-fire-in-the-vietnam-war.htm>

¹³ <http://historynet.com/operation-attleboro-from-calamity-to-crushing-victory.htm>

then driven to Logan International Airport, in Boston, by his mom and his longtime sweetheart Elaine Fowler, where he boarded a plane for San Francisco.¹⁴ Once there he walked around the city for the day with his brother-in-law because he was that early for his check in at Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California.¹⁵ It was from there that Oz was flown to Vietnam where he joined the 1st Platoon of Company C, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment (Wolfhounds) of the 25th Infantry Division.¹⁶ Ozzie’s C Company commander was Green Beret Captain Gerald F. Currier, an Andover, Mass., native. “On occasion the captain would stop to talk to me because I was the only one in the company also from Massachusetts”, according to Ozzie. The Wolfhounds were transported to Tay Ninh, 12 miles from the Cambodian border. Tay Ninh was an important market town in 1966 and was surrounded by rubber and tea plantations and rice fields.¹⁷ The town was also an important religious center where Caodaiism, a monotheistic religion which brings together aspects of other major religions, was founded in 1926. It is sometimes mistaken as a Buddhist sect. By late October Ozzie was settled in and with his characteristic sarcastic humor he related, “We’d been checked out on weapons, patrolling and what we had to know. After a few weeks we were ready – big shots, part of the ‘in crowd’”.¹⁸ He and his company were to be severely tested shortly because Phase I of Operation Attleboro ended on October 31st. Phase II began on November 1st, which was the date that the Wolfhounds were attached to the 196th LIB and sent to Dau Tieng.¹⁹

“Colonel Cam and General De Saussure were about to embark on a bloody encounter that would begin on November 3 and conclude 22 days later. It would ultimately involve skirmishes and battles over several thousand square kilometers with 22,000 Allied troops fighting 5,000 to 6,000 NVA and VC soldiers. But, this wide

¹⁴ Conners, Elaine. Email message to the author. June 22, 2012.

¹⁵ “Travis Air Force Base,” Wikipedia. Accessed July 1, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Travis_Air_Force_Base

¹⁶ The Virtual Wall, Vietnam Veterans Memorial. “Thomas Joseph Conners, Private First Class.” VIRTUALWALL.org, Last modified October 30, 2012, <http://www.virtualwall.org/dc/ConnersTJ01a.htm>

¹⁷ Lowe, p. 2.

¹⁸ Young, Stephen B. “Belmont GI Recalls Hellish Night of Viet Ambush,” *Boston Globe*, December 31, 1966.

¹⁹ “25th in Fiery Battle with Cong Div.; Wolfhounds Repel 6 Wave Assaults.” *Tropic Lighting News*, Vol. 1, No. 38, November 11, 1966. Accessed April 29, 2012, <http://www.25thida.org/TLN/tln1-38.htm> (last modified January 14, 2008).

ranging struggle would be triggered, driven and shaped not by well-laid plans of either Colonel Cam or General De Saussure, but rather by ferocious action in a bloody three-day battle that exploded unexpectedly in the thickly wooded four-square-kilometer patch 14 kilometers northwest of Dau Tieng. In those 72 hours, a decisive victory was won by a few American soldiers whose units suffered almost 40 percent of the U.S. battle deaths during the entire three-week operation. Unfortunately for the American survivors of the fight, most did not know what they had achieved at the battle's end, and it is likely many of those men still do not know the results today.”²⁰ This may have also been true for Ozzie Conners.

On November 1st, the Wolfhounds were given the job of securing the airstrip at Dau Tieng and conducting “eagle flights”, special helicopter-borne infantry assaults in areas where the VC supply caches had been previously located.

A new plan of attack involving these battalions was devised by the brigade staff on November 2 and the plan was to be carried out the next day as laid out by Gen. De Saussure. The 1st Battalion of Wolfhounds, under the command of Major Guy “Sandy” Meloy and three other battalions were assigned to spearhead the offensive against the 9th VC Division. Specifically, one of Meloy's companies, B Co., 1st Battalion, 27th Regiment (B/1/27), was to move northwest and establish a blocking position on former highway LTL19, 10 kilometers from Dau Tieng where the stream Suoi Ba Hao flows into the Saigon River. Another company (C/1/27) was to be placed 5 kilometers from B/1/27, splitting Meloy's battalion which is a violation of usual army tactical procedures. To add to this, De Saussure's plan called for two more battalions, the 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry and the 4th Battalion 31st Infantry, to attack squarely between Meloy's already widely separated companies.²¹

Meloy strenuously objected to this plan. He later said, “The plan was ludicrous. Command and control of the separate attacks was impossible. There was no linkup plan

²⁰ <http://historynet.com/operation-attleboro-from-calamity-to-crushing-victory.htm>

²¹ McAllister, H.L. “Wolfhound Commanders 1: Sandy Meloy and Operation Attleboro.” 2004. Accessed March 3, 2012, <http://www.wolfhoundcountry.com/meloy.html>

whatsoever. There was no appreciation of either the terrain or the enemy. But since I was a major at the time, and he (De Saussure) was a brigadier general, obviously I lost.”²²

The objective was to attack the VC 9th Division and to make sure they didn't break through those units of 196th deployed in the plan, hence the blocking maneuver. The landing zone (LZ) where Meloy's second company, C/1/27, landed was covered by elephant grass 10 feet high in places.²³

The VC was dug in, protecting a large base camp. The next days showed that Meloy was correct in his objections to the plan. Meloy's companies encountered heavy fire from small arms and machine guns in well prepared positions. The VC and their machine guns were in covered bunkers from which they could fire down lanes cut out of the high grass and shrubs. The grass and undergrowth in some cases formed canopies over the firing lanes creating tunnels. These could not be seen from the air in most places. These lanes enabled the shooters to fire close to the ground which meant that they could kill anyone who was walking, crouching, crawling or who had “hit the deck” after an outburst of gunfire. The VC had also planned to fire on their enemy from above by placing snipers in trees, actually tied to the trunks. This was done to either keep them from leaving or prevent them from falling out of the trees if hit. These snipers caused quite a few casualties in the few days that followed.²⁴

American casualties began to mount and communications between these small, isolated units began to breakdown. De Saussure, over his command net asked Meloy if he needed more troops and Meloy's emphatic response was, “Yes, sir!” This conversation between the general and Meloy was the last one to take place until this phase of the battle was over. At this time Meloy was flying in his command and control helicopter trying to direct units who were finding themselves confused as to where they were in relation to the other friendly units. Meloy knew the situation was deteriorating so he and his command group jumped from the helicopter while it was close to the ground so he could take command from there. It was a close call because the enemy was firing at them

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ <http://www.historynet.com/operation-attleboro-the-196th's-light-infantry-brigade-baptism-by-fire-in-the-vietnam-war.htm>

constantly, wounding a sergeant and riddling the copter with bullets. Luckily it succeeded in getting away.

De Saussure made some moves to reinforce Meloy but unfortunately wasn't able to communicate these to the major. Meloy's radio antennas weren't strong enough for long range communications and even after using an Air Force Forward Air Controller (FAC) and jury-rigging a longer range antenna, he found that he couldn't communicate with brigade staff. Reinforcing units would show up unexpectedly or get close enough to Meloy to radio him without him realizing that they were so close. As incidents like these continued, Meloy became increasingly aware that he was commanding many more units than he was supposed to based on the prescribed army rules and procedures.

This is exactly what occurred when Meloy received a radio call from Lt. Col. William C. Barrott, commander of 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry, Ozzie's unit, informing him that his battalion had been sent to reinforce his 1/27th Infantry and the lead unit would arrive within 10 minutes, and Barrott, would be accompanying them. De Saussure hadn't informed Meloy of this.²⁵ By this time, Meloy had set up his A/1/27 in a horseshoe shaped perimeter so that they could defend themselves without being flanked by the VC, should they decide on an all-out assault.

Ozzie's company was the first unit to arrive and Meloy assigned Barrott to a landing zone two kilometers west of his perimeter telling Barrott to move the company due east until it crossed an open field, then turn north into the 1/27 Infantry position. “It was a major mistake on my part”, Meloy later said. “I should have given him azimuth directions, - instead of Cardinal directions – to move on an azimuth of zero-niner-zero, then three-six-zero”.²⁶ Meloy also had an additional problem, he had sustained a painful wound from mortar fragments but refused to be evacuated.²⁷

The men in Ozzie's C Co. 2nd Battalion, including their commander, Capt. Currier, and their Battalion Commander, Barrott, never anticipated the possibility of engaging an entrenched enemy. The company was lightly loaded by Vietnam standards. Riflemen carried 140 rounds for their M-16's, with four frag (fragmentary) and two

²⁵ <http://www.wolfhoundcountry.com/meloy.html>

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ <http://www.historynet.com/operation-attleboro-the-196th's-light-infantry-brigade-baptism-by-fire-in-the-vietnam-war.htm>

smoke grenades per man. There were one thousand rounds for each M-60 machine gun, and four claymore mines with each platoon. The thump gunners carried forty rounds for each M-79 (grenade) launcher, and there were six of these in a platoon.²⁸

For more than two hours Ozzie's company, moved through dense jungle and instead of moving east and then north, Currier, Barrott and C Company went north and then east. This put the company between Meloy's defensive perimeter and the rear of the VC who were in camouflaged bunkers with concealed lanes of fire. The first couple of platoons (3rd and 2nd) of the company came under heavy fire from the enemy and Currier ordered an assault on the bunkers. Ozzie's 1st Platoon was to the rear at this time. This initial assault failed and Currier was killed after standing up to try to encourage his men onward. This brave Green Beret became the first man from Andover, Mass., to be killed in Vietnam. His place in the field was taken by the ranking platoon leader, Lt. Bruce McDougal.

Shortly after this, Lt. Col. Barrott, who had been following Currier, threw a smoke grenade to mark his location for aircraft overhead. A FAC saw the smoke, took a reading and determined that C Company was about 100 meters to the north of Meloy's bogged down 1/27. Barrott then took a squad and proceeded south in the direction of Meloy to link up. He was using the sound of what he thought was the 1/27th's gunfire as a guide. Unfortunately he crossed a well-concealed VC fire lane and was killed instantly by automatic weapons fire. C Company's, 1st sergeant, a platoon leader, a platoon sergeant, and several radio operators were killed during this same action.²⁹

Lt. McDougal ordered Ozzie's 1st platoon to move up to the perimeter. Ozzie related the following to a *Boston Globe* reporter; “We crawled along the trail. We were crawling over the dead and wounded of the ambushed platoon. I fired my weapon a couple of times. Now my team leader took over a machine gun position from a wounded soldier. I got the ammo. It was a wild sort of fire fight. The machine gun fired into trees and foliage around, searching for the Viet Cong. There was another machine gun, and it

²⁸ Marshall, S.L.A. 1969. *Ambush: The Battle of Dau Tieng*. Nashville: The Battery Press, p. 94-95.

²⁹ <http://www.historynet.com/operation-attleboro-the-196th's-light-infantry-brigade-baptism-by-fire-in-the-vietnam-war.htm>

was sweeping a 90 degree arc in front. Then the team leader got it and I became the gunner.”³⁰

Now Ozzie and C/2/27 were completely isolated on the battlefield. Right after Meloy found out from radio-telephone operator, PFC Bill Wallace, that C Company had lost their company commander and the battalion commander, he knew it was imperative that he had to help it somehow. Meloy ordered the men to stop where they were and form a tight perimeter so they could defend themselves against an assault during the night. The company had just about accomplished this before the order was even received. Now Meloy had to get help to C Company somehow, but the unit’s location created its own set of problems. “It hampered our ability to call in artillery fire and restricted full use of firepower by the rifle company opposite them,” he said, “Friendly fire was overshooting the enemy bunkers and landing in the C/2/27 Infantry position. I had a gut feeling the enemy did not know the precise location of C Company, and I imposed a strict cease-fire on them for fear they would reveal their exact position.”

According to Meloy, during the night the enemy probed C Company’s position three times, with the men maintaining their discipline by not returning fire. Meloy said that two attempts at relieving the company were made. One attempt was a night attack by C/2/1 Infantry through what appeared to be a gap in the VC lines. This failed when the attack was repulsed with five dead and eight wounded.³¹

Ozzie’s account of that night was slightly different. “At sunset the firing died down, from both the enemy and friend. I manned the (machine) gun all night, firing an occasional burst. Friendly artillery came in all that wild and terrible night so the VC wouldn’t overrun our positions. Helicopter and flare ships hovered overhead, adding their noise and light to the eerie scene in the jungle. It was a sleepless night.”³²

At first light on the morning of November 5th, in his second attempt to relieve C Company, Meloy ordered A Company of the 2nd Battalion, Wolfhounds, under the command of Captain Robert Foley, of Newton, Mass., to attack through what appeared to be another gap in the enemy’s lines in hopes of linking up with C Company and relieve them. Again, there was no gap and an intense firefight took place. Foley and PFC John F.

³⁰ Young, “Belmont GI”.

³¹ <http://www.wolfhoundcountry.com/meloy.html>

³² Young, “Belmont GI”.

Baker were each to receive the Medal of Honor for their actions in this, one of the heaviest firefights of OA. Foley's citation read in part, 'despite his painful wounds he refused medical aid...and...led an assault on several enemy gun emplacements and single handedly destroyed three such positions. Baker citation read in part, 'as he returned to evacuate another soldier, he was taken under fire by snipers, but raced beyond friendly troops to attack and kill the snipers'³³

Ozzie remembers this fateful day this way; “Soon after daybreak came, the small arms fire began. At eight there was a tremendous fire fight. The other machine gunner and I provided grazing fire around the forward arc of our perimeter. The trees were stripped bare of their foliage. And all of a sudden I was shot through the shoulder and across the spine. I laid there and couldn't move.” Soldiers dragged Ozzie away from the gun and two others took over. “The firing continued. They moved the machine gun back to another position”. The relief company was moving up, firing and picking up wounded when they got to Conners. “He couldn't find his lighter and couldn't smoke. Then he was hit in the hip while lying there.” Ozzie was most likely hit by snipers on both occasions. “Another big fire fight broke out. The machine gun was hit again. Finally, the Americans made a stretcher out of a poncho and branches and rolled Conners over into it. Four of them picked him up and started off. They'd run a few feet, then down, a few more, and so on, being fired at all the time. Conners, was in a daze. But they got him out.”³⁴

The battered C Company was, in fact, relieved in place about noon on the 5th of November, by elements of B Company, 1st Infantry Battalion of the Wolfhounds, led by their resourceful commander Captain Bob Garrett. Prior to this Garrett experienced another failure in communications between a company commander in the field and the brigade command staff and Gen. De Saussure. On November 4th, Garrett had joined with two units of the 196th – A/2/1 Infantry and A/4/31 Infantry. Both of these companies had battalion command groups and commanders with them.

On the 5th, Garrett told these battalion commanders he was moving, “to the sound of the guns”, to reinforce the battalion and relieve C Company. At first the two commanders agreed to go with Garrett. Before the entire force could get to the battle

³³ <http://www.historynet.com/operation-attleboro-the-196th-s-light-infantry-brigade-baptism-by-fire-in-the-vietnam-war.htm>

³⁴ Young, “Belmont GI”.

area, the two commanders decided to return east with their command groups. This was done either on orders from Gen. De Saussure or on their own initiative. “Oddly enough, they left their two companies with Captain Garrett. I never did figure that one out,” Meloy said later. The addition of these two companies brought the number of companies under Meloy’s command to eleven. After coordinating artillery fire with Garrett, Meloy ordered him to attack to the south to relieve C Company. By this time the NVA had all but vanished.

By noon Garrett and his task force had accomplished the relief mission, sustaining one casualty en route. He and his men recovered six dead and 19 wounded infantrymen, including Ozzie Conners.³⁵

After Meloy successfully pulled back his troops he got a surprise visit at his command post from Maj. Gen. William DePuy, commander of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division. Meloy later described the conversation he had with DePuy. “He asked if I really had eight companies. I told him that since I had been given three more, I was now up to eleven. He was rather astonished and he asked when I had last talked with De Saussure on the radio, and I told him it had been at least 48 hours. He then asked when was the last time I actually had physical contact with De Saussure and I told him it had been on the evening of November 2nd at Dau Tieng.” According to army procedure Meloy should have never had more than three to five companies under his direct command. DePuy was now in command of the entire operation so he ordered all U.S. units out of the woods, assembled and returned to their original battalion and flown back to their home bases where everyone would be accounted for.³⁶

Phase II of Operation Attleboro ended on November 5th but, “A dark and gloomy mood prevailed among exhausted officers and troops of the 196th LIB and the two 27th Infantry battalions as they withdrew. Talking about what they had been through, many of the soldiers claimed they were ‘ambushed’, inferring the enemy had gotten the best of them. Telling these dejected soldiers that they had in fact, been the force that had located an enemy camp and attacked it and that it was the enemy who had been forced to defend themselves was not a satisfying explanation. Most had never experienced such large

³⁵ <http://historynet.com/operation-attleboro-from-calamity-to-crushing-victory.htm>

³⁶ *Ibid.*

losses. On returning to their bases, they would learn the depressing numbers: 60 U.S. killed in action and 159 wounded. Contributing to the low morale was that they had been pulled from the battlefield before they had the opportunity to see the death and destruction they had brought on their adversaries, losses that included about 200 dead.”³⁷

After Phase III of OA, which lasted a couple of weeks and resulted in major losses of manpower, food and supplies by the VC and NVA, the enemy withdrew from Tay Ninh and that portion of the Saigon Corridor. Few members of the two Wolfhound battalions that did most of the fighting and sustained most of the losses during OA would learn of their actual accomplishments before they left Vietnam. The Operation Attleboro story ended with most elements of the 9th VC Division having either been run out of the country or desperately evading the forces they had been sent to destroy.

“Operation Attleboro exposed the lack of clear understanding by some senior commanders of how to best use American troops to fight an elusive and determined guerrilla force in the jungle. Complicated maneuvers by company-size units in the heavy underbrush of the jungle were not successful. Radio and ground communications between commanders were neither well planned nor properly tested. Piecemeal commitments of forces were made seemingly without rhyme or reason. The principle of span of control was violated by giving one battalion commander command over a brigade-size force of 11 rifle companies on an ad hoc basis. And finally, the American units lacked adequate, timely intelligence on the VC and NVA units in the area of operation. In spite of these tactical weaknesses, Operation Attleboro and its follow-on operations, Cedar Falls and Junction City, dealt the VC and North Vietnamese Army a blow from which they would not fully recover until the 1968 Tet Offensive. What began as a 196th LIB warm-up exercise ended in a massive corps engagement, supported by 22,000 troops, 12,000 tons of tactical air support, 35,000 artillery rounds and 11 B-52 strikes. The VC left 1,106 dead on the battlefield and had 44 captured. Friendly losses were 155 killed and 494 wounded.”³⁸

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ <http://www.historynet.com/operation-attleboro-the-196th's-light-infantry-brigade-baptism-by-fire-in-the-vietnam-war.htm>

“Whether it should have been fought through, other than with the heaviest weapons, is a good question. That it became a wild melee, almost completely preoccupying large forces on our side, may be traced partly to the misfortunes of a single rifle company,” stated S.L.A. Marshall in *Ambush: The Battle of Dau Tieng*.³⁹ That rifle company was Ozzie’s.

What happened to some of the players in this early campaign in Vietnam? General Nguyen Chi Thanh was promoted to the rank of senior general after he was reportedly killed in a B-52 bombing attack. Brigadier General Edward H. De Saussure was relieved of command of the 196th LIB shortly after Operation Attleboro ended. “To the dismay of many who were there during those costly three days, De Saussure was later promoted to major general.” He died in 2002. “Major Sandy Meloy was the only American officer in the Vietnam War to exercise personal command over 11 rifle companies in combat. The textbooks on tactical doctrine will inform that such a thing far exceeds an individual commander’s span of control – the number of subordinate leaders he can effectively control. But sometimes in infantry combat, the textbooks go out the window.”⁴⁰ Meloy retired in 1982 with the rank of Major General. Robert Foley retired as a lieutenant general in 2000. Master Sergeant John Baker retired in 1989 and served as vice president of America’s most prestigious veteran’s group, the Medal of Honor Society. He died recently on January 20, 2012. “In April 1975, a little over nine years after Operation Attleboro, Maj. Gen. Hoang Cam commanded the North Vietnamese IV Corps in defeat of the of the South Vietnamese army at the last clash of arms in the Vietnam War, the Battle of Xuan Loc.”⁴¹

And what happened to Ozzie Conners?

After being rescued on November 5th he was initially flown to the Philippines, then to Yokohama, Japan, for surgery. When he gave the interview to *Globe* reporter, Stephen B. Young, Ozzie was in Ft. Devens Army Hospital, paralyzed from the waist down. He had been awarded the Purple Heart, the Combat Infantryman Badge, the

³⁹ Marshall, p. 93.

⁴⁰ <http://www.wolfhoundcountry.com/meloy.html>

⁴¹ <http://historynet.com/operation-attleboro-from-calamity-to-crushing-victory.htm>

National Defense Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal and the Vietnam Campaign Medal which was awarded by the Republic of Vietnam.⁴² After some recovery he was secured to a Stryker frame which forced him to eat upside down from dishes on the floor. It wasn’t until a while later that Ozzie would learn from his doctors that he would be paralyzed permanently. Being confined to a wheelchair didn’t stop him from leading a full life. He married Elaine, learned to drive a car with manual controls, earned a master’s degree from Boston College and had a successful career with the Veteran’s Administration, working with the handicapped veterans, in various hospitals in New England. Ozzie had season tickets to the Celtics and Patriots and would invite many of his friends to accompany him to games. He was instrumental in getting the management of both teams to set aside certain areas of their facilities for handicapped access and seating. His loyalty to BSC never faded, and he attended Bears football games and alumni banquets whenever he was able (he played from 1961 to 1964). His loyalty also extended to his undergraduate fraternity, Kappa Delta Phi.

Ozzie rarely talked about his service in Vietnam. “He made a choice when he was 21 and paid dearly. He certainly grieved his loss, but he didn’t let himself get stuck in self pity or anger for the rest of his life. His acceptance of what was has always been a beacon to me. It is not my greatest strength despite years of Buddhist practice”, according to his wife Elaine.⁴³ Ozzie moved on, and moved forward, savoring each day of life with a positive attitude, even gusto. His courage never seemed to fail him but his body eventually did. Ozzie succumbed to squamous cell bladder cancer on May 27, 2000, and passed away. “It is a fairly rare form of bladder cancer. It is most common in paralyzed people due to the irritation to their bladder from sitting. Thus it was directly related to his war injury”, according to his wife Elaine.⁴⁴ She, sent his medical records to the Department of the Army and it was determined that his death was a result of the wounds he sustained in combat in 1966, in Operation Attleboro. Because of this determination, Elaine was informed of a change in the policy that governed the placing of names on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. No longer would the Department of the Army limit the names of veterans on the memorial to only those who died in Vietnam. Elaine

⁴² Conners, Elaine. Email message to the author. 6/27/2012.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Conners, Elaine. Email message to the author. 8/18/2012.

was informed that his name, Thomas Joseph Conners, would be inscribed on, “The Wall” on Memorial Day, May 30, 2005 along with three others who passed away under similar circumstances. His name was added to the 58,245 names already engraved on that low riding, streamlined, granite memorial, in panel 13-E, line 125. Elaine, members of Ozzie’s family and three of his college friends attended the ceremony on that 100 degree Memorial Day. On that solemn day, it seemed that Ozzie was giving them a little sample of what the weather was like in Vietnam in November, 1966, during Operation Attleboro.