



Attack on Cam Rahn Bay

The huge perimeter of Cam Rahn Bay was secured by different branches and units of the military each assigned a sector.



August 8, 1969 - Terror Attacks, Battles Mark Sharp Break in Viet War ...

archives.chicagotribune.com/1969 : A devastating bomb explosion at an American-run school in Saigon, a sapper attack on an American hospital at **Cam Ranh Bay**, and four pitched ...



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ubl2-OsMgcw>

In August 1969, Viet Cong sappers twice **attacked** the 6th Convalescent Center, a US Army hospital, at **Cam** ...



The Sapper Attack on Cam Ranh Bay from *Pacific Stars and Stripes*

11 August 1969 by S. Sgt. Jim White, S&S Staff Correspondent

CAM RANH BAY, Vietnam- The cluster of buildings that is the 6th Convalescent Center here sits atop a sun-splashed slope on the Cam Ranh Bay peninsula overlooking the South China Sea. At the foot of the slope transparently clear blue waves wash against a sugarwhite beach that stretches away until it becomes lost in the blue-green haze of the jungled mountains to the north.

It is a place where soldiers come to forget the war, to relax, and to recuperate. Clad in light blue pajamas, they congregate on the beach in small groups.

They swim in the warm water, or stroll in the damp sand, or they spread blankets and bask in the heat of the sun in a sky that is almost always cloudless blue. It is a peaceful place.

Or, rather, it was.

An hour after midnight Thursday morning, that peace was abruptly and savagely shattered. A barrage of 107mm rockets streaked upward on the mainland, arced across the bay, and slammed into the air base. At the same time, a small group of Communist sappers cut through the perimeter fence at the north end of the convalescent center and raced through the compound, flinging satchel charges into buildings as they went. Halfway down the compound a GI on duty in the A Co. orderly room heard the first explosions and dived for the floor. "I thought at first we were being hit by mortars or rockets," he said. "Then I crawled to the door and looked down the street. I saw somebody running toward me. He stopped, pitched something into a building, then turned and ran the other way. Then a bunch of satchel charges went off, boom, boom, boom, coming my way, and I knew that sappers had gotten in."

In "L" ward Pfc. Charles D'Hondt from Utica, Mich., woke up and started running from the direction of the explosions. "Man, my mind may have been asleep, but my body was getting out there," he said, "I was headed for the back door, but about halfway there I saw somebody there trying to open the door." "I knew he wasn't one of us, so I turned around and started the other way. Then I saw the flash of an explosion at the front of the ward, about six feet from my bed. so I crawled under a bunk. There was nothing else I could do. I didn't have anything to fight with."

In the next ward, Spec. 4 Renard Hainesworth sat up in bed just as a satchel charge went off outside the door, 10 feet away. A door hinge buried itself in his locker, inches away from his head. He dived for the floor and rolled under his bunk. "I just couldn't believe it" he exclaimed. Being here was like being on a vacation, everything was so peaceful and quiet. You almost didn't feel like you were in Vietnam, and now here was Charlie, blowing up our wards."

Near the north end of the compound, in her trailer quarters, 1st Lt. Dianne Houser from Sandusky, Ohio, heard the exploding satchel charges and raced to a window. "I could see the flashes of the explosions and flames coming from the bachelor officers' quarters across the street," she recalled. "All I could think about was, "My God, those men are going to be burned alive." Then as more explosions rocked the trailer, she dove under her bed. Something smashed into the window. "I saw sparks on the floor," she said, "but they didn't register. I thought the window had been broken by the concussion of the explosions outside. I didn't find out until later that four sticks of TNT together with a detonator and a fuse, were lying on the floor about three feet from Margaret (1st Lt. Margaret Cohee, of Denton, Md., a second nurse living in the trailer) and about 10 feet from me. Somehow, the fuse went out."

But for 100 other patients and staff members of the convalescent center, the fuses burned too long. Ninety-eight were wounded., some seriously. One man sleeping within 10 feet of the spot where a satchel charge-exploded, died instantly. Another died on the way to the 12th USAF Hospital for treatment.

In all, the sappers hit 19 of the 94 buildings in the compound. Four of the - one unoccupied patient ward, one patient and one staff officers' quarters, and a latrine - were burned to the ground.

The day after the attack, the question in everyone's mind was "why?"

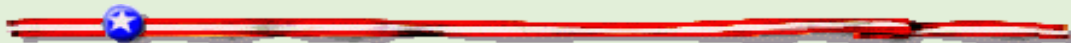
"It just doesn't make sense," Lt. Houser said bitterly. "Why blow up a hospital? The men here were already sick and hurt. There's nothing here that could have harmed the VC. I knew that they don't abide by the Geneva conventions . . . but this?

Particularly galling to the GIs in the wards was the fact that they had no means of fighting back. Here - in theory, safely away from the fighting - they were without their weapons. "A lot of the infantry guys wanted to go after them," one patient said, "but you can't fight rifles and satchel charges with your hands." Nonetheless, one sergeant gave it a try. Clothed only in pajama bottoms and unarmed, he ran after a sapper escaping over a hill only to trip in the darkness and break a leg.

Ironically, until the day before the attack, volunteer patients who were well enough stood guard duty around the perimeter, supplementing regular security forces. But due to a policy change, no patients were on guard duty in the Thursday morning darkness.

The 15 damaged buildings, in the process of being repaired, are already back in partial use; the ashes and scorched metal debris of the burned buildings are being removed.

The same sun shines on the same beach. The Idyllic surroundings of the 6th Convalescent Center are unchanged, but the sense of peace and security is gone.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDHTFo82BQo>

Enemy rockets hit a fuel dump and sets it alight, while US Air Force firefighters try to put it out. ...



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