

I. Introduction: SSG Webster Anderson: One NCOs contribution to battlefield success.

A. Research paper references

1. The Congressional Medal of Honor, the Names. Forest Ranch: Sharp & Dunnigan Publications, 1984.
2. Ott, David Ewing. Field Artillery, 1954-1973. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data, 1975.
3. Summers, Harry. Vietnam War Almanac. New York: Factson File Publications, 1985.
4. "Martins Vietnam War Articles." CIDG: Civilian Irregular Defense Groups. Sept. 30 2005. < <http://www.diddybop.demon.co.uk/cidg.htm>>.

B. This research was about an American Soldier whose heroic actions helped defeat the enemy and save many American lives. I selected SSG Webster Anderson because I understood his mission and wanted to learn about an artillery NCO in Vietnam.

II. Body.

A. Artillery Fire Bases

B. Weapons

C. The Attack

III. Summary.

A. In summary: My research covered the different equipment SSG Webster Anderson used and the ways his unit employed them. I also discussed the enemy weapons used and what tactics the Vietnamese Army used. The terrain, type of weapons, and numerous other variables made it impossible to standardize artillery operations. Outstanding leadership from NCOs like SSG Webster Anderson made it possible for Artillery units to adapt and succeed on the battlefields of Vietnam.

B. Questions

C. Conclusion

## **SFC Webster Anderson**

SFC Webster Anderson's story is an example of one Non-Commissioned Officer's contribution to battlefield success. It seemed nothing could stop Webster Anderson, not North Vietnamese troops, not the loss of both legs and a hand. Until the end, Army Sergeant First Class Anderson pressed on -- driven to see his life of 70 years end on his own terms. Anderson, who received the Medal of Honor for heroism in the Vietnam War, died August 30, 2003 at his Fairfield County home. He did not complain and he passed away on his terms, he took his last breath with dignity. (Summers 137)

Webster Anderson was one of two men from South Carolina who received the Congressional Medal of Honor for their actions in Vietnam. Anderson was born in Winnsboro, South Carolina on July 15, 1933. He joined the United States Army in 1953 years before his tour in Vietnam. He considered himself a career soldier from the time he entered the military. Anderson attained the rank of Staff Sergeant in the field artillery prior to his deployment to Vietnam. He went through the field artillery cannon crewmember training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma then went through Airborne School in Fort Benning, Georgia. He was then assigned to Battery A, Second Battalion, Three Hundred and Twentieth Artillery, One Hundred and First Airborne Infantry Division in Fort Campbell, Kentucky. One of the training techniques Anderson used to train his section was nighttime fuze settings. To ensure his soldiers could function during hours of limited visibility he would have them set the fuzes of the 105mm artillery rounds completely blindfolded. It was his way of taking care of his Soldiers in the event they had to fight on the battlefields of Vietnam. In June 1965, the 320<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery and the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Infantry Division deployed to Vietnam where they served for seven years of continuous combat. Anderson was a Staff Sergeant at the time of deployment and held the

position of howitzer section chief for A Battery. Some of his duties included the training and proficiency of a seven-man section, the maintenance of his howitzer, crew serve weapons, and individual weapons. He also had the responsibility to maintain twenty-four hour security within his section of the perimeter as well as maintaining firing capabilities at all times to provide timely and accurate fires in support of infantry patrols. In the event of an attack on the perimeter, SSG Anderson's section had to be prepared to initiate direct fires at the enemy without guidance from the chain of command. Anderson took pride in being a Soldier, when he did something, he did not stop until he got it right, and he never left anything undone.

Staff Sergeant Anderson's unit was a 105mm howitzer battery and utilized the M102 howitzer. The organization of a firebase was a sample of the flexibility and ingenuity of the American Soldier. The terrain, type of howitzer, and other variables made it impossible to standardize occupation procedures. Anderson's battalion used several types of firebases, to include Riverine, star and lazy W. Riverines were used in the Mekong Delta area because of the high water table, rice patties, and numerous rivers and canals throughout the land. They were twenty square foot tables with adjustable legs tethered to the shoreline (Summers 216) with howitzers emplaced on top. The star formation was the preferred method for occupation for a six-gun battery. Five of the guns outlined the points of the star, with one gun positioned in the center. This configuration provided the best security and effective displacement between guns in the event ground bursts hit inside the perimeter. The last configuration is the lazy W. This formation was used for emergency occupations, and for areas of limited ground space such as narrow ridgelines and along rivers. SSG Anderson's battery occupied the star formation on the morning in which he earned the Medal of Honor.

The capabilities and weapons of U.S. forces and Vietnam forces were fairly equal. Webster Anderson's battery defense included the following weapon systems and ammunitions. The howitzers had two specific rounds used in the defense. The XM546 is a shell fuze combination that is fired at maximum charge directly at the enemy. A timed fuze explodes the instant it leaves the tube and projects five thousand to eight thousand dart like projectiles at the enemy, which proved very effective against light infantry. The Killer Junior was another type of round, which was shot at minimum charge, equipped with a timed fuze that exploded thirty feet above ground level two-hundred to one-thousand meters away. This was very effective against light infantry units in defilade. The small arms used by A battery were the M60 machinegun and the M16A1 rifle. U.S. forces also used the M79 grenade launcher, which was the predecessor to the M203 grenade launcher. The North Vietnamese Army used weapons with similar capabilities as the U.S. but used far different tactics. The main weapon for the enemy was the AK47 assault rifle. This weapon had simple mechanics and was easy to clean and maintain which was perfect for the wet jungle environment. Their squad support rifle was the RPD 7.62 and was the equivalent to the U.S. M60 machinegun. The Vietnamese used the M60 light mortar tube to provide quick support of their guerrilla tactics. They could quickly emplace this mortar tube, launch several rounds and leave the firing point before U.S. forces could return accurate fire. The last weapon the enemy used against A battery was the 90mm recoilless rifle, which could easily destroy light vehicles and artillery tubes. Another tactic the Vietnam Army used was the sapper. These soldiers were trained to infiltrate U.S. forces compounds and perimeters with grenades and satchels and initiate an attack by destroying key operations cells and communications equipment. The weapon systems of both sides were extremely effective, the

difference in many battles were the techniques used and the determination of the soldiers operating the equipment.

The morning SSG Webster Anderson earned the Medal of Honor was 14 October 1967, in the early morning hours. Battery A, 320<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery occupied an unnamed firebase located halfway between Tam Ky and Thien Phuoc in the I Corps region. To assist the artillerymen with the defense of the perimeter, there were seventy-five Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) personnel manning the perimeter bunkers. Each howitzer position and the fire direction center maintained one soldier on guard duty throughout the night. Because of the difficulty in distinguishing the CIDG from the enemy at night, the irregulars had been instructed to remain within the bunkers during hours of limited visibility (Martins 86).

The perimeter bunkers were on the edge of a steep drop off along the ridgeline. The steepness of the slope made it impossible to observe directly below the bunkers. During the early morning hours of 15 October, enemy sappers crept up the slopes to pre-position themselves for an attack. Their objective was to capture the howitzers and turn them on both the 16<sup>th</sup> Artillery (155mm), and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 327<sup>th</sup> Infantry Headquarters that occupied the same ridgeline to both sides of Alpha Battery. (Ott 121)

A devastating barrage of mortars, rockets, and recoilless rifles teamed with the sapper attack was unleashed on the battery position at 0320 hours. A sapper tossed a grenade into the fire direction center and placed a satchel charge on the batteries communications systems, crippling their ability to command and control the unit. Each one of the howitzer positions had its own battle going on after the initial barrage. Everyone in SSG Anderson's section was wounded during the initial mortar attack, but due to his outstanding leadership, they managed to man the parapet and direct fire on the enemy. During the two-hour battle, SSG Anderson's

actions demonstrated his discipline and courage. Two mortar rounds landed at his feet and severely mangled both legs. Although in great pain, he managed to move around in the parapet returning fire and inspiring his soldiers. When a grenade landed next to one of his soldiers, he picked it up and attempted to throw it out of the parapet. The grenade exploded as he threw it and blew off his hand. After the two-hour battle, the battery executive officer found him and moved him to medical aid. The Viet Cong were finally forced from the battery position after two-hours of close combat. The 16<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery and the 1/327<sup>th</sup> Infantry Headquarters did not receive a single round due to the heroics of SSG Webster Anderson and the rest of Alpha Battery. Twenty-two of the initial strength of 49 soldiers in Battery A, had to be evacuated after the battle. Each howitzer parapet had at least five mortars impact, and a total of fifty-six craters were counted in the battery position. Although the battery was badly hurt, the enemy's objective was not met. (Ott 122-124)

Americans like SFC Webster Anderson demonstrated time after time the determination of the Non-Commissioned Officer and their heroic actions on the battlefields of Vietnam. Anderson did not quit and continued to lead his soldiers even when death seemed likely. For his actions, Congress granted him the Medal of Honor. President Richard Nixon presented it to Webster Anderson in November 1969. Sergeant First Class Anderson lived his life proudly until the day cancer took his life on August 30, 2003.

The official citation awarding the Medal of Honor to Anderson reads as follows:

SFC Anderson (then SSG), distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as chief of section in Battery A, against a hostile force. During the early morning hours Battery A's defensive position was attacked by a determined North Vietnamese Army infantry unit supported by heavy mortar, recoilless

rifle, rocket propelled grenade and automatic weapon fire. The initial enemy onslaught breached the battery defensive perimeter. SFC Anderson, with complete disregard for his personal safety, mounted the exposed parapet of his howitzer position and became the mainstay of the defense of the battery position. SFC Anderson directed devastating direct howitzer fire on the assaulting enemy while providing rifle and grenade defensive fire against enemy soldiers attempting to overrun his gun section position. While protecting his crew and directing their fire against the enemy from his exposed position, 2 enemy grenades exploded at his feet knocking him down and severely wounding him in the legs. Despite the excruciating pain and though not able to stand, SFC Anderson valorously propped himself on the parapet and continued to direct howitzer fire upon the closing enemy and to encourage his men to fight on. Seeing an enemy grenade land within the gun pit near a wounded member of his gun crew, SFC Anderson heedless of his own safety, seized the grenade and attempted to throw it over the parapet to save his men. As the grenade was thrown from the position, it exploded and SFC Anderson was again grievously wounded. Although only partially conscious and severely wounded, SFC Anderson refused medical evacuation and continued to encourage his men in the defense of the position. SFC Anderson by his inspirational leadership, professionalism, devotion to duty and complete disregard for his welfare was able to maintain the defense of his section position and to defeat a determined attack. SFC Anderson's gallantry and extraordinary heroism at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty are in the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army. (The Congressional 19)

Works Cited

- The Congressional Medal of Honor, the Names. Forest Ranch: Sharp & Dunnigan Publications, 1984.
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