

= Battle of Binh Gia =

The Battle of Binh Gia ( Vietnamese : Tr?n B?nh Gi? ) , which was part of a larger communist campaign , was conducted by the Viet Cong from December 28 , 1964 , to January 1 , 1965 , during the Vietnam War in B?nh Gi? . The battle took place in Ph??c Tuy Province ( now part of B? R?a ? V?ng T?u Province ) , South Vietnam .

The year of 1964 marked a decisive turning point in the Vietnam War . Following the ousting of President Ng? ?nh Di?m in 1963 , South Vietnam 's top army generals continued to vie with each other for control of the country 's military @-@ dominated government instead of combating the emerging forces of the National Liberation Front , also known as the Viet Cong . The fragility of the South Vietnamese government was reflected on the battlefield , where its military experienced great setbacks against the Viet Cong . Taking advantage of Saigon 's political instability , Communist leaders in Hanoi began preparing for war . Even though key members of North Vietnam 's Politburo disagreed on the best strategy to reunite their country , they ultimately went ahead to prepare for armed struggle against South Vietnam and their American supporters .

Towards the end of 1964 , the National Liberation Front commenced a series of large @-@ scale military operations against the Army of the Republic of Vietnam , as ordered by the North Vietnamese government . As part of their Winter @-@ Spring Offensive , the Viet Cong unleashed its newly created 9th Division against the South Vietnamese forces at B?nh Gi? , fighting a large set @-@ piece battle for the first time . Over a period of four days , the Viet Cong 9th Division held its ground and mauled the best units the South Vietnamese army could send against them , only breaking after intense attack by U.S. bombers .

= = Background = =

In 1964 , the political establishment in South Vietnam was still in turmoil . Following the coup that ousted Ng? ?nh Di?m , the military situation quickly worsened as the National Liberation Front ( NLF , also known as Viet Cong ) gained significant ground in the countryside because the Military Revolutionary Council which governed South Vietnam , lacked direction both in terms of policy and planning . Furthermore , General D??ng V?n Minh , as the Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council , and his civilian Prime Minister Nguy?n Ng?c Th? favoured a political resolution instead of using military force , which brought them into conflict with the United States over the best strategy to end the Communist threat in South Vietnam . As a result , both men became increasingly unpopular among the military generals who held real political power in Saigon . On January 30 , 1964 , General Nguy?n Kh?nh successfully ousted D??ng V?n Minh from the Military Revolutionary Council without firing a single shot . For much of the year , Kh?nh spent most of his efforts on consolidating political power , instead of fighting the Viet Cong .

In contrast to the political unrest in Saigon , the Communist leadership in North Vietnam were far more concerned about the best strategy to fight the South Vietnamese government and their American supporters . While all leaders in Hanoi shared the same goal of eventual reunification of their homeland , different factions within the Communist Party disagreed on the best method to achieve their desired goal . Members of North Vietnam 's Politburo were divided by the issues surrounding the Soviet strategy of peaceful co @-@ existence versus the Chinese strategy of supporting national liberation movements in emerging countries . Despite their differences of opinion , the Communist Party leadership ultimately made preparations for armed struggle in South Vietnam . From Hanoi 's perspective , the military regime in Saigon was able to hold out because the Communist main forces were still not ready to fight a conventional war , so North Vietnam must focus on the development of its military force in the shortest period of time . In the meantime , however , the war must be kept at its current level in order to prevent the full involvement of the United States military .

On October 11 , 1964 , the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam was ordered to carry out a series of military operations as part of the Communist winter @-@ spring offensive . The NLF Nam Bo ( Mekong Delta ) Regional Command established a sub @-@ command under the leadership of

Trần Đình Xu , with Nguyễn Hòa as the deputy commander , and Lê Trọng Tấn as the political commissar . Their mission was to inflict damage on the regular units of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam ( ARVN ) and destroy the strategic hamlets constructed by the former Ngô Đình Diệm regime . The National Liberation Front in South Vietnam identified the regions of Bình Long @-@ Phước Long and Bà Rịa @-@ Long Khánh , along Route 14 , as the main targets for their offensive . Meanwhile , the Central Military Commission in Hanoi appointed General Nguyễn Chi Thanh as the commander of North Vietnamese military operations in southern Vietnam . Other high @-@ ranking officers such as Major Generals Lê Trọng Tấn and Trần ?? , and Colonel Hoàng Cầm were sent to South Vietnam to supervise the military build @-@ up which would commence in November 1964 .

= = Prelude = =

In July 1964 , the 271st and 272nd Regiments of the People 's Liberation Armed Forces ( PLAF ) , began moving into the provinces of Bình Định , Bình Long and Phước Long to carry out their mission . During the first phase of their campaign , the Viet Cong regiments overran several strategic hamlets at Xan Sang , Cam Xe , Dong Xa , and Thai Khai . Between August and September 1964 , Viet Cong regiments executed deep thrusts into Bình Định and Châu Thành to apply additional pressure on South Vietnamese outposts situated on Route 14 . During the second phase of their campaign , the Viet Cong ambushed two South Vietnamese infantry companies and destroyed five armoured vehicles , which consisted of M24 Chaffee light tanks and M @-@ 113 APCs . The PLAF defeated regular South Vietnamese units at the strategic hamlets of Bình Mỹ and Bình Cơ .

Following the completion of the initial stages in their campaign , the Viet Cong forces were ordered to regroup and prepare for the next offensive in the Long Khánh region . Viet Cong soldiers from the two regiments were assembled in War Zone D , where they were trained to attack well @-@ fortified enemy strongholds . On November 20 , 1964 , the Viet Cong reached the Long Khánh battlefield , having completed a 200 kilometres march from War Zone D. On the battlefield the Viet Cong 186th Battalion ( from Military Region 5 ) , the 500th and 800th Battalions ( from Military Region 7 ) , and the 445th Company also joined the offensive . To kick @-@ start their offensive in the Baria @-@ Long Khánh region , the Viet Cong selected Bình Giã as their next target . Bình Giã was a small village located in Phước Tuy Province , about 67 kilometres away from South Vietnam 's capital of Saigon .

During the war about 6 @, @ 000 people lived in Bình Giã , and most of whom were staunchly anti @-@ communist . The inhabitants of Bình Giã were Roman Catholic refugees who had fled from North Vietnam in 1954 during Operation Passage to Freedom because of fears of Communist persecution . To prepare for their main battle , the Viet Cong 272nd Regiment was ordered to block Inter @-@ provincial Road No. 2 and 15 , and destroy any South Vietnamese units attempting to reach Bình Giã from the south @-@ western flank of the battlefield . In the days leading up to the battle , the Viet Cong often came out to harass the local militia forces . On December 9 , 1964 , the 272nd Regiment destroyed an entire South Vietnamese mechanised rifle company along Inter @-@ provincial Road No. 2 , destroying 16 M @-@ 113 APCs . On December 17 , the 272nd Regiment destroyed another six armoured vehicles on Inter @-@ provincial Road No. 15 .

= = Battle = =

During the early hours of December 28 , 1964 , elements of the Viet Cong 271st Regiment and the 445th Company , signaled their main attack on Bình Giã by penetrating the village 's eastern perimeter . There , they clashed with members of the South Vietnamese Popular Force militiamen , which numbered about 65 personnel . The South Vietnamese militia fighters proved no match for the Viet Cong and their overwhelming firepower , so they quickly retreated into underground bunkers , and called for help . Once the village was captured , Colonel Tạ Minh Khâm , the Viet Cong regimental commander , established his command post in the main village church and waited for fresh reinforcements , which came in the form of heavy mortars , machine guns and recoil @-@ less

rifles . To counter South Vietnamese helicopter assaults , Colonel Kham 's troops set up a network of defensive fortifications around the village , with trenches and bunkers protected by land mines and barbed wire . The local Catholic priest , who was also the village chief , sent a bicycle messenger out to the Bà Rịa district headquarters to ask for a relief force . In response , the Bà Rịa district chief sent out elements of two Vietnamese Rangers battalions to retake Bình Giã . On December 29 , two companies of the ARVN 33rd Ranger Battalion and a company from the 30th Ranger Battalion were airlifted into area located west of Bình Giã , by helicopters from the U.S. 118th Aviation Company to face an enemy force of unknown size .

However , as soon as the soldiers from the 30th and 33rd Ranger Battalions arrived at the landing zone , they were quickly overwhelmed by the Viet Cong in a deadly ambush . The entire 30th Ranger Battalion was then committed to join the attack , but they too did not initially succeed in penetrating the strong Viet Cong defensive lines . Several more companies of the Rangers then arrived for an attack from multiple directions . Two companies of the 33rd Ranger Battalion advanced from the northeast . One of them came to the outskirts of the village but was unable to break through the enemy defenses . The other one , trying to outflank the enemy , had been lured into a kill zone in open terrain at the coffee plantation and were quickly obliterated in an ambush by the three VC battalions using heavy weapons . The two companies suffered a 70 percent casualty rate , and survivors were forced to retreat to the nearby Catholic church . The 30th Rangers had more success by assaulting from the western direction and succeeded in fighting their way into the village , aided by local residents . It however also suffered heavy losses , with the battalion commander and his American adviser severely wounded . The local civilians in Bình Giã retrieved weapons and ammunition from the dead Rangers , and hid the wounded government soldiers from the Viet Cong . The 38th Ranger Battalion , on the other hand , landed on the battlefield unopposed by the Viet Cong , and they immediately advanced on Bình Giã from the south . Soldiers from the 38th Rangers spent the whole day fighting but they could not break through their enemies ' defences to link up with the survivors hiding in the church , and fell back after calling in mortar fire to decimate Viet Cong fighters moving to encircle them .

The morning of December 30 , the 4th South Vietnamese Marine Battalion moved out to Biên Hòa Air Base , waiting to be airlifted into the battlefield . The 1 / 4th Marine Battalion was the first unit to arrive on the outskirts of Bình Giã , but the 1st Company commander decided to secure the landing zone , to wait for the rest of the battalion to arrive instead of moving on to their objective . After the rest of the 4th Marine Battalion had arrived , they marched towards the Catholic church to relieve the besieged Rangers . About one and a half hours later , the 4th Marine Battalion linked up with the 30th , 33rd and 38th Ranger Battalions , as the Viet Cong began withdrawing to the northeast . That afternoon the 4th Marine Battalion recaptured the village , but the Viet Cong was nowhere to be seen , as all their units had withdrawn from the village during the previous night , linking with other Viet Cong elements in the forest to attack the government relief forces . On the evening of December 30 , the Viet Cong returned Bình Giã and attacked from the south @-@ eastern perimeter of the village . The local villagers , who discovered the approaching Viet Cong , immediately sounded the alarm to alert the ARVN soldiers defending the village . The South Vietnamese were able to repel the Viet Cong , with support from U.S. Army helicopter gunships flown out from Vung Tau airbase .

While pursuing the Viet Cong , a helicopter gunship from the U.S. 68th Assault Helicopter Company was shot down and crashed in the Quảng Giao rubber plantation , about four kilometres away from Bình Giã , killing four of its crewmen . On December 31 , the U.S. Marines Advisory Group sent a team of four personnel , led by Captain Donald G. Cook , to Bình Giã to observe conditions on the battlefield . At the same time , the 4th Marine Battalion was ordered to locate the crashed helicopter and recover the bodies of the dead American crewmen . Acting against the advice of his American advisor , Major Nguyễn Văn Nho , commander of the 4th Marine Battalion , sent his 2 / 4th Marine Battalion company out to the Quảng Giao rubber plantation . Unknown to the 4th Marine Battalion , the Viet Cong 271st Regiment had assembled in the plantation . About one hour after they had departed from the village of Bình Giã , the commander of the 2 / 4th Marine Battalion reported via radio that his troops had found the helicopter wreckage , and the bodies of four American crewmen .

Shortly afterwards , the Viet Cong opened fire and the 2 / 4th Marine Battalion was forced to pull back . In an attempt to save the 2nd Company , the entire 4th Marine Battalion was sent out to confront the Viet Cong . As the lead element of the 4th Marine Battalion closed in on the Qu?ng Giao plantation , they were hit by accurate Viet Cong artillery fire , which was soon followed by repeated human wave attacks . Having absorbed heavy casualties from the Viet Cong 's ambush , the 2 / 4th Marine Battalion had to fight their way out of the plantation with their bayonets fixed . During the entire ordeal , the company did not receive artillery support because the plantation was beyond the range of 105mm artillery guns based in Ph??c Tuy and Bà R?a . They however escaped with the crucial support of the U.S. aircraft and helicopters whose rocket attacks forced the enemy to pull back and halted their attempt at pursuit .

In the morning of December 31 , the 4th Marines Battalion returned to the crash site with the entire force and the American graves were located and their corpses were dug up . At about 3 pm , a single U.S. helicopter arrived on the battlefield to evacuate the casualties , but they only picked up the bodies of the four American crewmen , while South Vietnamese casualties were forced to wait for another helicopter to arrive . At 4 pm , Major Nguy?n V?n Nho ordered the 4th Marine Battalion to carry their casualties back to the village , instead of continuing to wait for the helicopters . As the 4th Marine Battalion began their return march , three Viet Cong battalions , with artillery support , suddenly attacked them from three directions . The battalion 's commanding and executive officers were immediately killed and air support was not available . Two ARVN Marine companies managed to fight their way out of the ambush and back to Bình Giã , but the third was overrun and almost completely wiped out . The fourth company desperately held out at a hilltop against Viet Cong artillery barrages and large infantry charges , before slipping out through the enemy positions at dawn . The 4th Marines Battalion of 426 men lost a total of 117 soldiers killed , 71 wounded and 13 missing . Among the casualties were 35 officers of the 4th Marine Battalion killed in action , and the four American advisers attached to the unit were also wounded . Backed by U.S. Air Force bombers , on January 1 three battalions of ARVN Airborne reinforcements arrived , they were too late as most of the Viet Cong had already withdrawn from the battlefield .

= = Aftermath = =

The battle of Bình Giã reflected the Viet Cong 's growing military strength and influence , especially in the Mekong Delta region . It was the first time the National Liberation Front launched a large @-@ scale operation , holding its ground and fighting for four days against government troops equipped with armor , artillery and helicopters , and aided by U.S. air support and military advisers . The Viet Cong demonstrated that , when well @-@ supplied with military supplies from North Vietnam , they had the ability to fight and inflict damage even on the best ARVN units . For the first time in their history , the NLF was able to control a government stronghold for several days , and inflict heavy casualties on regular units of the South Vietnamese army in a large set @-@ piece battle .

The Viet Cong suffered light casualties with only 32 soldiers officially confirmed killed , and they did not leave a single casualty on the battlefield . In recognition of the 271st Regiment 's performance during the Bình Giã campaign , the NLF High Command bestowed the title ' Bình Giã Regiment ' on the unit to honour their achievement . Following the Bình Giã campaign , the NLF went on to occupy Hoài ??c District and the strategic hamlets of ??t ?? , Long Thành and Nh?n Tr?ch along Inter @-@ provincial Road No. 2 and 15 . They also expanded the Hát D?ch base area , which was located in Bà R?a and Bình Thu?n provinces , to protect the important sea transportation routes used by the Vietnam People 's Navy to supply Viet Cong units around the regions of the Mekong River .

Unlike their adversaries , the South Vietnamese military suffered heavily in their attempts to recapture the village of Bình Giã and secure the surrounding areas . The South Vietnamese and their American allies lost the total of about 201 personnel killed in action , 192 wounded and 68 missing . In just four days of fighting , two of South Vietnam 's elite Ranger companies were destroyed and several others suffered heavy losses , while the 4th Marine Battalion was rendered ineffective as a fighting force . At that stage of the war , Bình Giã was the worst defeat experienced by any South Vietnamese army . Despite the humiliating defeat inflicted on them , the South

Vietnamese army stubbornly considered the battle as their victory and erected a monument at the site of the battle to acknowledge the sacrifices of the soldiers who had fallen to retake Bình Giã .

= = Order of battle ( ground forces ) = =

= = = Viet Cong = = =

271st Regiment ( renamed the 1st PLAF Regiment and became part of the 9th Division on 2 Sep 1965 )

272nd Regiment ( renamed the 2nd PLAF Regiment and became part of the 9th Division on 2 Sep 1965 )

186th Battalion

500th Battalion

514th Battalion

800th Battalion

445th Company

80th Artillery Detachment

= = = Army of the Republic of Vietnam = = =

1st Airborne Battalion

3rd Airborne Battalion

7th Airborne Battalion

4th Marine Battalion

29th Ranger Battalion

30th Ranger Battalion

33rd Ranger Battalion

35th Ranger Battalion

38th Ranger Battalion

Two artillery platoons and one section of M @-@ 24 tanks in support .