

= Battle of Dong Xoai =

The Battle of ??ng Xoài (Vietnamese : Tr?n ??ng Xoài) was a major battle fought during the National Liberation Front Summer Offensive of 1965 as part of the Vietnam War . The battle took place in Ph??c Long Province , South Vietnam , between June 9 and 13 , 1965 .

In 1964 , General Nguy?n Khánh gained control of the South Vietnamese government after General D??ng V?n Minh was overthrown in a military coup . Although General Khánh was able to gain control of the military junta , he failed to garner support from the civilian population when he implemented various laws which limited the freedoms of the South Vietnamese people . He then had a falling @-@ out with the Catholic faction within his own government , when he became increasingly reliant on the Buddhist movement to hold on to power . Consequently , on February 20 , 1965 , General Khánh was ousted from power and was forced to leave South Vietnam forever . The political instability in Saigon gave North Vietnamese leaders in Hanoi an opportunity to step up their military campaign in the south . They believed the South Vietnamese government was able to survive because it still had a strong military to combat the growing influence of the Viet Cong . With the summer campaign of 1965 , North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces aimed to inflict significant losses on the South Vietnamese military . In Ph??c Long Province , the Communist summer offensive culminated in the ??ng Xoài campaign .

The fight for ??ng Xoài began on the evening of June 9 , 1965 , when the Viet Cong 272nd Regiment attacked and captured the Civilian Irregular Defense Group and U.S. Special Forces camp there . In response to the sudden Viet Cong assault , the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) Joint General Staff ordered the ARVN 1st Battalion , 7th Infantry Regiment , to retake ??ng Xoài district . They arrived on the battlefield on June 10 , but were quickly overwhelmed by the Viet Cong 271st Regiment near Thu?n L?i . Later that day , ??ng Xoài was recaptured by the ARVN 52nd Ranger Battalion , who had survived an ambush while marching towards the district . On June 11 , further South Vietnamese reinforcements arrived in the form of the ARVN 7th Airborne Battalion . The South Vietnamese paratroopers , while searching for survivors of the 1st Battalion in the Thu?n L?i rubber plantation , were defeated in a deadly ambush by the Viet Cong . On June 13 U.S. Army General William Westmoreland decided to insert elements of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade into a major battle for the first time , because he feared the Viet Cong could secure a major base area in Ph??c Long Province . By that time , however , the Viet Cong had already withdrawn from the battlefield , so the U.S. paratroopers were ordered to return to base without a fight .

= = Background = =

In January 1964 , General Khánh ousted General D??ng V?n Minh as the leader of South Vietnam 's military junta in a bloodless coup . Although Khánh had made considerable efforts to consolidate his power , opposition to his rule began to grow as he tightened censorship laws , banned protests and allowed police arbitrary search and imprisonment powers . Khánh drafted a new constitution , which would have expanded his power within the military junta . In response to General Khánh 's political manoeuvres the South Vietnamese people , predominately Buddhists , held large demonstrations in the cities calling for an end to the draconian laws which had limited the people 's political freedom . Fearing that his power could be weakened by those demonstrations , General Khánh immediately repealed his constitution and new police powers . He promised to reinstate civilian rule and remove members of the Catholic @-@ based C?n lao from power .

Internally , the concessions made by General Khánh had the effect of unsettling Catholic officers such as Nguy?n V?n Thi?u and Tr?n Thi?n Khiêm , because they were concerned by what they perceived to be the handing of power to Buddhist leaders . Subsequently , General Khiêm fell out with General Khánh over policy issues along religious lines , even though an alliance between both men had enabled Khánh to remove General Minh from power . As military support for his regime diminished , Khánh had to rely upon civilian Buddhist activists to maintain power . For the Americans , Khánh 's increased reliance on the Buddhists was a cause for concern , because the Buddhists favoured a political resolution to the conflict with the Communists . Thus , by the end of 1964 the

Americans looked for someone to overthrow Khánh , in order to continue the military effort against the Communists . On February 20 , 1965 , Khánh was finally removed from power , and he was forced to leave South Vietnam .

From the Communist perspective , even though South Vietnam was plagued by political instability , it still had a strong army to resist the Viet Cong . So shortly after the Binh Gia campaign , North Vietnamese leaders reached a resolution to launch a summer offensive , to destroy the regular units of the South Vietnamese military . During the early stages of the Communist summer campaign , Viet Cong forces in Quảng Ngãi Province successfully destroyed a South Vietnamese task force , led by the ARVN 51st Infantry Regiment , in the village of Ba Gia . Following their victory at Ba Gia , the National Liberation Front (known in America as Viet Cong) turned its attention to the Mekong Delta region . To prepare for their next offensive , Major @-@ General Le Trong Tan was given the task of directing Viet Cong military operations in the provinces of Ph??c Long , Bình Ph??c . For the first time , the newly created Viet Cong 273rd and 274th Regiments was ordered to join the 271st and 272nd Regiments on the battlefield ; their objective was to destroy the regular units of the South Vietnamese military , and eliminate the strategic hamlets to enlarge what North Vietnam viewed as ' liberated zones ' .

= = Prelude = =

Since May 1965 , the Viet Cong offensive in Ph??c Long Province had been in full @-@ swing . Beginning on May 10 , the Viet Cong 271st Regiment , supported by the 840th Battalion and local sapper units , attacked the district town of Ph??c Long , capital of the province . Simultaneously , the Viet Cong 272nd Regiment overran South Vietnamese government positions in the sub @-@ sector of Ph??c Bình . During their brief occupation of Ph??c Long district , the Viet Cong destroyed several major strategic hamlets in the surrounding areas , such as Ba Ra , Thuan Kiem , Thuan Loi , Phu Rieng , Da Kia , Bu Dop , Duc Bon and Song Be .

In response to the Viet Cong occupation of Ph??c Long district , the ARVN 36th Ranger Battalion was ordered by the ARVN Joint General Staff to recapture government positions there . On May 11 , two companies from the battalion sustained heavy casualties in battles with Viet Cong units positioned along Inter @-@ Provincial Road 13 and National Highway 14 . On May 12 , the Viet Cong 271st Regiment and other support units withdrew from Phuoc Long district .

In the Ph??c Bình sub @-@ sector , the Viet Cong 272nd Regiment were able to overrun South Vietnamese government positions within 25 minutes , and they claimed to have killed 115 South Vietnamese soldiers in the process . At 9 am on May 11 , the ARVN 34th Ranger Battalion was airlifted into a small town located about 14 kilometres away from Ph??c Bình in the south @-@ east . As the ARVN 34th Ranger Battalion marched upward towards Ph??c Bình , the Viet Cong 272nd and 273rd Regiment was ordered to destroy the South Vietnamese Rangers . However , by the time the 272nd Regiment arrived at the South Vietnamese staging area , the Rangers had already pulled out and successfully recaptured Ph??c Bình . Meanwhile , on May 15 , the Viet Cong 274th Regiment defeated two South Vietnamese Regional Force companies along Route 20 , and destroyed 20 vehicles in the process .

After those operations in Ph??c Long district and Ph??c Bình sub @-@ sector , the Viet Cong 9th Division was ordered to attack ??ng Xoài . In 1965 , ??ng Xoài was a district town situated at a road junction which connected Inter @-@ Inter @-@ Provisional Road 13 , National Highway 1 and Highway 14 . The district was defended by 200 local Vietnamese soldiers drawn from the 327th and 328th Militia Companies , and the 111th Regional Force Company . They were supported by one armoured squadron (6 armoured vehicles) and two 105mm howitzers . There were also 200 Cambodian soldiers of a Civilian Irregular Defense Group , 11 United States Army Special Forces personnel , and nine U.S. Navy Seabees . Prior to the battle , the U.S Special Forces had assumed control of ??ng Xoài 's defences ; they stepped up guard and patrol activities , and ordered the construction of new defensive fortifications around the district headquarters , the Special Forces Camp , and the armoured and artillery positions on the eastern side of the district .

= = Battle = =

On the evening of June 9, 1965, the Viet Cong made final preparations for their assault on ??ng Xoài. While the Viet Cong assembled their formations, U.S.-led forces inside the Special Forces Camp were suddenly placed on alert, forcing the Viet Cong to commence their attack 70 minutes earlier than scheduled. At 11 : 30 pm Viet Cong heavy mortar rounds began to fall on South Vietnamese and American positions around ??ng Xoài, soon followed by an infantry assault led by the 272nd Regiment. During the initial assault, the Viet Cong sustained heavy casualties as they tried to navigate through the surrounding minefields and barb wire fences, which they had failed to pick up during previous reconnaissance missions. At about 1 : 30 am, two helicopter gunships from the U.S. Army's 118th Aviation Company were dispatched to support the Special Forces Camp, they fired on the Viet Cong around the compound, and returned to base only after their weapons load was emptied. At around 2 : 30 am, the Americans and a few of the Cambodian soldiers retreated to the district headquarters, where other local troops were holding out. Meanwhile, at Biên Hòa Air Base, all flight crews of the 118th Aviation Company were on the flightline preparing for combat assault at first light. By that time, however, the Viet Cong had captured the Special Forces compound, and they began massing for an attack on the district headquarters.

While fighting raged inside the district, all flyable aircraft from the 118th Aviation Company flew out from Biên Hòa to Ph??c Vinh, a small town about 30 kilometres from ??ng Xoài. From Ph??c Vinh the first contingent of the ARVN 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, was airlifted into the battlefield. At around 8 am, the UH @-@ 1 formations of the 118th Aviation Company descend on the landing zone near the Thu?n L?i rubber plantation, about 4 kilometres north of ??ng Xoài; they immediately began to receive fire from bunkers and foxholes surrounding the area. The South Vietnamese command believed the landing zone near Thu?n L?i would be ideal to land their troops, because it was distant enough that the Viet Cong would not find and engage them immediately. However, the Viet Cong had anticipated the South Vietnamese would land troops in the area, and had prepared for an ambush. As a result, after U.S. helicopters had departed from the landing zone, soldiers of the Viet Cong 271st Regiment immediately turned their attention on the South Vietnamese. Within 15 minutes the main body of the ARVN 1st Battalion was completely destroyed.

At around 11 : 55 am the last remaining soldiers of the ARVN 1st Battalion were discharged near the original landing zone in Thu?n L?i, and they too were put out of action within three minutes of touching down on the field. During the afternoon, the Viet Cong had managed to destroy parts of the district headquarters building using their 57mm recoilless rifle. Second Lieutenant Williams then ordered 14 Americans inside the building, along with an equal number of Vietnamese women and children, to retreat to the artillery position located east of the town where they continued their resistance. Late in the afternoon on June 10, the U.S. 118th Aviation Company was joined by other elements of the 145th Combat Aviation Battalion in their final sorties for the day; airlifting the ARVN 52nd Ranger Battalion from Ph??c Vinh into ??ng Xoài, with the objective of recapturing the road junction and the Special Forces Camp. Following their last mission, the 118th Aviation Company immediately returned to Biên Hòa. During the first day of heavy fighting, every helicopter in the unit had sustained damage, including the loss of one helicopter and its entire crew.

At 3 : 20 pm the ARVN 52nd Ranger Battalion were discharged on a landing zone about 3 kilometres south of ??ng Xoài. As the South Vietnamese Rangers marched towards the town centre, their lead company was decimated in an ambush mounted by elements of the Viet Cong 271st Regiment. Undeterred by the strength of the Viet Cong, they continued their march towards the district. On the night of June 10, the battalion began attacking Viet Cong positions around the Special Forces Camp, and they gradually recaptured the compound and much of the town. The Viet Cong eventually launched a counter @-@ attack in an attempt to win back the lost ground, but they failed to dislodge the soldiers of the ARVN 52nd Ranger Battalion. The next morning, on June 11, the 118th Aviation Company was back at full strength in Ph??c Vinh. Like the previous day, they flew air @-@ support and airlifted further reinforcements from the ARVN 7th Airborne Battalion. After the South Vietnamese paratroopers were dropped off on a soccer field, the 118th Aviation

Company started large @-@ scale evacuation of South Vietnamese casualties . In contrast to the previous day , the 118th Aviation Company encountered only isolated rear guard actions .

Just before the ARVN 7th Airborne Battalion landed on the battlefield , the Viet Cong had intercepted a radio conversation between the aforementioned unit and the 52nd Ranger Battalion in the district centre ; several months earlier the 7th Airborne Battalion was involved in the battle at Bình Giã , so they vowed to avenge the loss of their comrades . Thus , from the soccer field , the ARVN 7th Airborne Battalion marched up to Thu?n L?i , against only light opposition . The South Vietnamese paratroopers arrived at the area where the first group of the ARVN 1st Battalion , 7th Infantry Regiment , was dropped off and they collected seven survivors and 55 bodies . In the afternoon , as elements of the 7th Airborne Battalion moved through the Thu?n L?i rubber plantation to search for remnants of the second group of the ARVN 1st Battalion , the Viet Cong 271st Regiment started attacking the South Vietnamese paratroopers in a manner which had characterised earlier ambushes . Taking advantage of the poor weather conditions that had limited U.S. air strikes , as well as their numerical superiority , the Viet Cong broke the South Vietnamese formation into small groups and destroyed many of them . On the next day , the strength of the ARVN 7th Airborne Battalion was reduced from 470 to just 159 soldiers .

After the defeat of the ARVN 7th Airborne Battalion , U.S. General William Westmoreland concluded that the Viet Cong still had the strength to continue the attacks on ??ng Xoài . In contrast , South Vietnamese forces within the vicinity of ??ng Xoài were severely depleted , and did not have sufficient strength to defeat the Viet Cong . Furthermore , there was only one remaining battalion in South Vietnam 's strategic reserve , and it may not be enough to drive the Communist out from the area if it was committed .

Westmoreland was unwilling to leave the Viet Cong with a position from which they could dominate Ph??c Long Province . So , on June 13 , he made the decision to insert U.S. combat forces . Subsequently , 738 men of the 1st Battalion (Airborne) , 503rd Infantry Regiment , 173rd Airborne Brigade , were flown out to the staging area in Ph??c Vinh . Elements of the 3rd Battalion (Airborne) , 319th Artillery also followed later in the day . Upon arrival at Ph??c Vinh , the U.S. Army task force waited for five days , but it soon became apparent that the Viet Cong had withdrawn from the area and had no intention of holding territory . On June 18 , the 1 / 503rd Infantry was ordered to return to base .

= = Aftermath = =

In this battle both sides of the conflict had paid a heavy price to achieve their objectives . After the battle , search parties found several hundred VC bodies within small arms range of the Special Forces compound and district headquarters , and another 126 VC bodies inside these compounds . Numerous other Viet Cong casualties had been evacuated or incurred in the fighting beyond the towns borders . In their efforts to recapture the district town of ??ng Xoài , the South Vietnamese military lost 416 soldiers killed in action , 174 wounded and 233 missing . In addition , over one hundred South Vietnamese civilians were believed to have been massacred by the Viet Cong during their brief occupation of the area . Total casualties sustained by U.S. military personnel included 20 soldiers killed or wounded , and 13 missing . According to Vietnam 's official account of the ??ng Xoài campaign , the Communists claimed to have put 4 @,@ 459 enemy soldiers (including 73 Americans) out of action . Furthermore , 1 @,@ 652 weapons of various kinds were captured , 390 weapons and 60 vehicles were destroyed , 34 aircraft and 3 helicopters were shot down .

Even though the Viet Cong had won a clear victory over the regular units of the South Vietnamese army , they did not get away with light casualties . After the battle , a combined total of 126 Viet Cong bodies were recovered within the Special Forces compound and the district headquarters , and several hundred more were strewn all over the battlefield . Indeed , individual Viet Cong soldiers usually spare no efforts to evacuate their dead or wounded comrades ; but as military operations were conducted during the rainy season , the Viet Cong struggled to evacuate all their casualties from the battlefield as conditions on the main roads deteriorated . Despite the minor setbacks , the ??ng Xoài campaign marked the rapid maturity of the Viet Cong 9th Division as a fighting force . For

their efforts during the battle , the Viet Cong 272nd Regiment received the title of ' ??ng Xoài Regiment ' to mark their achievements .

Six days after large @-@ scale fighting in ??ng Xoài had concluded there was another change of government in Saigon . South Vietnamese Air Marshal Nguy?n Cao K? was appointed prime minister and executive chairman of the government by the military junta , and General Nguy?n V?n Thi?u became a figurehead president . Unlike previous leaders , Air @-@ Marshal K? and General Thi?u were more interested in fighting the Communists , and they intended to stop the Buddhist factions from interfering with their decision @-@ making processes . However , due to Air Marshal K? 's lack of experience in civil government , the Americans were not entirely pleased with the formation of a new government with him as the leader . In contrast , General Thi?u 's appointment to the office of president was considered to be a positive development by the American Embassy and military command , because he possessed the political skills required by Saigon ' s political establishment . Nonetheless , K? 's ascension to the position of prime minister had effectively ended the cycle of military coups which had plagued Saigon since the downfall of Ngô ?ình Di?m .

In a significant contrast to the political scene in South Vietnam , the North Vietnamese government in Hanoi were far more occupied with their military effort . The North Vietnamese Transportation Group 559 , then under the leadership of Major @-@ General Phan Trong Tue , was ordered to open a new transportation and communication lines through southern Laos and South Vietnam . The purpose was to facilitate the movement of troops and material through the Pathet Lao @-@ occupied section of the Ho Chi Minh trail . They were supported by 1 @,@ 500 workers from the Ministry of Transportation and 7 @,@ 600 volunteers . By the end of 1965 , the strength of Group 559 had grown to 24 @,@ 400 personnel organised in six battalions of motor vehicles , one battalion of boats , 18 battalions of combat engineers , four battalions of anti @-@ aircraft artillery and guard units . In addition to the expansion of their logistical abilities , the North Vietnamese also decided to establish five infantry divisions and one artillery in South Vietnam . Thus , the stage was set for a major military struggle with American and other allied forces .