

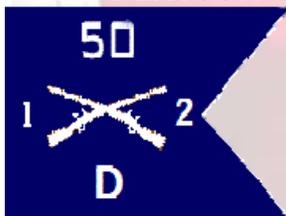


1<sup>ST</sup>  
AIR CAVALRY  
DIVISION



1<sup>ST</sup> BATTALION  
50<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY

2<sup>ND</sup> PLATOON



"D" COMPANY



SECOND  
LIEUTENANT



INFANTRY

## MELVIN DEWAYNE SODOWSKY

"D" Company, 2nd Platoon Leader, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Mechanized), 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry  
Second Lieutenant, O1, O5336966, MOS 1542

Home of Record: Fairview, OK

Date of Birth: April 20, 1946, Age at time of loss: 21, Single

1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), Binh Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam

Start of Tour: August 23, 1967, Date of Casualty: December 10, 1967, Days in Country: 109

Casualty Type A1, Other causes, Panel 31E - Row 078

Lieutenant Melvin Sodowsky was the first Officer from the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 50th Infantry, killed in Vietnam. He sustained a fatal head injury on December 10, 1967, when "D" Company came under heavy fire from the village of My An (2). Medic Randy Smith remembers rushing to drag the stricken officer from his Armored Personnel Carrier, but he had died instantly of his wound.

Fourteen 50th Infantry men were killed in the Battle of Tam Quan, which was the major battle of the 1st Air Cavalry Division's "Operation Pershing" on the coastal Bong Son Plains in and around Binh Dinh Province. 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) units, including the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 50th Infantry, and the 40th ARVN Regiment engaged the NVA/VC including the 7th and 8th Battalions of the 22nd NVA Regiment, 3rd NVA Division in a running battle from the 6th through the 20th of December, 1967.



The engagement began on the 6th of December when a scout helicopter from "A" Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry observed an antenna and received small arms fire from a native village structure in the vicinity of the village of Dai Dong (2) near the city of Tam Quan, from which the ensuing battle took its name. Late in the afternoon, a Platoon of Infantryman (Blues) from Troop "A" were sent to investigate the antenna and became pinned down by intense enemy automatic and small arms fire. Reinforcements from "B" Company, 1st of the 8th Cavalry and a "Ready Reaction" platoon of Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) from "A" Company, 1st Battalion, 50th Infantry were able to successfully remove the 9th Cavalry elements that had been pinned down.

The following morning, on December 7th, after prep artillery fire and CS Gas deployment, the "A" Company Ready Reaction force was called in to help the now engaged troops from "A" Company, 1st of the 8th Cavalry in the same vicinity. Lt. Hinton's RTO was killed in this action. Dudley Arlentino of Coolidge, Arizona became the first 50th Infantry man killed in the battle.

At this time, other 50th Infantry elements became fully involved in the battles as the enemy forces were located and attacked by our companies. "D" Company, which was a new company, was called in at noon on December 7th and fought there for three days.

Rigo Ordaz recalls, "In the initial days of the Battle of Tam Quan, D Company made it to the AP and UPI reports back home and even to the New York Times. When Delta company got called in, it was about noon on the 7th of December. We fought hard that day, and we were the ones that broke through the bunker and trench line, where the enemy had kept A Company and 1/8 Cavalry back.

We battled the enemy at Dai Dong (2) for three days (December 7th, 8th, and 9th). After the third day, we got pulled back in the evening to LZ English for some rest, a shower and clean clothes, but our rest got cut short the next day on December 10th as some unit of ARVNS South Vietnamese Army (our allies) were caught in an ambush crossfire at My An (2), another small village to the south of Dai Dong (2). We took off and got them out, but then I think they started shooting from behind us. This battle made it to many newspapers back home. There was a lot of shooting from everywhere, and I think some of our casualties were from what they call 'friendly fire'. Lieutenant Sodowsky was in the APC next to mine, and I saw when he got hit. It was a big loss to us, as we all liked him. We kept on fighting until the 14th of December, when some of our other companies came in to continue the fighting."

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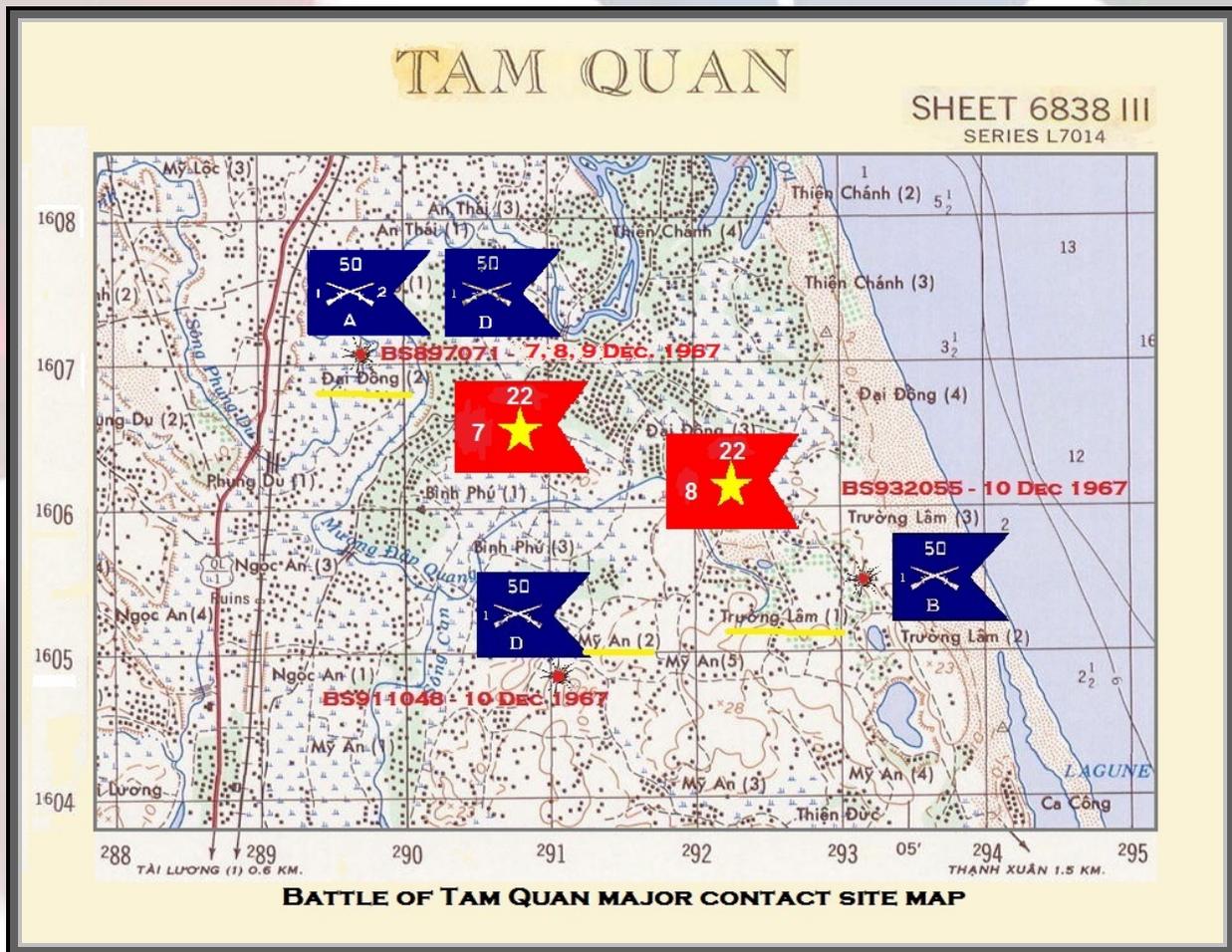
In accordance with Ordaz's account, "D" Company 2nd platoon medic Pete Tovar reports that there was much noise, smoke, confusion, and chaos when Lt. Sodowsky was hit. He remembers hearing the officer on the radio after his APC was hit by the B-40 self-propelled rocket, which was the main weapon used against their tracks. According to Tovar, Lt. Sodowsky was trying to radio the CO track that they had taken a rocket and had casualties that needed to be tended to. He apparently succumbed to his own wounds shortly thereafter. Tovar remembers Lt. Sodowsky as a "tall, lean man very dedicated to the effort - a soldier's soldier". Lt. Sodowsky replaced Lt. Dennis Driscoll, who had been wounded earlier when a friendly artillery round fell short into their position; Tovar recalls, "It seemed Melvin was with us only a short time, but I'll never forget him. He was indeed a leader who even during his last minutes was doing what he could for those he led. Without a doubt he was truly respected by us all. For those of us who knew him personally, I believe we can all attest to his love of country and honor to the U.S. Army. None of us will ever know what he would have been today, but we can only imagine."

Louis Frisbie, who first met Lt. Sodowsky in the "C" Company, 2nd Battalion (Mechanized), 41st Infantry AIT Training at Fort Hood, Texas, where Lt. Sodowsky was his platoon leader, recalls that Melvin was "the best officer we had" and that he always treated his men well. Both Frisbie and Lt. Sodowsky were transferred to the 1st 50th (M) Infantry later on in preparation for deployment to Vietnam, and Lt. Sodowsky was again Frisbie's platoon leader. Having been taken out of the platoon to become the radio operator for the Company Commander, Frisbie was on the other side of the village on December 10th when Lt. Sodowsky was hit. Frisbie recalls, "I was very sorry to hear he had passed."

Actions on the 10th of December saw ten men killed from "B" Company at the village of Truong Lam (1) and three men killed from "D" Company at the village of My An (2).

Most sources list the enemy (VC/NVA) dead for the battle at 650, and friendly forces lost a total of 58 men.

A map of the location of the three key engagements of the Battle of Tam Quan is shown below:



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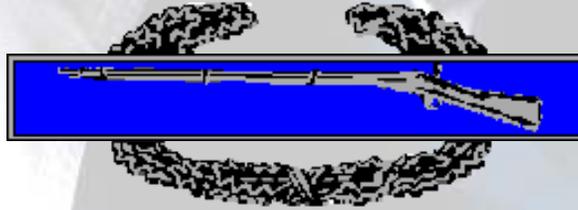
Melvin Sodowsky is buried at Lone Star Cemetery near Fairview, Oklahoma (south of Highway 412 and east of Highway 281 on N 2400 Road).



Photo immediately above is of Melvin Sodowsky's brothers tending his grave for Memorial Day 2010. Photos supplied by the Sodowsky family.

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## MELVIN SODOWSKY'S AWARDS AND DECORATIONS



Combat Infantry Badge



HQ, 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMObILE)

GENERAL ORDERS NUMBER 543

24 JANUARY 1968

FOR GALLANTRY IN ACTION WHILE ENGAGED IN MILITARY OPERATIONS INVOLVING CONFLICT WITH AN ARMED HOSTILE FORCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. SECOND LIEUTENANT SODOWSKY DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF BY EXCEPTIONALLY VALOROUS ACTION ON 10 DECEMBER 1967, WHILE SERVING AS A PLATOON LEADER WITH COMPANY D, 1ST BATTALION (MECHANIZED), 50TH INFANTRY DURING A COMBAT MISSION NEAR BONG SON, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. WHEN AN ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIER WAS HIT BY HOSTILE RECOILLESS RIFLE FIRE AND SEVERAL CASUALTIES WERE SUSTAINED, LIEUTENANT SODOWSKY LEFT HIS VEHICLE AND MOVED THROUGH THE ENEMY FIRE TO ASSIST HIS INJURED MEN. HE THEN CARRIED THE INJURED SOLDIERS TO HIS VEHICLE FOR MEDICAL EVACUATION. ASSUMING COMMAND OF HIS ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIER WHEN THE VEHICLE COMMANDER WAS WOUNDED, LIEUTENANT SODOWSKY DIRECTED ITS MOVEMENT UNTIL HE BECAME MORTALLY WOUNDED HIMSELF. HIS GALLANT ACTION WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN CAPTURING A LARGE NUMBER OF HOSTILE SOLDIERS AND CONTRIBUTED GREATLY TO THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF HIS UNIT'S MISSION. LIEUTENANT SODOWSKY'S GALLANT ACTION IS IN KEEPING WITH THE HIGHEST TRADITIONS OF THE MILITARY SERVICE, AND REFLECTS GREAT CREDIT UPON HIMSELF, HIS UNIT, AND THE UNITED STATES ARMY.



Silver  
Star

Purple  
Heart

National  
Defense

Vietnam  
Service

Vietnam  
Campaign