

AFTER ACTION REPORT OF THE SAME BATTLE
As transcribed by then MSG David Butters, Battalion Operations Sergeant
from the official document submitted to the Commanding General, 4th Infantry
Division

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 2D BATTALION 35TH INFANTRY
3D BDE 25TH INF DIV

AVDC-C-CTB

19 March 1967

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report for 12 March 1967

TO: Commanding General
4th Infantry Division
APO US Forces 96262

Commanding Officer
3d Bde TF, 25th Inf Div
APO US Forces 96355

Commanding Officer
1st Bde, 4th Inf Div
APO US Forces 96265

1. NAME OF OPERATION: SAM HOUSTON (part)
2. DATE OF OPERATION: 0700 12 March 67 - 0700 13 March 67
3. LOCATION:
 - a. A Company.....vic YA 662486
 - b. B Company.....vic YA 658488
 - c. C Company.....vic YA 661486
4. COMMAND AND CONTROL HEADQUARTERS:
 - a. HQ, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf
 - b. Company A, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf
 - c. Company B, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf
 - d. Company C, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf
5. REPORTING OFFICERS:

- a. LTC Clinton E. Granger, CO 2nd Bn, 35th Inf
- b. CPT S.L.C. Barcena, CO, A Company, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf
- c. 1LT Vaughn D. Brauer, Acting CO, B Company, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf
- d. CPT Ronald B. Rykowski, CO, C Company, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf

6. TASK ORGANIZATION:

- a. Company A, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf
- b. Company B, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf
- c. Company C, 2nd Bn, 35th Inf

7. SUPPORTING FORCES:

- a. Btry C, 2nd Bn, 9th Arty
- b. USAF
- c. Engineer Sqd, D Company, 4th Engineer Bn
- d. Btry D, 5th Bn, 16th Arty

8. INTELLIGENCE: None

9. MISSIONS:

- a. Company A was to conduct a reconnaissance of the area of the B-52 strike.
- b. Company B was initially designated to secure the battalion fire base; subsequently, the company was directed to attack from NW to SE and link up with A Company.
- c. Company C was initially to conduct local search and destroy patrols vic YA 666548, subsequently, the company was directed to attack from SW to NE and link up with A Company

10. BACKGROUND:

- a. The 2nd Bn, 35th Inf continued to conduct search and destroy, ambush, and blocking operations while attached to the 1st Bde, 4th Inf Div.
- b. At 1900 11 March 67 Company A closed into a night location vic YA663489. The mission for the following day was to continue the sweep of the area bounded by YA 648479, YA 673495, YA680480, YA655488 (See Tab A).
- c. At 1900 11 March Company B had closed at the battalion fire support base and had assumed the mission of securing the FSB and of conducting local patrols.

- d. At 1900 11 Mar 67 Company C had closed on its night location, CP 25, vic YA 666548 and had the mission of conducting local search and destroy operations in that vicinity.

11. EXECUTION:

- a. Company A departed its night location at 0705 hours 11 March 67 and began sweeping SW on three axes, 1st Platoon on the right, 3rd Platoon in the center, and 2nd Platoon with the headquarters section on the left. (See Tab B) At approximately 0850 hours 11 March the 1st Platoon observed two NVA without weapons or equipment running down a trail that roughly paralleled A Company's axis of advance. These enemy were killed. Four other enemy were observed and killed and the lead elements deployed into a maximum security formation. Shortly afterward, the lead elements of the 1st Platoon were engaged by SA and AW fire from well concealed bunkers approximately twenty meters to its front. The 1st Platoon began taking heavy casualties. CPT Barcena brought indirect fire to bear on the enemy and instructed 2LT Karopcyzc to take his platoon, the 3rd Platoon, and maneuver to the left to relieve the 1st Platoon. Due to the heavy vegetation it was approximately 1000 hours before the 3rd Platoon began to close on the area near the 1st Platoon. (See Tab C). At this time the lead element of the 3rd Platoon noticed that there were well concealed bunkers about thirty meters to their front. 2LT Karopcyzc immediately deployed the 3rd Platoon on line, and shortly afterward, heavy AW fire was received from the bunkers to the front and one flank of the platoon. 2LT Karopcyzc was seriously wounded in the early moments. His Platoon and the NVA exchanged a heavy volume of fire; however, 2LT Karopcyzc was able to reorganize the platoon and disengage to move to a better location. 2LT Karopcyzc then pulled the platoon into a tight perimeter and notified the company commander that the platoon was almost surrounded and sustaining heavy casualties. (See Tab D). Meanwhile, the 2d Platoon, the company headquarters section and a small contingent from HHC S-3 had attempted to move forward and establish a perimeter when they began to receive SA fire (See Tab C). At this time the 1st Platoon had withdrawn and pulled into a tight perimeter, but was still receiving a heavy volume of fire from the NVA positions and was unable to disengage. At approximately 1200 hours the three platoons were isolated and actively engaged by NVA in bunkers and trees, and positions on the ground.
- b. Company C was notified at 1100 hours that it would be committed at 1200 hours. At 1200 hours Company C began the airlift into LZ vic YA655476. Company C completed the airlift at 1301 hours and began to move WNW to set up blocking positions. (See Tab A). Company C was instructed at 1530 hours to move NE and effect a link up with Company A.
- c. During the period 1200 - 1530 hours, the 3rd Platoon and 1st Platoon of Company A were still in contact, but had set up defensive positions and attempted to evacuate their wounded. At 1600 hours, the 3rd Platoon sent an eight man squad to the 2d Platoon to secure ammunition. At 1630 hours the

eight man squad, plus five men from the 2nd Platoon and one man from the headquarters section, began to move back to the 3rd Platoon position. At 1650 hours the fourteen man element was hit by NVA mortar fire, and fired upon by a ground element that was attempting to flank the 3rd Platoon (See Tab D). Pinned down by heavy AW fire, the fourteen men began to receive heavy casualties from the mortar fire. The element sustained eight casualties and was separated into two smaller elements. The two small elements remained pinned down until Company C linked up with them at approximately 2300 hours.

- d. At 1330 hours Company B was committed northwest of Company A. Company B began its airlift at 1350. At 1530 hours Company B closed at the LZ location vic YA 649501 and began moving SE. (See Tab A). At 1733 hours Company B received sniper fire from one NVA and killed him. Company B was traveling in columns of platoons for speed and control, with the 3rd Platoon in the lead. At 1800 hours the point of the lead element began to receive heavy AW fire from well concealed bunkers 25 - 30 meters to its front. The 3rd Platoon took heavy casualties in the initial engagement from well directed enemy 82mm mortars and automatic weapons (See Tab E). 1LT Brauer, acting CO of Company B, immediately maneuvered the 1st Platoon to the right and the 2nd Platoon to the left in an attempt to flank the NVA positions and disengage the lead elements. At 1830 hours the 1st Platoon received heavy SA and AW fire and was forced to halt; also, at 1840 hours the 2d Platoon reported that it was receiving heavy SA fire and also could not advance. From 1915 hours to 1930 hours, the three platoons exchanged fire, directed indirect fire, and began to receive mortar fire. The 82mm rounds that Company B received appear to have been preplanned concentrations. The 1st Platoon received heavy casualties from the mortar rounds. 1LT Brauer, realizing that the NVA position was larger than previously estimated, requested permission and began to disengage the company. (See Tab F). The 1st and 2d Platoons, and the company headquarters section withdrew 100 meters and set up a perimeter. They treated their wounded, and sent back a party to help the 3rd Platoon evacuate the wounded. The 2d Squad, 2d Platoon returned to the 3d Platoon position and assisted in evacuating the wounded under intense enemy fire (See Tab G). At 2400 hours, 1LT Brauer ordered the 1st Platoon and the 2d Platoon (- the 2d Squad) to move to the NW and secure an LZ, so that the evacuation of the wounded could be accomplished as soon as possible. The 3d Platoon was receiving only sporadic sniper fire at this time. 1LT Brauer also directed the 3d Platoon to withdraw with its wounded to the LZ. The 3d Platoon and the 2d Squad, 2d Platoon arrived at the LZ at 0140 with the wounded (See Tab H). The helicopter medical evacuation pilot, "DUSTOFF 24", made five extractions and at 0300 hours, all wounded had been removed from the Company B LZ. Company B then consolidated and continued to develop defenses for the night. Throughout the night, the perimeter received sporadic sniper fire and some mortar rounds.
- e. During the same period from 1500 hours, Company C had continued its progress to the northeast, and at 1745 hours made contact with one NVA

sniper, vic YA658485. The sniper was killed. Company C continued to move toward Company A with the 3d Platoon on the left, the 2d Platoon on the right, and the 1st Platoon and headquarters section trailing. At 2215 hours, the lead elements of the 2d and 3d Platoons began receiving SA fire from positions to their front. One particular position delivered AW fire on a line between the two platoons. CPT Rykowski, CO of Company C, moved forward and personally eliminated this position (See Tab I). CPT Rykowski then maneuvered the 3d Platoon to the left and the 2d Platoon to the right in an attempt to flank the positions (See Tab J). As the 3d Platoon maneuvered, the NVA detonated approximately five Claymore mines and placed a heavy volume of fire on the platoon. At this time, the 2d Platoon also began to receive a heavy volume of fire from the position to its front. CPT Rykowski, then realizing that the NVA force was larger than earlier estimated, disengaged the 2d and 3d Platoons and formed a company perimeter. He employed indirect fire on front and flanks throughout the night. Shortly before 2300, CPT Rykowski sent LT Rutledge, the 3d Platoon leader, and some of his element out to effect a link up with the 3d Platoon, Company A. LT Rutledge moved down the draw and to the right and in doing so met the remnants of the fourteen man composite squad from A Company. LT Rutledge's element carried these wounded into the Company C perimeter at approximately 2300 hours. At 0130 CPT Rykowski sent another element to try and contact the 3d Platoon of Company A. Radio contact had been established earlier between the two units, and both had agreed to use a whistle to locate and identify each other. As the element from Company C approached the 3d Platoon's position, they gave the prearranged signal and received approximately forty answers from all around the 3d Platoon's position. Realizing that any attempt at link up would undoubtedly result in heavy casualties, and knowing that the 3d Platoon of Company A was not receiving any fire at this time, CPT Rykowski ordered his element to return. The element reached the company at 0150 without further incident. At 2300 hours, CPT Rykowski had moved the 1st Platoon and the headquarters element to an area to the southeast that was capable of being developed into an LZ. After the unsuccessful try at link up with the 3d Platoon of Company A, CPT Rykowski moved his other two platoons and the wounded from Company A to this LZ. Throughout the night, Company C, while still under sniper fire from the NVA positions, worked on the LZ so the wounded from both companies could be evacuated at first light. At 0330 hours contact was broken by the NVA.

12. RESULTS AND COMMANDERS ANALYSIS:

- a. Enemy casualties are estimated at 200, of which 55 were buried after the battle, 30 were observed as being killed by small arms or artillery fire by eyewitnesses, and the remainder an estimated enemy loss based on bandages, blood, and similar indications of enemy casualty evacuation.
- b. The enemy can be divided into two separate and distinct units. Those on the north had old weapons and equipment, and the physical condition of

the dead indicated that they had been on extensive campaigns prior to the engagement. The enemy encountered in the south had new weapons and equipment, new uniforms, a full basic load of small arms ammunition and grenades, and the condition of the dead indicated that they were fresh troops; e.g. the soles of the feet were not calloused.

- c. Friendly casualties totaled 14 dead and 46 wounded, as follows:

Company A - 6 KIA, 13 WIA

Company B - 7 KIA, 26 WIA

Company C - 5 WIA

HHC - 1 KIA, 1 WIA

52d Avn - 1 WIA

- d. The effectiveness of the enemy unit as a cohesive fighting force was destroyed as a result of the battle, and it is believed that he withdrew, carrying all possible wounded and dead into Cambodia.

Sic Clinton E. Granger, Jr.
 CLINTON E. GRANGER, JR.
 LTC, Infantry
 Commanding

My Epilogue

It must be remembered that the author of the newspaper article was a civilian. He tended to get his platoon designations confused. He also had no idea who the Lieutenant was who stuck his finger in the bullet hole of his chest wound or the real end of his story. As indicated in the official after action report, his name was 2LT Stephen Karopczyk (pronounced Kar op chek). He was a young 2nd Lieutenant fresh out of ROTC. Initially he was assigned as Liaison Officer in S-3 where he served for about a month. But, Alpha company was short of officers and he wanted to get into the war. He got his wish and died a hero's death directing and protecting his men. For his action on that fateful day he was awarded the nations highest award, the Medal of Honor. He is the only Cacti Blue in receipt of the MOH during my tenure with the battalion. Following is the official citation of his heroism: