

Stan Tyson asked me to contribute to what remains in my memory bank, after all these years, concerning the Cacti battle at LZ10 Alpha.

My principal recollection (I'd be remiss not to mention it first) is of the magnificent, courageous, winning fight there by Cacti soldiers and their leaders. That said, 30 plus years somehow having stolen away, much of the detail of that heroic action is blurred by other battles, other years. What I do recall is this: There was no specific reason to believe the enemy was present in force vicinity 10 Alpha. It simply seemed a likely spot. But to insert a force there to check it out was risky, reason being that 10 Alpha was at the outer range limit of our supporting artillery. This constraint had nothing to do with whether to place preparatory fares on and around the LZ. Reason: I had no intention of including such fires in our plan. I had close to zero enthusiasm for them, believing strongly that were enemy present preparatory fires surely would give them a hint that a heliborne attack was likely. Instead, when there existed an alternate LZ in the same general area as the LZ we actually intended to use (but not too close), I preferred to put preparatory fires there. This is precisely what was done in the case of 10 Alpha. We were fortunate indeed to have employed this ruse. It permitted our insertion to achieve total surprise. (Memory tells me the enemy troops were receiving some kind of training in the shade some distance removed from their prepared gun positions, guns that would have devastated our insertion had surprise been absent.) But also surprised was Jim Maisano, commanding the 2/35 company first inserted, when the enemy stayed surprised not for long. His radio message to me left no doubt that he and his men had stepped on a hornets nest. At that moment, because at that time my own location also faced enemy ground force action, I radioed my executive officer, Stan Tyson, and suggested that he round up another Cacti company (that company turned out to be A/1/35 commanded by Tony Bisantz), get to 10 Alpha without delay and take command there. His response was standard Tyson-- calm, confident, and quick. From that point on, for his leadership under

fire, for that of his subordinate leaders, and for the fighting spirit and tenacity of their soldiers, there is only one word, sufficient! That word is magnificent!

Who could have known that our insertion into 10 Alpha would place our lads into the mid-section of a much larger enemy force. It was only a guess. Had I known, the action planned surely would have been different and much more substantial. But that also would have precluded the way this glorious page in the fighting history of Cacti soldiers unfolded. How lucky we all were, and still are, to have been Cacti!

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LZ 10 ALPHA

28 – 29 May 1966

On 27 May 1966, the 2/35 Inf conducted a heliborne assault into AO 11 and 12 with companies A and B landing at LZ 12A (YA 908385). The battalion (-) landed at LZ 11A (YA 873369). Companies A and B later closed to LZ 11A after conducting search and destroy operations to the northwest and southwest, respectively.

Based on a terrain analysis, the valley associated with LZ 10A (YA 769376) appeared to be a likely area for use by enemy forces, hence Company B was directed to prepare for a heliborne assault into LZ 10A on 28 May 1966.

On the morning of 28 May 1966, Company B, commanded by Captain James R. Maisano, conducted the heliborne assault into LZ 10A. Following the assault, the mission assigned was to conduct a search and destroy operation along an assigned axis to the east along the valley floor, establish a company ambush at dusk, and return to the battalion base, YA 873369, on 29 May 1966.

At 1100, the first lift of nine HU-1D helicopters placed 63 men (1st platoon, company HQ, and part of the 2d platoon) into the LZ without incident. As the 1st platoon secured the NW portion of the LZ, suddenly they began to receive heavy enemy small arms fire from an estimated reinforced squad. After the initial contact, which resulted in four US casualties, the LZ appeared secure; however, as DUSTOFF medevac aircraft attempted to land extremely heavy ground fire was received from the NW. The DUSTOFF aircraft was driven off with several hits. The estimate of enemy strength was raised to a reinforced platoon. Following the DUSTOFF incident, the volume of fire declined, although occasional sniper and AW fire continued to be triggered by movement of friendly troops.

Following the initial DUSTOFF attempt, 52d Avn Bn gunships (BUCCANEER 6) made repeated passes firing both machineguns and rockets into the wood lines running north and south. Particularly heavy fire was delivered against a machine gun which was firing across the flank of the 1st platoon from the SW and could not be reached by friendly small arms fire. The gunships, however, did not suppress enemy fire to the degree required. Friendly positions were marked with smoke and two A1E aircraft strafed and dropped napalm on the machinegun position. Still the machine gun continued in action. Another flight (F4C jet aircraft) appeared on the scene and shortly thereafter neutralized the enemy position with 500 pound bombs. The A1E's meanwhile, were effectively suppressing enemy fire to the north.

Immediately following the air strike, the 1st platoon maneuvered a squad to the southwestern portion of the LZ and made contact with two NVA. On contact, both fled into the woods to the west. A large number of packs and equipment plus one 12.7mm anti-aircraft weapon were found. The latter was returned to the company CP. The squad continued a clockwise sweep of the entire LZ. A second anti-aircraft

gun was found virtually destroyed by the airstrike. Discovery of guns #3, 4 and 5 followed in quick succession as the sweep was completed.

At approximately 1430, the remainder of Company B was lifted into the LZ. With the exception of some automatic weapons fire at the aircraft, this lift was carried out without major incident. On the ground, the 1st platoon put down a base of fire to the north. Enemy fire ceased as the aircraft departed. The perimeter was then reorganized and captured enemy equipment and gear were consolidated at the company CP.

Company B then began a sweep to the north to clear the area and obtain a body count. The initial count totaled ten. Sweep elements then moved out some 150 meters and returned; however, upon return, sniper fire again came from a bunker position at the north end of the LZ. Because the sweep elements of the 1st and 2d platoons were mixed, a consolidated squad attacked the bunker with grenades. Two NVA were KIA and two were captured. Both POW's were returned to the brigade CP. Because of this action, another sweep was generated. This sweep likewise received sniper fire from the NW. Snipers accounted for two friendly WIA. The 3d platoon maneuvered against the snipers, later determined to number two, and suffered one KIA and seven WIA, including the platoon leader who later in the day died of wounds. The snipers, both excellent marksman, were firing one semiautomatic and one automatic weapon from positions concealed behind trees. Both were killed by M-79 and M-60 MG fire.

At approximately 1630, the seriously wounded were lifted out by the brigade CO's helicopter. Prior to this, two DUSTOFF ships had been driven off by enemy fire. One of these had received several hits. Additional wounded subsequently were lifted out without incident by two 52d Avn Bn gunships. The enemy was believed to have withdrawn. Resupply was requested.

Information was then received that Company A, 1st Bn, 35th Inf, would be lifted into the LZ as a reinforcing element and would be placed under OPCON of the 2/35 Inf. The 2/35 Inf Executive Officer (Major Wallace S. Tyson) was lifted into the LZ to command the two company task force and to accomplish the mission of holding the LZ on the night of 28 May 1966. Company A, 1/35 Inf, commanded by Captain Anthony Bisantz, was lifted in at 1700. To assist in the landing, B 2/35 Inf put down a base of fire. No enemy fire was observed. The perimeter promptly was reorganized with A 1/35 Inf taking the western sector and B 2/35th Inf the eastern sector. Positions were prepared.

At approximately 1800, the Company A, 1/35 Inf, 81mm mortar section was lifted into the LZ along with one 4.2" mortar from the 2/35 Inf 107mm Cannon Platoon. Total mortars available thus consisted of two 81mm of B 2/35 Inf, two 81 mm of A 1/35 Inf, one 107mm of HQ 2/35 Inf and one 107mm of HQ 1/35 Inf. All were located on an "island" (the LZ was essentially a swamp) in the northeastern sector

of the LZ. By 2000, all DEFCONS had been fired and ammunition and ration resupply had arrived. LP's were put out and all was quiet.

At 0110, 29 May 1966, the task force was attacked along a 400 meter front confined to the north side of the LZ. The main attack appeared to be in a NW to S direction with a secondary attack driving NE to SW. The attack, which appeared to come in waves, lasted until 0300 and was followed thereafter by sporadic fire until 0430. During the attack, DEFCONS were fired by all available indirect fire weapons. Organic 81mm mortars fired almost all of their ammunition (200 rds), some as close as 25 meters to friendly positions. This mortar fire was extremely effective and is thought to have prevented a probable breakthrough. Friendly task force casualties were one 1 KIA and nine WIA.

At 0700, 29 May 1966, the task force conducted local sweeps fifty meters out, one platoon at a time. In the immediate area, some 30-40 NVA bodies were found. Later A 1/35th conducted a more extensive sweep while B 2/35 Inf, now in reduced strength, secured the perimeter.

Upon return of the sweep (approximately 0830), sniper fire again became frequent, in fact, B 2/35 Inf suffered its greatest number of casualties from sniper attacks. Much of the sniper fire was directed at the mortar positions, although it felt that the primary reason for the enemy's return was to fire on incoming aircraft. These snipers also used automatic weapons. From 0830 to 1200, sniper fire was so intense that personnel on the northern and eastern portions of the LZ effectively were pinned down. Armed helicopters were called to suppress the fire (causing 81mm fire on sniper positions to cease). Again because of the close proximity of friendly positions plus the heavy foliage density, the gunships were ineffective. An airborne FAC was contacted. He spotted ten automatic weapon positions at the east end of the LZ. Friendly lines were marked with smoke and two A1E's made two successful runs. The third run consisted of an accidental napalm attack on the CP of B 2/35 Inf. Results of this unfortunate incident were six WIA, all of whom later had to be evacuated. Two successful napalm runs followed, after which the FAC aircraft again hosed down the periphery of the LZ with heavy bombing and cannonading.

At approximately 1400 29 May 1966, C 1/35 Inf arrived by helicopter. The companies on the ground assisted by moving the northern edge of the LZ and laying down a base of fire to the N and NE. B 2/35 Inf and A 1/35 Inf then secured the northern portion of the LZ and C 1/35 secured the southern portion. This reinforcement caused the snipers to withdraw. At 1800, 1/35 Inf (-) closed and command in the LZ passed to CO, 1/35 Inf.

In the interim, resupply was effected. At 1600, sweeps began again. The goal was to push the perimeter out 150 meters in order to provide more adequate LZ security. Again snipers were encountered, with B 2/35 Inf taking the remainder of its casualties. During the perimeter expansion and the resupply activity, enemy 82mm mortar fire was received in and around the LZ. Light casualties resulted (WIA

only); however, one of the resupply ships was damaged. Organic mortars returned fire 360° around the LZ with constant shooting and traversing. This proved successful in quieting enemy mortar fire.

By 2000 29 May 1966, the new, perimeter was organized and dug in. Thereafter, all remained quiet with the exception of occasional probes.