

Col (Ret) Wallace S Tyson

3 January 1996

Lt Col Stanley B Clemons
Commanding Officer
2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry
25th Infantry Division (Light)
Schofield Barracks, HI 96857

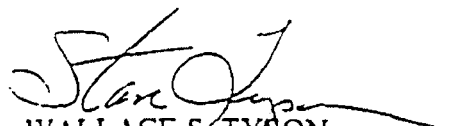
Dear Lt Col. Clemons,

First, I wish to express my appreciation for your letter concerning the 2/35th's Thanksgiving activities and the Regimental Room there in F Quad. History has always been a favorite subject of mine, and military museums and memento rooms should be a must for every battalion-sized unit. I always believed that Fort Monroe should be designated as the site for the Army Museum, and had that been done during the days of CONARC, the incumbent staff could have been one of the major exhibits. I was the one who sent Bob Ord the forty-eight star flag and the wooden crest so that they could be returned when the 2/35th was re-activated. The flag was replaced by the present version in 1965, and my CO, Lt. Col. George Scott, told me to figure out what to do with it - so I took it home. Same with the crest as the battalion was leaving for Vietnam in late December of that same year.

Enclosed is an expanded version of an after action report that I wrote following a set-to in May, 1966. Bravo 2/35th and Alpha 1/35th were paired in a two company Task Force, and I was fortunate enough to be the TF CO. Both units were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation. My original report was submitted to USARV, and with some additional information made available to me at a later date, I was able to flesh out some of the unknowns and make better sense of what was a pretty confusing situation at the time. Your Bravo Commander might be able to use it to explain to his troops how they got at least one of the PUC's they are probably wearing - or for whatever use you might see fit.

While on active duty, I commanded the 1/12th Cav on a second tour in Vietnam and the 3rd Bde, 1st Inf Div in Germany. Of all my assignments, your job was the absolute best. There's nothing better than being able to work with soldiers who walk in the mud for a living.

"CACTI"


WALLACE S TYSON
Col Inf
U.S.Army (Retired)

2D BATTALION, 35TH INFANTRY
3RD BRIGADE (SEP), 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION

LANDING ZONE 10 ALPHA

28 - 29 MAY 1966

PLEIKU PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

WALLACE S. TYSON
MAJOR INFANTRY
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
2D BATTALION, 35TH INFANTRY
25TH INFANTRY DIVISION (LIGHT)
SCHOFIELD BARRACKS, HAWAII 96857


APVG-TZB-CO (1)

14 May 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR All Bravo Company "Cacti" Soldiers

SUBJECT: Presidential Unit Citation

This is the history of how your company earned an additional Presidential Unit Citation for it's brave and gallant efforts on 28-29 May 1966 in the republic of Vietnam, Pleiku Province.



JOSEPH L. MATTISON
CSM, USA

PLEIKU PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

LANDING ZONE 10 ALPHA

The following is a description of the battle between Task Force TYSON, 3rd Brigade (Separate), 25th Infantry Division, and the 66th North Vietnamese Army Regiment at Landing Zone 10 ALPHA, Pleiku Province, Republic of South Vietnam, 28 and 29 May 1966. Map reference: YA 6536IV. Coordinates: 769376.

BACKGROUND

The 25th Infantry Division began its departure from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii in December, 1965, en route to the Republic of South Vietnam. Because of building pressure against the Central Highlands by North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regulars moving out of sanctuaries west of the Cambodian border, the 3rd Brigade of the 25th Inf was deployed directly to Pleiku Province in the western portion of the Highlands. The Advanced Party arrived in Pleiku on 26 Dec 1965, and the remainder of the Brigade, under the command of Colonel Everett A. Stoutner, completed the air movement of 4,000 men and over 9,000 tons of equipment in twenty-five days. The 3rd Brigade was composed of the 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry (1/14th); 1st and 2nd Battalions, 35th Infantry (1/35 and 2/35th); 2nd Battalion, 9th Artillery (2/9th); 1st Battalion, 69th Armor (1/69th); 3rd Provisional Support Battalion; C Troop, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment; and D Company, 65th Engineers.

In conjunction with the overall plan of deployment of US forces into areas where the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong forces were actively involved or where intelligence sources indicated enemy activity was increasing, the remainder of the 25th Inf Div, under Major General Fred C. Weyand's Divisional control, was deployed to Military Region Three. Arriving in-country after the first of the new year, they were positioned at Cu Chi, twenty miles northwest of Saigon.

Pleiku was the capital city of Pleiku Province and was located at the junction of Highways 14 and 19. Hwy 14 was a north/south artery that paralleled the Vietnamese/Cambodian border and connected Kontum, Pleiku and Ban Be Thout with regions farther south. Hwy 19 was little more than a dirt track from the Cambodian border east to Pleiku, and macadam from that city to Qui Nhon, some seventy miles farther east and on the coast of the South China Sea. Pleiku served not only as a Provincial Center and Headquarters for Gen Vihn Loc and the ARVN (Army, Republic of Vietnam) II Corps, but also as a major supply point for ARVN Regular and Regional Forces in the area. An airfield just outside the city, at Camp Holloway, provided a critical logistical link for the Special Forces Teams that were positioned in fortified camps, at extended intervals along the

border, for the purpose of providing early warning against enemy movement of personnel and supplies from the west. Prior to the arrival of the 3rd Bde/25th Inf, the major US ground force in the region was the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), based approximately forty miles east along Hwy 19 at An Khe. Even with the tactical advantage of unchallenged air mobility, the Central Highlands presented an area of rugged mountains, deep valleys and dense jungles that was greater than the Division could reasonably be expected to cover. To tie down the assets of the Cavalry by placing them on permanent "picket duty" along the Cambodian border would have negated much of the Division's tactical value as an airmobile strike force with the ability to mass a portion, or all, of its combat strength anywhere in-country on very short notice.

Phase I of the strategic objective of the Northern Liberation Front to seize the Highlands had been initiated the previous year. Its purpose was to seize Hwy 19, thereby cutting the southern Republic in half and severing ground communications and the logistical link between the northern and southern portions of the country. In conjunction with the onset of the summer monsoon, attacks from the west were planned against Pleiku and Kontum Provinces.

The potential disaster for the Republic began on 19 Oct 1965, with a three battalion attack/ambush against the South Vietnamese garrison at Plei Me. The attack was broken through the combined efforts of the ARVN and the availability of massive tactical air support. The fighting intensified during the early days of November as the 1st Cavalry was employed to execute airmobile search and destroy operations between Hwy 14 and the border. For the first time, the NVA were forced to deal with an enemy who was no longer road bound, but who was able to leap broad distances and take the fighting deep into previously inaccessible rear areas. The troopers of the Cav earned their Combat Infantry Badges several times over in the fighting that followed into mid-November in the valley of the Ia Drang and the Chu Pong massif. The Cav hit the NVA on their own ground, mauled the 33rd and 66th Regiments and sent the remnants scurrying back to their sanctuaries across the Cambodian border.

In late 1965, intelligence coming from Special Forces and ARVN sources indicated a heavy buildup of NVA strength to the west and predicted a renewal of the major effort against Hwy 19 and its connections north, south and east during the first quarter of 1966. One report estimated that as of first week of January, 1966, Pleiku City had a life expectancy of two to three weeks. The 3rd Bde was positioned in the western Highlands to help block the NVA attempt, and from the onset, the unit was tagged as the "fire brigade".

With the Bde base camp established outside of Pleiku City, the 3rd began its acclimation to the climate, terrain and local enemy units. Operations were expanded as expertise and familiarity grew, and these included company and reinforced battalion-sized search and

destroy missions north of Kontum along the border with Laos, medical assistance visits to isolated Montagnard villages in the back country, and road clearing and convoy security missions along both Hwys 14 and 19. One such security mission placed the 2/35th Inf high in the Mang Yang Pass above Hwy 19 on Easter Sunday. The road into the pass still bore the evidence of the ambush and total destruction of French Mobile Force 100 in 1954. The rusted hulks of French vehicles and the numerous clusters of French and Vietnamese graves along the approaches to the pass testified to the effectiveness of the Viet Minh tactics and fire power that destroyed them. A single stone obelisk, near route marker PK 15, stood in mute testimony to the men who had preceded us along that same stretch of highway some twelve years earlier. In French and Vietnamese, the inscription read, "Here on June 24, 1954, soldiers of France and Viet Nam died for their countries."

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10 MAY 1966

Intelligence received by Headquarters, First Field Forces, Vietnam (IFFV), Lt General Stanley "Swede" Larson, Commanding, through the network of Special Forces Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) camps along the border of the Central Highlands gave warning that a multi-regimental ground force was moving out of Cambodia into either Pleiku or Kontum Provinces. This action was not unexpected in that it was in keeping with the overall strategic plan for the conquest of the Highlands and represented a resumption of the effort that had begun six months earlier. In conjunction with the NVA advance, it was logical to predict that the isolated Special Forces camps on or adjacent to their route of approach would be targeted for elimination in order for the effort to be able to continue its movement eastward without having to be concerned with its rear areas. Earlier contact with the NVA in that area had identified the 33rd, 66th and 320th NVA Regiments. At that time, they were assigned units of Brigadier General Chu Huy Man's 3-3 Front. In addition, there were several other regiments listed as either "confirmed" or "possible", and the estimated strength massing behind the border was shown to be as high as seven regiments. It was reported that the identified units had spent sufficient time in "sanctuary" to refit and recover from the defeat suffered at the hands of the 1st Cav in the Ia Drang the previous November. Personnel replacement and resupply had been accomplished by use of the trail network (Ho Chi Minh Trail), passing through Cambodia and Laos reaching back into North Vietnam.

OPERATION PAUL REVERE

Operation "Paul Revere" was set in motion by Lt Gen Larson, IFFV, using forces available within the 3rd Bde, 25th Infantry Division. The stated mission of the operation was for the Brigade to intercept the enemy force along the border by inserting units to cover the primary routes of entry into the highlands. By conducting spoiling operations west of Pleiku, the 3rd Bde would disrupt the strategic plans of the Front and give early warning revealing both the location and size of the enemy thrust. The 3rd Bde was detached from the 25th Inf Div, designated "Separate", and command was passed to Brigadier General Glenn D. Walker, Assistant Division Commander, Maneuver, 25th Inf Div. The Bde moved southwest of Pleiku to search out a portion of the remote border area that measured almost eighty kilometers (forty-eight miles) in length by forty kilometers (24 miles) in width. Brigade Forward (Bde Fwd) was established twenty-five kilometers from Pleiku. The site was near Hwy 19 and took advantage of a location and an abandoned air strip that had been used by the 1st Air Cav the previous year. The base was named "Oasis".

As the summer monsoon gained momentum, the area was subjected to heavy rainstorms that fell from just before noon to dusk every day. Shortly after dark, periods of clear skies would follow. Star and moonlight were available if and when they could penetrate the double and triple canopy of overhead forest growth. By daylight, the clouds would begin to rebuild, and any advantage gained during the respite would soon be lost to the next day's deluge. During May, 1966, the rainfall in the Central Highlands totaled 22 inches. Gen Walker assigned his combat battalions sectors of the area west of the Bde base camp, and search and destroy operations were started. Each battalion moved out from Oasis, and set up a Battalion Forward (Bn Fwd), with a Battery of 105mm artillery attached and positioned so as to provide support to the infantry companies that would range westward to the border. The 105mm's fire support range was approximately ten kilometers (six miles), and that set the operational limits for the infantry. Prior to moving his units into the mountains and valleys that lay to the west of Oasis, Lt Col Philip R. Feir, commanding the 2/35 Inf, and his Operations Officer, Major Glenn M. Reisling, Jr., overflew the battalion area of operations (AO) and every potential landing zone (LZ) was plotted and numbered for future reference. The 2/35th Bn Fwd was established at an LZ designated as 11 ALPHA (YA 6536 IV, 655366). Units on the ground at that location consisted of the Headquarters and Command Group, Reconnaissance Platoon, and an attached Battery of 105's from the 2/9th Artillery Battalion. Captain Michael R. Tryon's Charlie Company provided the infantry security for the battalion tactical headquarters. In addition to the artillery dedicated to a specific infantry battalion, additional fire support was available and "on call" from batteries of 155mm and 8-inch howitzers located at Bde Fwd and from 175mm cannons positioned at the Special Forces camp at Duc Co.

26 MAY 1966

The 2/35th was conducting operations in an area measuring approximately thirty kilometers, north to south, lying just west of Special Forces camps located at Duc Co, to the south, and Plei Djereng, to the north. While Duc Co enjoyed the advantages afforded by its nearness to Hwy 19 and the fairly open terrain immediately to the south, Plei Djereng was isolated and served as a blocking position in the mountainous terrain to the north. Three east to west valleys divided the terrain assigned to the battalion, each with its primary stream that served as part of the watershed that fed westward into the Ia Nam (river) and eventually farther south into the Ia Drang. LTC Feir was faced with the tactical decision as to how best to employ the assets of his battalion to their maximum advantage in the rugged terrain within his AO. In order to do this, he had to determine which of the three possible routes the enemy would most likely chose as his primary axis if he were to attempt passage through the 2/35th's area of operations. The two Special Forces camps were located adjacent to the northern and southern approaches, but each was positioned to the outside of the high ridges that flanked the three valleys in question. All three approaches led into the Highlands, had ample water and their heavy overhead cover could easily serve to conceal a main route of advance for units up to regimental size. However, the advantages of the two routes to the outside were flawed because of their proximity to the Special Forces camps, and their use would be subject to discovery by the aggressive patrolling that was characteristic of the units stationed within the camps. Because of that, LTC Feir determined that the NVA would probably select the middle valley because it held the advantage of remoteness, coupled with a degree of security provided by the flanking ridges and valleys lying to the north and south. Further, if his mission included an attack against either of the Special Forces camps, the center route would allow the NVA Commander greater flexibility with freedom of movement to the north or south as a later situation might dictate.

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ENEMY SITUATION 01 MAY - 25 MAY 1966

Lt Col La Ngoc Chau, Commander of the 66th NVA Regiment, moved his unit across the Cambodian border into South Vietnam in early May, 1966. The 66th NVA had three infantry battalions assigned: the 7th, 8th and 9th. Each battalion contained approximately 450

Note: Comments on the ENEMY SITUATION are based on known intelligence reports, on conclusions drawn from the actions taken by the 66th NVA Regiment before and during the battle at 10 ALPHA and on a survey of the ground and surrounding area following the NVA withdrawal. Lt Col Chau commanded the Regiment in November, 1965.

officers and men and because of the heavy losses he experienced in the Ia Drang campaign, many of his line units were made up of untried and inexperienced personnel, fresh out of the Ho Chi Minh pipeline. In addition, the regiment carried an anti-aircraft battery of 12.5mm, tripod mounted, heavy machine guns. The 66th NVA was to attack the Special Forces camp at Plei Djereng, unite with two other regiments of the NVA 325th Div, also moving to the east, and exploit any success against American and South Vietnamese forces that might be developed. Failing this, he was to move back across the border to the sanctuary provided by Cambodia.

The 66th NVA established a base camp about ten kilometers inside South Vietnam and 1000 meters to the north of a swampy clearing that was later to be designated by the 2/35th as LZ 10 ALPHA. LTC Chau deployed security units of his regiment around that clearing and at other sites within the vicinity of his headquarters that might serve as landing zones for the American helicopters. At the clearing closest to his Regimental Headquarters (10 ALPHA), he placed five of his tripod mounted 12.7mm anti-aircraft guns just inside the tree line, and the crews dug firing pits into the swampy ground and camouflaged the positions. The infantry units that comprised the main body of his regiment, and other troops not required in the headquarters area or occupied with defense of the possible LZ's, were dispersed and prepared for movement to the east along the stream and parallel ridges that formed the middle avenue of approach to Plei Djereng.

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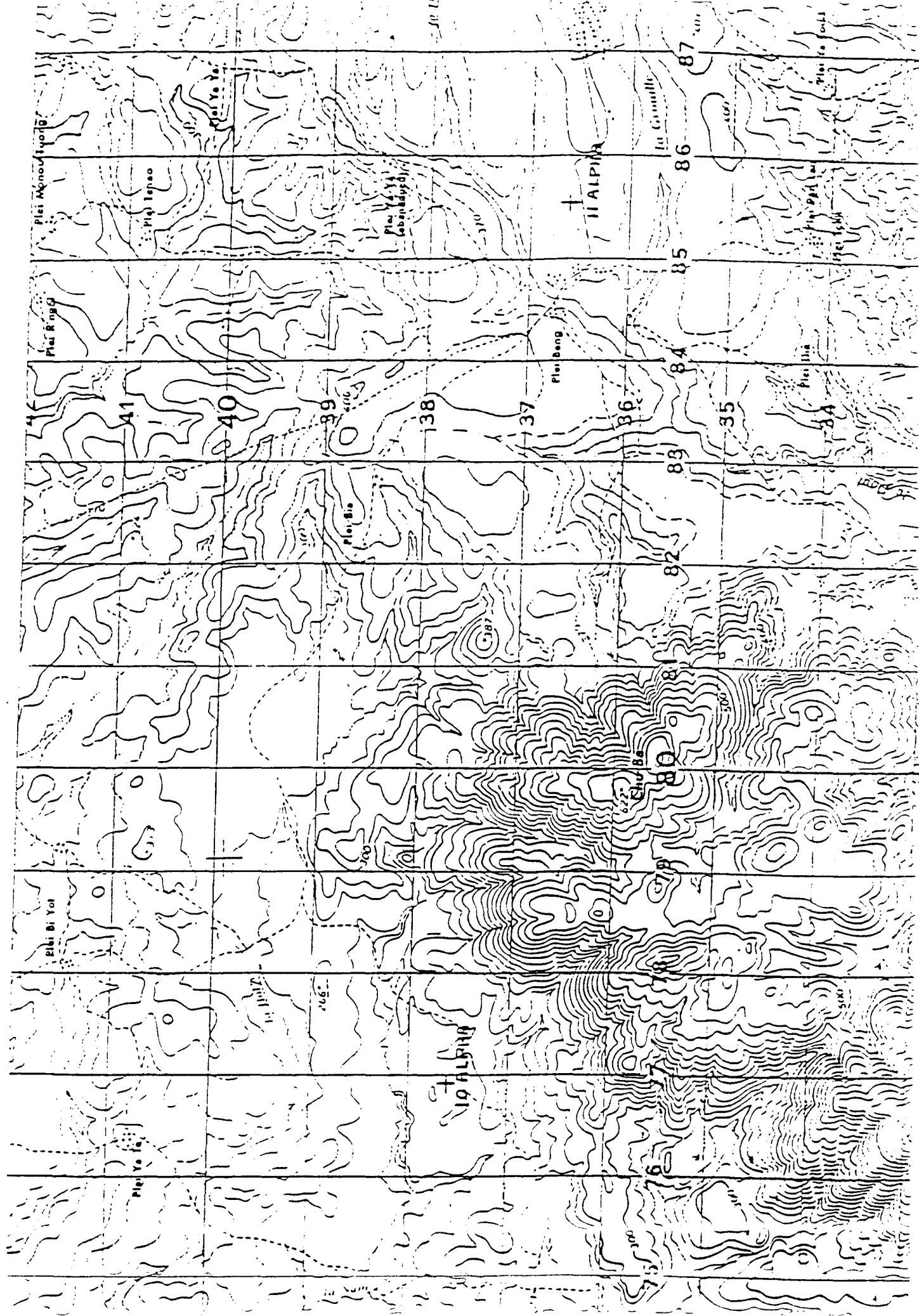
28 MAY 1966

On the morning of 28 May, as Executive Officer, 2/35th, I took a convoy of four vehicles from Oasis to the Bn Rear in Pleiku. The purpose of the convoy was two fold - the first being to pick up several supply items needed at Bn Fwd and by units working the bush farther west; and second, to round up 2/35th soldiers, who, for whatever reason, had returned to the Bn rear and had not found transportation back to their units in the field. Upon arrival in Pleiku, I was informed by a member of the staff that Company "B", 2/35th, commanded by Captain James Moisano, had conducted a combat assault that morning and was in heavy contact at an LZ designated as 10 ALPHA. With the supplies and about forty soldiers in hand, the convoy immediately returned to Oasis.

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1055 HOURS: 28 MAY 1966

At the time the convoy was leaving for the Rear, Bravo Company began its airlift from Bn Fwd at 11 ALPHA, bound for a small clearing near the border almost ten clicks westward. The unit's mission was to conduct a heliborne assault, check the immediate area



around LZ 10 ALPHA for signs of recent NVA activity and then sweep overland up the floor of the valley to the east and back to Bn Fwd. Each heliborne assault was preceded by a preparatory barrage fired by the 105mm Arty Battery supporting the Bn. The thirty to fifty round artillery prep was positioned to destroy or disrupt any enemy around an LZ and to buy time for the first heliborne lift to get in and place its troops on the ground, secure the LZ and provide security and support for subsequent lifts. However, the prep for 10 ALPHA was plotted in error using incorrect map coordinates and was fired on a clearing some 3000 meters to the south. Thus, the assault at 10 ALPHA went in without artillery support. Although that in itself could have been critical, it actually served as an advantage for the troops from Bravo Company. When the helicopters carrying Lt Bob Ponder's 1st Platoon landed in the three to five inches of water that covered much of the LZ, the element of total surprise worked in Bravo's favor. The NVA soldiers who were supposed to be manning the five 12.7mm anti-aircraft weapons that had been positioned around the clearing were not in the water filled pits, but were back from the guns on higher and drier ground. The heavy forest growth served to cushion the sound of the approaching helicopters, and the soldiers from the 1st Platoon captured two of the guns before their crews could react to the assault landing. Fire fights erupted around the other three positions, and they were quickly overrun. The NVA took immediate action by committing men to reinforce their unit fighting to recapture their guns and regain control of the LZ. The second lift, carrying Cpt Moisano and his Command Group, an 81mm mortar section, and part of the 2d Platoon, Lt Mike Glenn, came in under fire and joined the action. With fire fights breaking out all along the unit's restricted perimeter, Cpt Moisano called for fire support from the artillery. In so doing, the support mission ringed the LZ and precluded the rest of his company from coming in, and the trail elements were forced to return to 11 ALPHA. Bravo (-) was on its own to deal with the situation on the ground for the better part of two hours.

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1255 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

The force applying pressure against the LZ broke contact and withdrew into the heavy forest to the north. Artillery and tactical air support were placed on hold, and Cpt Moisano called for the remaining lifts of his unit to join him. Within an hour, Bravo had completed its insertion, and the perimeter was secured and expanded. Bravo reported to Bn Fwd that the area was relatively quiet, that two NVA prisoners had been taken, and that five 12.7mm anti-aircraft machine guns had been captured. There was no interpreter available to Bravo; however, one POW could speak a little English, but he would say nothing as to the size or designation of the NVA force that Bravo had stirred up. The prisoner acknowledged he was a member of the company assigned to defend the LZ, and stated that his Company Commander had killed himself after failing to recapture his

guns. Unit casualties up to that point were light and none of the wounded required immediate evacuation.

An initial sweep of the immediate area around the LZ failed to reestablish contact with the enemy force. The soldiers of Bravo Company started the day with a full basic load of ammunition (approximately 300 rounds), enough food and water to last for three days, and 10 Claymore anti-personnel mines per squad. By the time the remainder of the company reached the LZ, the two platoons that had been in contact were running short of ammunition and had to be resupplied before any further offensive action could be mounted. After his unsuccessful attempt to determine just what size enemy force his 1st Platoon had landed on, Cpt Moisano notified LTC Feir that following a resupply for his 1st and 2nd Platoons, he would be ready to move back to the east along the floor of the valley as originally directed or to react to any subsequent change in orders. Bravo was instructed to wait for supply ships and to send out casualties, POW's and the 12.7mm's. The unit was then to continue on its original mission: search the immediate area for continued presence of the enemy. If there were indications the NVA were headed back for the Cambodian border, to work the area over with the available artillery, and then move the unit eastward to determine if there had been any activity along a trail that led beside the stream bed of the central valley toward the Bn base at 11 ALPHA.

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1400 HOURS: 28 MAY 1966

Following the completion of the resupply and evacuation of casualties, weapons and prisoners, Bravo's platoons were sent out in a "cloverleaf" to sweep the area to the north, south and west. As the platoon moving to the north advanced into the heavy ground cover out from the LZ, enemy activity began again with sporadic firing from single individuals and small groups disposed along a small east to west stream, some 150 meters from the Bravo base. The volume of fire continued to build, and the flanks extended as more enemy joined the fire fight. The platoons were recalled and tied together as pressure built against the northern sector of the hastily formed perimeter. The attack gained in its intensity, and Bravo was pinned to the LZ. All offensive motion, either out from the LZ or back toward the east, was stopped. For the next hour or so, the pressure ebbed and flowed as the NVA probed the perimeter, slowing to almost nil in one sector, only to suddenly break out with renewed strength against another.

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1600 HOURS: 28 MAY 1966

The action at 10 ALPHA was monitored at both Bn and Bde Fwd's, and it was readily apparent that Bravo was into a situation that

could not be resolved unless additional help was sent in. Even then, if the NVA felt their losses were worth the effort, troops defending the LZ could expect a long and difficult night. The decision was made at Bde Fwd that Company "B" would hold in place and that reinforcements and resupply would be airlifted to the LZ. In that other 2/35th companies were not immediately available for the relief mission because of their deployment either on the high ground parallel to the central valley or at the Bn Fwd base, and because it was believed the "reaction" platoon of C/2/35th was of insufficient strength for the task at hand, Gen Walker tagged the 1/35th for a rifle company. "Alpha" Company, Cpt Tony Bizantz commanding, was ordered to move to a pickup point and await transportation to the west.

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1615 HOURS: 28 MAY 1966

Immediately upon returning to Oasis, I was told to report to Gen Walker in the Operations Center at Brigade Headquarters. I was briefed on the situation at 10 ALPHA and was told that LTC Feir had requested that I command the relief force. Once on the ground at the LZ, I was to take command of both units and their attachments and serve as the Task Force (TF) Commander. My mission was to conduct the defense of the LZ, and as soon as the situation allowed, to resume offensive operations. The elements of the TF were Companies "B", 2/35th, and "A", 1/35th, four 107mm (4.2 inch) mortar squads and in total, would number eleven officers and 258 men. All infantrymen of Alpha Company were issued double basic loads of ammunition, and additional ammunition was loaded for distribution to Bravo. The flights to pick up Cpt Bizantz's troops were inbound, and just enough time was available for me to pick up a FXC-25 radio, borrow an M-16 rifle from SFC Clarence Crawford, Admin Sgt of the 2/35th, fill my canteen, and get to the helicopter pad.

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1700 HOURS: 28 MAY 1966

Flying as a hitchhiker on one of the supporting gun ships, I arrived at LZ 10 ALPHA with the first lift of Alpha, 1/35th. The insertion of the lead element of the reinforcing company was accomplished as the fire fight ebbed and flowed around the perimeter. I sat on the floor on the left side of the Huey to get my initial view of the scene as my gunship paralleled the inbound flight. As we proceeded down the long axis of the LZ, the outboard machine gunner sprayed the trees below. The pilot did a 180 at the far end of the LZ, and as the last troop carrier lifted off, made a quick pass back up the floor of the clearing. His comment to me was, "Hit running, because I don't plan to stop!" As I jumped from the skids, I saw Cpt Moisan motioning from the edge of the trees on the south side of the LZ. The gunship lifted off, and the downwash

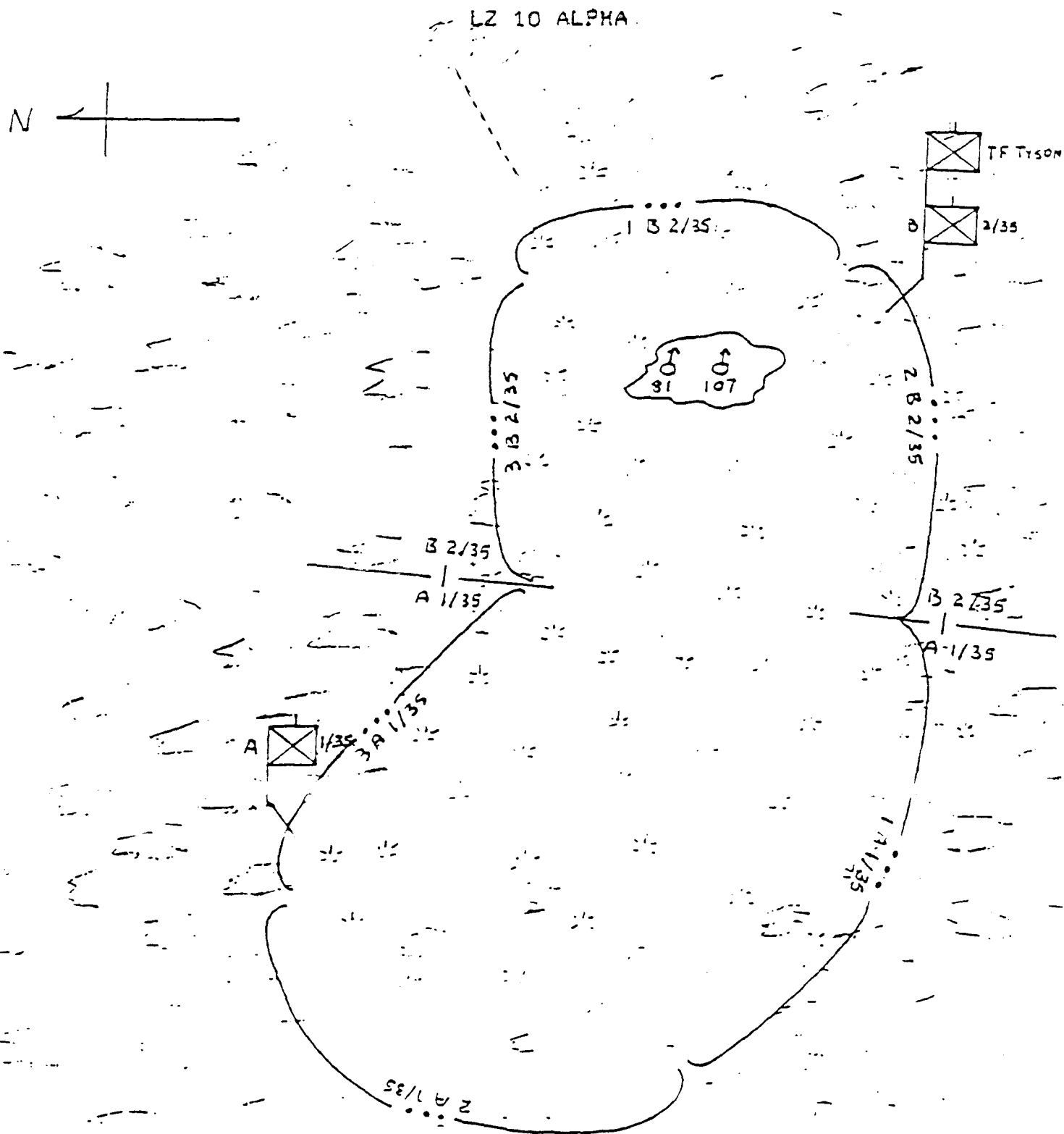
of its rotors blew the olive green poncho from the body of one of Bravo's soldiers who was lying among the dead and wounded at the unit collection point. At that time, Cpt Moisano's casualties totalled three killed and twenty-two wounded, and all were evacuated in the departing ships of the remaining flights. Cpt Bizantz moved his people into position and as later arrivals became available, the Task Force perimeter was consolidated and expanded.

10 ALPHA was situated in a low marsh-like clearing, completely devoid of any growth aside from the low grasses particular to the swamps of Southeast Asia. A few scattered trees stood in the western end, some thirty or so meters from the edge of the surrounding forest. At the opposite end, the heavy growth funneled back from the clearing, and presented a limited view of a small portion of the area some forty meters outside the perimeter. The LZ measured not more than 170 meters long by 100 meters wide, with the long axis of its slightly oval shape running from northwest to southeast. Most of the area was covered with standing water from one to five inches deep, with the only dry surface being a slight rise at the southern end of the clearing. The floor of the swamp was thick heavy clay that quickly gave way to rocky ground at the tree line where the elevation rose barely above the water line. The surrounding forest growth was of tall trees with little undergrowth close in to the clearing, but that thickened as the elevation rose and the soil became more supportive. The entrance to the trail to the east that Bravo had been tasked to sweep was clearly visible at the small end of the funnel as it left the clearing and disappeared immediately into the green. At a greater distance to the southeast stood the dominant high ground in the area - a mountainous rise designated as "Chu Ba" on the 1:50000 topographic map.

The IF Com Post was set up jointly with that of Bravo Company. Communication with both line companies was no problem, and one of Bravo RTO's (Radio Telephone Operator) was pressed into service as the IF Communications Center and manned the PRC-25. However, communication with Bn Fwd was a bit more complicated. In able to transmit or receive effectively, the radio had to be moved from under the trees and out into the open area. Several transmissions were made without incidence, especially during the hours of darkness. On one attempt to transmit the following day, a sniper, who had obviously noticed the procedure, fired, missed, and cut off the antenna where its base joined the radio. Daylight communications with Bn Fwd dropped off sharply after that.

Each rifle company occupied about half of the perimeter, with Alpha centered on northwestern end and Bravo on the southeast. The flanks were tied together, and Bravo's Claymore mines and trip flares were shared with Alpha and placed into position. Under better conditions, the IF could have covered a larger area; however, considering the heavy forest and the outlying dense undergrowth, it was necessary to compress the perimeter to ensure that a cohesive all-round defense be established. With the exception of one

SCHEMATIC - DEFENSIVE POSITIONS



platoon, all infantry positions were inside the tree line and above the water level of the LZ. The center of Bravo's 2d Platoon had to bend back across the open end of the funnel in the southeast end of the position. Though partially exposed, their line was able to make use of a small ridge of ground that was mostly above water. Their positions were constructed using mud and clay as parapets, fortified with logs and rock and anything else that was available. The individual positions could be classed as little more than prone shelters.

The heavy mortars were mounted on the rising ground in the southern portion of the open area. Both line units moved their organic 81's out to join with the 107's, because their's was the only location that would allow the overhead clearance necessary for the mortars. Each mortar had fifty rounds of high explosive (HE) and a combined total of twenty-five flares. Empty ammunition boxes filled with rock and mud served as a makeshift parapet around the tubes. Because of their exposure, casualties within the mortar sections were more than equal to their counterparts along the perimeter.

Lieutenant Brothers, Artillery Forward Observer (FO), attached to Bravo from the 2/9th Arty, also served as the IF Artillery Liaison Officer. He registered defensive fires around the IF with the 105mm's from 11 ALPHA covering three sides of the LZ and with the remaining portion to the northwest covered by fire from the two 175mm cannon positioned at Duc Co, some fifteen miles to the south.

After establishing contact with Bn Fwd and giving a quick update on the situation, and knowing that darkness would come early in the jungle, my first priority was to walk the perimeter to ensure that the troops were in the best defensive positions available and that they were taking full advantage of any material at hand to strengthen their line. I talked with individual soldiers and found that many did not have entrenching tools with them, and for those who did, the stony composition of the ground did not lend itself to digging in. Again much would depend on using fallen logs and piles of loose stone to supplement their fortifications. At ground level, the visibility into the undergrowth extended out some fifteen to thirty meters, and fields of fire were prepared to the extent possible. Sporadic firing by the enemy kept most activity out from the perimeter to a minimum. The standing trees gave an added measure of protection in that they precluded the NVA from placing machine guns well back from the perimeter and bringing it under fire. Instead, the only effective fire that could be brought to bare was by individuals who had worked their way close enough to the defense to fire as soldier against soldier.

Shortly after arriving in-country, 2nd Lt Michael Glenn, West Point Class of 1965, wrote a letter to President Lyndon Johnson expressing his support for the commitment of American forces to

Southeast Asia and explaining how, after being in country and seeing the people and their need, he felt that efforts to bolster the South Vietnamese Government were justified and that our nation was on the right path in its endeavors. In early May, Lt Glenn received a letter from the President thanking him and saying that his support was greatly appreciated and that several of his comments had been related at one of the White House press conferences. Lieutenant Glenn was killed by a sniper that afternoon during the fire fight.

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ENEMY SITUATION

1100 - 1900 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

When the artillery preparation started to fall around the clearing 3000 meters from the site selected for the Headquarters element of the 66th NVA, the Commander assumed an assault was in progress and that American troops would soon be landing at that location. Because most of his strength was moving along the trail to the east, he started to deploy other troops available to block American movement northward from that LZ. When the actual landing occurred only 1000 meters from his Headquarters, he was caught off balance, and delayed from committing his forces in the immediate vicinity to deal with the threat. His earlier experience with the Cav in the Ia Drang gave him much cause for concern. An artillery prep usually presaged a heliborne assault, and the Cav had made it painfully clear that the helicopter could land soldiers anywhere there was a large enough hole in the canopy. In this case, he was looking at one, probably two, and possibly three or more landings in his base area. The longer he waited to act, the more difficult it became to recall and redirect his troops back through the forest once they had been committed to the more distant locations. As such, the force immediately available to eliminate the American presence at 10 ALPHA was not sufficient to do the job, and the necessary strength was not able to reassemble until after the remainder of Bravo was safely on the ground.

The 66th NVA was caught on the "horns of a dilemma". The regiment's presence had been compromised. As long as the American unit sat astride its route back into Cambodia, it no longer had the freedom to continue movement to the east and possibly become boxed in by more such units being inserted on its flanks and across its route of march. Further, it could not withdraw its forces back across the border without anticipating considerable difficulty as long as the Americans were allowed to remain and expand their blocking position. On the other hand, a new opportunity for success was in the offering in that the American landing presented the 66th with a more lucrative target than one of the Special Forces camps - that being Company "B" and any reinforcements that were sure to be sent in to assist the surrounded unit.

The course of action elected was to recall the outlying units, mount an attack against the side of the American perimeter closest to the Headquarters and drive the defenders from the open clearing. The advantages were two fold. Once the Americans were dislodged from the LZ and driven to the south, and away from the 66th Regimental Headquarters and the logistical support stockpiled at that location, control, coordination and resupply would become virtually impossible, and their defense would become fragmented. Thus, using the returning assets of the 66th, the US force could be surrounded and destroyed in detail. The second plus was by limiting the attack on the perimeter to one side, the chances of NVA firing into their comrades on the opposite side of the narrow clearing was eliminated.

The NVA units moving to the east were recalled. One company sized element was detached and was sent to exert pressure against the 2/35th Fwd base at 11 ALPHA in order to disrupt the artillery support coming from that position. Long before the first units returned and were able to mount any sort of sustained effort against the defense at 10 ALPHA, the remainder of the IF, with its resupply of ammunition, was on the ground, and the early advantage enjoyed by the 66th NVA had been lost.

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1900 - 2400 HOURS: 28 MAY 1966

The weather cooperated, and the IF enjoyed one of the rare twenty-four to thirty-six hour breaks in the monsoon season. As darkness fell, the companies sent out two-man Listening Posts (LP's) some 100 meters forward of each platoon for early warning against the expected enemy probes that were sure to come. By 1930, the mortars and artillery, from both 11 ALPHA and Duc Co, were adjusted with concentrations registered just outside bursting radius from the infantry line. With the exception of sporadic sniper fire and an occasional isolated burst of activity as the NVA probed around the perimeter, the early portion of the night passed without significant problems. Artillery support was called for on a regular basis just to discourage any close-in buildup of NVA. Early on, the defenders, other than the mortarmen, were fortunate enough to have a full moon that filtered down through the double canopy and gave broken visibility forward of some positions out some twenty meters or better. For the next several hours, the men in the circle tightened their grip on the LZ, and waited for the enemy to make his next move. The jungle was lacking the usual noises that start just after dark when the insects and lizards in that region try to outdo each other with signaling sounds of greetings, warnings or whatever. The message in that part of the world was, "When there's nothing out there, something's out there!" The long silence was broken by an occasional shot by one of the infantrymen reacting to an unexplained sound coming from out in the jungle. If answered, the response would be met with additional rifle fire, punctuated by the "chunk"

and impact of an outgoing 40mm High Explosive (HE) round from one of the M-79 Grenade Launchers. Situation reports were negative, and the unit commanders were encouraged to have their soldiers swap off short periods for rest.

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0001 - 0132 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

Just after midnight, several of the LP's in positions forward of the northern portion of the perimeter reported hearing movement to their front. The majority of the activity was concentrated forward of the sectors manned by Alpha's and Bravo's 3rd Platoons. The perimeter was returned to full alert; however, it was doubtful that any of the US troops were taking advantage of an opportunity to get any sleep at that time. As reports of the activity increased, Vietnamese speaking voices could be clearly heard coming from the direction of the suspected buildup. LTC Feir had been kept aware of the status of the IF through hourly Sit Rep's, as had been the battery of the 2/9th Arty through the efforts of the Battalion Artillery Liaison Officer, Captain Richard Erbaucher. The units on the perimeter were instructed to be prepared for a renewed attack that would probably come shortly after the moon passed below the line of mountains southeast of our position. At 0115, a trip flare was ignited forward of Alpha's 2nd Platoon, followed almost immediately by another trip going off to Bravo's front. As sounds of movement parallel to the LZ continued to build, the men in the LP's along the northern sector were instructed to return to the perimeter. The noise of men moving through the heavy undergrowth could be clearly heard by the men along the foxhole line, and Lt Brothers called for artillery flares over the forest to the north. The Battery responded with an immediate fire mission. It was quickly discovered that the flares served to the NVA's advantage more than our own because our backs were to the open area and were silhouetted against the light. The flares were shut down, and a helicopter flare ship that was offered for assistance was refused. The fire mission was changed to HE, and Lt Brothers adjusted the incoming to the sounds of movement. For a brief period, the activity ceased.

At 0132, just as the moon started to slide behind the most prominent peak of the Chu Ba, a voice called out from the darkness and demanded: "Americans, you have two hours to surrender or die." Almost at once, a second voice responded from along the Alpha line with, "Charlie, you have two hours to kiss my ass!" All the growing apprehension along the line was quickly relieved by the laughter that broke out across the entire perimeter. For obvious reasons, the 66th NVA must have concluded that the IF had refused the two hours that had been offered.

0100 0000 HOURS. 20 MAY 1968

Heavy enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire broke out directed primarily against the positions of the two 3rd Platoons. At that moment, little activity was noted forward of any of the other positions. As the incoming small arms fire reached its peak, a group of forty or so NVA came yelling and charging out of the darkness toward defensive line. Lt Brothers had alerted the artillery, and as the attack started, so did the 2/9th's supporting fires. The first of 1500 artillery rounds that would be fired in support throughout the remainder of the fight straddled the charging enemy and destroyed any advantage their numbers might have achieved had they survived to reach the perimeter in force. The IF mortars added their weight to the defense as the crews responded with equal measure. Soldiers fired from behind their barricaded positions at sounds and muzzle flashes to their front - occasionally an NVA would be briefly silhouetted by an exploding artillery round, and he would immediately draw fire from all those who were quick enough to spot him. After about thirty minutes, almost as quickly as it had begun, the NVA broke off the action and withdrew back into the darkness and the security of the forest. The only sounds left were the moans of their wounded as they tried to work their way back through the undergrowth and away from the line.

The initial attack broke out directly across the perimeter from the IF CP, and as we waited for the events to sort themselves out, the CP group was alerted by a heavy crashing coming through the undergrowth heading directly for us. The tension was broken by a voice loudly announcing that he was an, "LP, comin' in! LP, comin' in!". He not only "came in", he passed through the line, and his momentum carried him well into the open center of the perimeter before he slowed down.

The respite was short lived, and within a few minutes, the attack was renewed. The attacking force followed a similar pattern throughout the rest of the night. As each attack was beaten back, the NVA would break contact, and the firing would die down. Several times during the breaks in the action, the sounds of men cheering in the distance could be heard, and their cheers would be answered by those of the enemy who were regrouping closer to the perimeter. As the farther groups closed, their cheers would merge with those to our front, a single voice would order them forward, and another assault would be launched against the line.

As the night progressed, the scope of the attack broadened to include the defensive sectors of the 2nd Platoon, Alpha, and the 1st Platoon, Bravo. By this time, constant artillery support was being requested, and both the 107mm and 81mm mortars reported they were starting to run low on HE rounds. Several times units were reminded that as an NVA effort broke and their firing diminished, the defenders had to do the same in order to insure that the

ammunition that was left would carry until daylight and last until the IF could be resupplied.

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0330 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

Alpha reported one of the squads within its 3rd Platoon had run out of ammunition, and without coordinating with anyone, had withdrawn into the perimeter. Cpt Bizantz closed the gap with the fire of an M-60 machine gun. However, because there was continuing pressure along that portion of his line, he reported that it was possible that several NVA may have passed through the gap before it was closed and could be inside the defense. The word was passed that everyone was immediately to get into a prone position, and the 81's were told to hang a flare directly overhead. Instructions were given to shoot anyone on his feet when the "lights" came on. By the light of the flare, it was determined that the position had not been penetrated, and two fire teams were moved across from the opposite side of the perimeter to repair up the break. Alpha's errant squad was rounded up, resupplied and returned to the line. During the course of the battle, that remained the only incidence of that sort.

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0415 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

The NVA broke contact and withdrew to the north of the LZ. At this time, it was estimated the IF had been in contact with an element of about battalion strength. The artillery continued to work along the threatened portion of the line, and as the pressure fell away, rounds were shifted to harassing fires to the north and northwest. The 105's had been served without interruption despite an abortive ground attack that was launched out of the darkness against Bn Fwd at 11 ALPHA. The infantrymen of Cpt Tryon's Charlie Company defending the base had little difficulty dealing with the attacking force.

The problem of ammunition resupply along the line became more acute as the night progressed. Ammunition was redistributed from casualties who had been removed to unit collection points and from the uncommitted portion of the line to those who needed it most. Bn Fwd was notified that if the attacks were renewed and continued to carry the weight of those experienced thus far, by daylight the ammunition situation would be serious and that an early resupply was critical. Because of the heavy ground-to-air fire experienced by the helicopters earlier in the evening, an attempt to resupply in the darkness was not considered an immediate option. Surprisingly enough, IF casualties remained light throughout the night, two KIA and nine WIA, probably because all of the troops along the line were prone and had continued to improve their positions during every pause in the action. During the night, the

NVA were forced to fire at muzzle flashes rather than at individual soldiers. However, for that same reason, most of the wounds received during that period were serious head and shoulder hits.

Aside from an occasional shot from an enemy positioned in close to the perimeter, the NVA pressure ceased, and the attack was broken off. Again, voices of personnel and sounds of individuals dragging off their dead and wounded were easily heard as they withdrew from contact. The artillery was adjusted to speed them on their way. With the break in the action, wounded were collected, available ammunition was again stretched out among the defenders, and to the extent practical, LP's were reestablished.

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0530 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

Just before daylight, Medevacs (Dust Off) were requested pick up several of the more seriously wounded men. 8n Fwd indicated that a single ship was inbound and that the pilot and his crew had volunteered because the LZ was considered too "hot" for other ships to be ordered in. His ship could take out five of the wounded, and on the advice of their Medics, unit commanders had to select which men would go. This was extremely difficult, because if the morning did not bring an improvement to the TF situation and allow subsequent lifts to come in, they were deciding at that moment who might live and who might not. The bird could be heard as it approached the LZ from the east long before its running lights appeared over the Chu Ba. The Medevac was about 1000 meters south of the LZ, and when told to swing north, the pilot called for a flare to locate the clearing in the darkness. A green star cluster rose to meet him. The ship came in just above the tree tops, drew green tracer fire from several NVA automatic weapons en route, and dropped down just as a second flare died away. The five wounded were placed on board, and drawing fire as it climbed above the trees, the bird flew the soldiers directly to the Evac hospital in Qui Nhon. The word was relayed that all had survived. However, one of men not selected died before the next Medevac could get into the LZ. That aircraft came in at 0715, and, much to our surprise, was able to lift out with seven of our wounded on board.

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0610 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

As soon as there was sufficient daylight, the companies were ordered to send out their platoons, one at a time and search the area immediately to their fronts. They were to clear any snipers who were still in their sectors, bring in any wounded or weapons that were discovered, check for anything of intelligence value and get a body count. Because of the uncertainty concerning the size or disposition of the enemy force, the platoons were restricted from

sweeping beyond 100 meters from the perimeter. As each platoon moved out, the platoons on the perimeter expanded left and right to fill the gap until the sweep was completed. As Alpha's 3rd Platoon, Lt Light, was making its sweep, it reached the limiting distance as it approached a small stream in front of the company position. Across the stream were a number of NVA bodies, with weapons and packs still in evidence, that had been caught by one of the artillery fire missions, and the platoon moved to check them out. As they were crossing the stream, the NVA renewed their attack. The unit was hit in the front and flank and was pinned down. Cpt Bizantz asked for permission to try to extract them, and as Cpt Moisano spread his company to cover the perimeter, moved his other two platoons forward. Fire missions were called to build an artillery box around the trapped unit and isolate them from their attackers. Cpt Bizantz lead the relief and was successful in reaching and bringing out all of his people, to include his dead and wounded. He was the last of his unit to return to the perimeter, and as he did so, he was described by his one of his soldiers as covering the withdrawal, firing an M-16 with one hand and an AK-47 (NVA automatic weapon) with the other. The relief was successful, but at a cost of six killed and thirteen wounded, equivalent to more than sixty percent of the platoon's strength. Lt Light survived the fire fight. Two weeks later, while in the 1/35th's base camp at Oasis, he was killed when a weapon was accidentally discharged.

As the two companies resumed their positions, the NVA closed and renewed their efforts against the perimeter. Over the next four hours, the 66th NVA's attack slowly expanded to the flanks so as to involve more and more of the IF. The attackers came in bunches - not in the human waves as the Chinese had in the Korean War - but in groups of from platoon to company size. They would charge out of the forrest and undergrowth, yelling and shooting, and move straight against the perimeter - without any obvious effort to take advantage of the ground and cover. Because of their total disregard for their own safety, many of the enemy were cut down by the concentrated fires of the defenders, the mortars and artillery, and by the door gunners of helicopters that were attempting to resupply the position.

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ENEMY SITUATION

0100 - 0700 HOURS: 29 MAY 1968

As the recalled units of the 66th NVA returned to their regimental base area, they arrived after midnight in two major increments - one group around 0100 and the other shortly before 0600. From the welcoming cheers that were heard from time to time, it was apparent that smaller elements continued to arrive in the attack staging area until well into the morning. From the size and composition of the attacking groups, it appeared that the NVA Commander committed his units to the action against the American

position as they became available. Thus, instead of waiting and mounting an overwhelming effort, his strength was spent piecemeal, and he failed to capitalize on his advantage of superior numbers. Once committed, individual units seemed to be acting independently and without the benefit of centralized direction and control.

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0830 HOURS: 19 MAY 1966

Sixty percent of the perimeter became actively engaged in the defense, and because of constant heavy contact along the line, and the danger of ground-to-air fire, the resupply ships were loaded and marshalled at 11 ALPHA pending a break in the action. After an hour of continuous effort, the NVA broke off and retired into the forest. As was the previous experience, there would be short breaks in the fighting against any one point of the line, and at times, the entire attacking force would withdraw for a period that might last from ten to up to thirty minutes. As this pattern developed and to take advantage of any opportunity the lulls might present, resupply ships and Medevac's were placed in orbit nearby. At 0945, with the first real break in the action, three ships flying at tree top level and "with their foot to the firewall" came into the LZ. They off-loaded 107mm and 81mm mortar ammunition, along with small arms and rounds for the M-79 Grenade Launchers. Alerted that the ships were inbound, wounded were moved from the collection points closer to the touch down areas. IF wounded filled those ships to capacity. A second effort was made to resupply at 1015, but the aircraft were driven off by heavy ground-to-air fire. Rather than abandon the mission completely, the helicopters made one more pass over the clearing and the door gunners "kicked out" their loads at 20 feet and about 110 knots. That became the final resupply for the morning. Although several attempts were made, no more aircraft were able to land at 10 ALPHA until late in the afternoon.

When aircraft would come up on the IF Cmd Net and report they were inbound, Lt Brothers would lift or shift supporting fires coming from 11 ALPHA and Duc Co to keep from hitting our own people. During those respites, the IF picked up the firepower of the gunships that were escorting the supply aircraft, in addition to the searching fires from the outboard door gunners, and used them to make strafing runs parallel to our positions. Pilots reported engaging enemy troops as close as ten meters forward of the fighting positions. RTO's along the line, speaking directly to the gunships were more than once heard to say, "That was just right. Could you move it in another ten feet on the next pass?" The ships would pass on information concerning what they observed, roll out, and once they had cleared the area, the artillery and mortars would commence their close support missions once again.

The mortars were experiencing difficulty getting their rounds in close enough to the line to be effective, because even

firing the minimum range placed most of the rounds out into the forest and in a "lost" condition. To counter this, the crews built supports under the bipod legs of the mortars, and with minimum charges, fired their rounds almost straight up so that they could impact just beyond the bursting radius of the shells.

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0930 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

The only positions that had not become engaged in the expanding fire fight were those of Alpha's 1st and Bravo's 2nd Platoons, and both were directly across from the portion of the perimeter that experienced the heaviest NVA pressure. The IF Cmd Post was at the junction of these units. The action against the defense continued with varying degrees of intensity - slowing to a halt against one sector and swelling to a peak against another only a dozen or so meters away. However, at no time was the entire position involved, and the IF enjoyed the advantages of "interior lines" allowing both men and ammunition to be moved to bolster more critical points. Although there was a small group of men near the CP that had been designated as the IF reserve, individuals and fire teams from the uncommitted platoons served to plug the gaps created by the losses being taken along the far side of the perimeter.

General Walker had been keeping close touch with action on the ground and had been overhead several times on the evening of the 28th and again since just before daylight on the 29th. He had been keeping abreast of the situation by monitoring transmissions between the IF and Bn Fwd. On occasion, he came up on the IF net to request an update or to pass along some bit of information he felt useful, but basically, he left the fighting to those on the ground. He used his influence to insure that the troops continued to get all the support that was available in that part of Vietnam, and on one occasion, because of increased sniper activity against the exposed position of the radio during transmissions to Bn Fwd, the General served as an airborne relay.

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1130 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

The action at 10 ALPHA was the focal point for the moment in the entire II Corps Tactical Zone, and as the day wore on, more and more aircraft appeared overhead and asked if they could provide assistance. Some were Army, some were Air Force, and some were a total mystery. Several of the tactical aircraft were responding to specific support missions, while others were out cruising for "targets of opportunity" or were returning from a prior mission with ordinance and fuel still available. All were appreciated by the troops on the ground. In that targets out from the LZ were not visible to members of the IF, several of the pilots were asked to

direct their attention to the regrouping areas to the north of the LZ. Others were asked to concentrate on the areas to the east from which the cheers of newly arriving NVA could be heard. When the situation allowed, gunships were invited to make supporting runs along the flanks of the perimeter, and take action against any targets they could identify.

On one occasion, as a Huey gunship started its run, the pilot was advised of a machine gun that had been positioned in a tree at off the southeast end of the LZ, and he was advised to break left as he completed his pass over that sector. His first pass was from east to west, firing his outboard (right) door guns as he flew the line. He did a tight turn, came around and made a return pass from west to east. As the ship completed its second pass, it rolled out to the right and was immediately taken under fire by a stream of green tracers as it exited the LZ. The helicopter disappeared from view and suddenly reappeared coming in from the north, low over the trees. A huge jet of smoke and flame was boiling from the fuel tanks on the left side of the aircraft, and it was struggling to stay airborne long enough to reach the security of the LZ. The Huey bounced to a landing about forty meters from the mortar positions and both pilots and door gunners unloaded and cleared the aircraft almost before the water they had sprayed into the air on impact had a chance to settle. The ship continued to burn for several minutes with machine gun and rocket rounds "cooking off", causing some concern in the section of the perimeter closest to the wreck. The status of the crew was relayed to their friends overhead, and for the time being, they became "instant" infantrymen in Alpha's 2nd Platoon.

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1145 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

An NVA unit numbering around forty broke from the funnel leading into the tree line directly in front of Bravo's 2nd Platoon. That unit was positioned across the open southeastern end of the LZ and was back from the tree line some twenty-five or thirty meters. From the confusion in their ranks, it appeared that the NVA expected to close with Bravo at the edge of the trees, and failing to meet the expected resistance, their momentum carried them out into the open. They were immediately taken under fire, and suddenly finding themselves exposed, began milling around. A mortar round fired by Sergeant Evans' section of 81mm's landed at their leading edge, and the front ranks of the NVA turned and ran back into the others. Some of them made it back into the woods, others broke left or right. Those that ran to their right moved parallel to the line, and then for some distance, stayed within easy visual range of the men in position. The majority of this group became casualties in short order. Of the ones that moved to their left, two automatic weapons teams were able to establish themselves in the trees about 100 meters out. On occasion, either of the guns would fire down the

long axis of the perimeter, but because of intervening trees, their fire did little more than clip limbs and leaves and drop them on the troops below. Their fire downed at least one helicopter before they were eliminated. That Huey lost most of its hydraulic fluid, but made it back into the LZ without further damage and without injury to the crew. As were their predecessors, they were added to the troops on the line.

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1200 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

The action concentrating against the IF continued to occupy the center ring of the only "show in town". Unidentified aircraft came up on the radio, inquired how the situation was going, and asked if they could be of assistance.

Just after noon, a Forward Air Controller (FAC), flying a O-1A light observation Birdog, checked into the net and asked if we could use two A-1E Skyraider's that were "loaded for bear" and looking for targets. He indicated the fixed wing aircraft were carrying 20mm rockets and napalm. Lt Brothers shut down the artillery, and the NVA machine guns that had been set up back in the trees to our southeast were designated as the target. Men at opposite ends of the LZ threw smoke grenades to indicate a line of flight, and a compass heading of 140 degrees from the center of the LZ with an estimated distance to where the guns were located were passed to the FAC. The planes made two rocket runs and received return fire each time. The FAC called for the napalm, and as the first A-1E made its pass, the aluminum tanks splashed flame and smoke into the forest, on line but well beyond the target. The trail aircraft became disoriented, made a 90 degree error in its flight path, and came in over the LZ on a north to south run. The IF CP group was alerted to the impending danger when one of the nearby Bravo troops yelled, "God Almighty, look out!" The A-1E, at tree top height, released its napalm tanks as it passed over the far side of the perimeter, and as they fell, the tanks gave the appearance of two huge silver cigars slowly tumbling towards the Command Group. It was as if the CP had been the designated target. The right tank hit exactly five feet in front of the position, and the blast, metal and flame went over and fanned out beyond it. The left tank fell about five meters farther in, was deflected by a large tree, and its napalm passed over most of the men on the ground and carried out beyond the perimeter. Of the eleven men around the CP, nine were injured. Lt Brothers received third degree burns on his back, and 1st Sergeant Cox, Bravo, who at the moment of impact, was working with a soldier who had just been wounded, had only enough reaction time to raise his hands to cover his face. In spite of receiving severe burns on his hands and face, his eyes were not injured, and within several weeks, he returned to duty with the company. None of the wounds from the fire or exploding tanks were fatal, but because of them, six men were eventually evacuated from

country. The two who were not burned had avoided injury - one by dashing out into the open so that the tanks passed over and hit behind him, and the other, by diving into a water-filled foxhole. The PRC-25 that had been serving as the TF net control station was destroyed, and the Artillery radio was pressed into immediate service to notify the FAC and anyone else listening of the error and to call off any subsequent runs. The pilot of the errant A-1E could be heard over the FAC's radio saying, "I will not drop unless requested, I will not drop unless requested." It was obvious he had become aware of the mistake about the same time as those on the ground. The target in question was still active, and the FAC was requested to bring the aircraft around again, to make a dry run to ensure they were back on target, and then to engage with whatever ordnance they had left. The NVA machine guns ceased to be a problem at that time.

Just before the napalm incident, Bn Fwd had been contacted on the Admin net with a "Dust Off" request, and the Bn S-4, Logistics Officer, Cpt Ted Drum, had been informed that the TF had ten KIA and thirty-eight WIA for evacuation. He was on his way to inform LTC Feir of the request just as Cpt Bizantz, from his vantage point on the opposite side of the LZ, began reporting that the TF CP had been hit by napalm, and that he couldn't see any movement within the Command Group. At that moment, Cpt Drum announced that 10 ALPHA had ten dead and thirty-eight wounded, and it was assumed he was talking about casualties as the result of the napalm strike. The Bn Cmd Group was stunned into silence. Almost immediately from the radio they were using to monitor TF transmissions, they heard, "FAC! FAC! Cease fire! Cease fire! Tell that son of a bitch to abort!". It was obvious that the TF Cmd Gp was still functioning, and things at Bn Fwd returned to the business at hand.

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1245 HOURS: 29 MAY 1968

General Walker joined LTC Feir at 11 ALPHA in the early afternoon to finalize the best course of action concerning the fight and the troops at 10 ALPHA. He was faced with the same decision that had created the TF on the 28th. That being, whether to recall the ground force or to reinforce it with more troops and attempt to regain the initiative. To do nothing was to invite the NVA to continue to gather its units on either side of the border until numbers were sufficient to eventually over run the perimeter. Unless the NVA were forced back from the LZ, any attempt to extract would be difficult at best, and the trail units in the extraction would be placed in an almost impossible situation. Otherwise, the troops would have to abandon the LZ, and using the artillery and gunships as escorts, attempt to break out to the east. Neither option was acceptable. The General's decision was to reinforce with the remainder of the 1/35th Inf, under the command of the Brigade Executive Officer, Lt Col Robert Kingman. The TF was advised of

the decision. However, because of the logistics involved with heliborne operations, it would be after 1430 before the flights and escorts would be assembled - armed and fueled - and the relief force lifted from its present location and transported to 10- ALPHA. The thrust of the message from General Walker was: "The relief was in motion. LTC Kingston and the 1/35th were on the way, and until they arrive, dig in a little deeper and hang on to what you've got!"

As the morning had progressed, the situation had not improved by any appreciable amount. However, the perimeter remained sound, and the men in the positions had stopped every thrust the NVA had made without any ever reaching the defensive line. Aside from a few moments that were close, the NVA effort did not appear to be gaining strength. Of considerable concern was that the NVA seemed to have an endless supply of men to send against the IF positions. As friendly casualties continued to mount, with resulting gaps in the line, there was no way of replacing them other than by thinning other areas to serve the demand. I was not alone in my concern over this, and it became obvious that the question of our continued success was on the minds of many of us. Following one of the hourly sit rep's from Alpha, the RTO hesitated and then asked if he could ask a question. "Major, are we really going to get out of here?" I told him that no American unit that I knew of had surrendered in Vietnam, and we were not about to be the first. Gen Walker had the relief force cranking up, and we would be still here to greet the 1/35th when they came in. There was long silence and he said, "Thanks, I just wanted to know."

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1300 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

A Bravo company medic came to the CP area and told Cpt Moisano that Sgt Evans was dead. The Sgt, with the Company 81mm mortars, had been hit in the legs - a bullet passing through one and almost removing the kneecap from the other. Instead of allowing himself to be removed to the relative safety of the company collection point, he chose to stay with the mortars and keep his tubes in action. When an assistant gunner was killed, he reorganized the gun crew and talked the loader and ammunition bearers through the laying and firing procedures. Sergeant Evans stayed with the guns until, after receiving at least one more wound, he died from loss of blood and shock.

Another of the individual actions that occurred during the fight involved a soldier that I had had previous dealings with at Schofield Barracks while serving as President of a Fitness Board. The soldier had left the PX beer garden and, instead of returning to his barracks, had decided to go to the Post Library, stand out front and expose himself to any ladies who might be passing by. The first person to pass was the Post Duty Officer, and when the soldier failed to salute, he was called to "attention". Dropping his hands

from his front and coming to attention, his intentions were exposed, and I got the job as President of his Board. Although obviously guilty, we decided that his behavior had been influenced by the beer, and since he had no previous disciplinary problems, he was given another chance. "Figleaf", as he became known in some circles, was on the Bravo 3rd Platoon line a few meters from a machine gun team. When an incoming grenade killed the gunner and badly wounded the assistant gunner, three NVA broke from cover and tried to capture the weapon. "Figleaf" saw them coming, ran from his position, fully exposing himself - but in an entirely different sense of the word - to enemy fire and reached the machine gun just ahead of the NVA. He dropped into the firing position and drove off the attackers, killing two of them in the process.

Throughout the action, the NVA mortars were employed twice. On the first occasion, they fired nine rounds during the morning attack. The first round was heard to impact hit well back in the forest, and since the TF had no fire mission in progress at that moment, it was assumed that something had blown up out there. A second explosion occurred about ten minutes later, closer, but still "lost". A third impacted about ten minutes after the second, on line and within sight of the LZ. It was determined that an observer was probably in a tree somewhere in the vicinity and as each round was fired, he would send the correction back to the tube position by runner - thus the time lapse between rounds. Cpt. Moleson was told that the next round would hit pretty close to his 1st Platoon positions and for him to move his people to the left and right of the anticipated impact point. The troops moved, the round came in on schedule, hit just inside the perimeter and did no damage. There was one final adjustment out into the center of the LZ, the tube fired four rounds "for effect", and after that, the mortar ceased firing.

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1430 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

Bn Fwd passed the word that LTC Kingston and the relief force had completed marshalling and would be arriving at the LZ around 1500. It had to be assumed that the NVA were also monitoring any transmissions between the TF and the outside world. At the time the information concerning the relief was received, the NVA effort was gaining momentum once again. They were well aware that their window for success was about to close! As had been the case throughout the attack, the pressure was concentrated against the 3rd Platoons of Alpha and Bravo.

The danger of ground-to-air fire against the incoming flights was critical, and suppression of that fire was crucial to the success of the relief. Bn Fwd was instructed to have the Flight Commander come up on the TF net and report when the first in bound

lift was five minutes out. At that time, a number of the troops on the ground would be moved from the portion of the line least committed to the area of heaviest contact. A "mad minute" of suppressive fires from the perimeter would be laid down in concert with those of the escort ships in order to prevent the enemy from directing his fire against the troop carrying helicopters while they were on short final and landing. It was requested that once the soldiers exited the aircraft, they move to the northern portion of the perimeter and take up positions there. Because of the "mad minute", the defenders would be down to their last rounds of ammunition. Once the TF was committed to the suppressive course of action, the first lift had to come in, regardless of fire, so as to keep the TF and its perimeter from becoming untenable. Cpts Bizantz and Moisano were briefed, ammunition was redistributed for a maximum effort, and the troops who were going to move were designated and oriented as to their role in support of the relief. When the birds were four minutes out, men were moved across the perimeter. They took up the fire, and the first troop lift came in without loss. The dismounting soldiers of the 1/35th moved into the line, passed out the extra ammunition they were carrying, and joined the fight. LTC Kingston and Maj Fred Delisle, Battalion Operations Officer, arrived with the second lift, and the command of the TF was turned over at that time.

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ENEMY SITUATION 1600 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

Any hope of success in overrunning and destroying the American defense was preempted when the remainder of the 1/35th joined the battle. Considering the losses he had already sustained, the only course of action still open to the NVA was to block with a delaying force while the remainder of his regiment retreated back into sanctuaries west of the Cambodian border.

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With the additional strength on the ground, the LZ was expanded outward. The NVA reacted to the reinforcement with renewed efforts for another thirty or so minutes, but within an hour and a half, all that was being received was occasional sniper fire. The situation went quiet for the next hour or so, and the TF consolidated its enlarged holdings, saw to the evacuation of the dead and wounded, and policed the battlefield immediately to the front.

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1700 HOURS: 29 MAY 1966

At 1700, there was a heavy mortar attack in which about fifty rounds impacted within the LZ. One of the initial rounds landed

directly in front of a supply ship that was just lifting off, and the pilot reacted by banking sharply to his right. In so doing, he caught his main rotor in a tree and crashed on the LZ. Aside from minor injuries, all aboard survived and were extracted on a later aircraft. Damage from the mortars was minimal in that most of the troops were no longer on the tree line, but were fifty to 100 meters farther out into the forest on the new perimeter. The remainder of the night passed without incident, and the following morning, Bravo Company and the 107mm mortars from the 2/35th were detached and were flown back to the Brigade base at Oasis.

SUMMARY

Casualties for the Task Force amounted to sixteen killed and eighty-eight wounded, almost thirty-nine percent of its total strength. For the 66th NVA Regiment, 241 bodies were found in the forest around the original perimeter, and information was received that on 02 Jun, an NVA unit had passed through a Montagnard border village with walking wounded and carrying over 100 litter cases. Headquarters, IFFV did not show the 66th NVA on the list of enemy units "in country" again until after the first of 1967. Listed captured enemy equipment included:

- 5 12.7mm anti-aircraft machine guns
- 1 50 cal heavy machine gun
- 1 SG-43 heavy machine gun w/extra barrel
- 4 RPD light machine guns
- 1 RP-46 light machine gun
- 29 Automatic weapons
- 22 AK-47 assault weapons
- 1 62mm mortar base plate and bipod
- 1 Field telephone
- 2 ChiCom radios

The "Nashville Tennessean" reported on Monday, May 30, 1966, lateline Saigon (AP):

"US infantrymen engaged a North Vietnamese force in bloody combat yesterday in the Central Highlands near the Cambodian border, a US spokesman reported.

The action, in which 78 North Vietnamese regulars were reported killed in a day's fighting, was taking place west of Pleiku, 240 miles northeast of Saigon. It was in this same general area that 10,000 North Vietnamese regulars have been reported by authoritative sources in Saigon to be posted for an attack from Cambodia's Chu Phong Mountains.

The Americans involved were troops from the US Army's 25th Division. Their casualties in the fighting since noon

Saturday were described by Saigon briefing officers as moderate.

The clash topped the day's war news, which for weeks now has been secondary to South Vietnam's political crisis.

Informants in Saigon said Saturday the North Vietnamese troops were sitting on the Cambodian side of the border waiting to spring into South Vietnam's Central Highlands during the rainy season.

Cambodia, a neutral, has denied it is allowing North Vietnamese troops or the Viet Cong guerrillas to use its territory and did so again today.

The report of the informants in Saigon, however, seemed to agree with remarks to newsmen in Washington Friday by Maj Gen Stanley R. Larson, that up to six North Vietnamese regiments were massed in Cambodia. His remarks drew a quick denial from the US Defense Department. It said there were unconfirmed reports of North Vietnamese being in Cambodia but no actual evidence of it.

The Saigon informants said their information on the North Vietnamese was based on intelligence reports available to military commanders in South Vietnam.

Larson, who is now on leave in Washington, is the commander of US forces in the Central Highlands area. After the Pentagon contradicted his statement in Washington, Larson told newsmen: "I stand corrected."

The informants here said the troops in the Cambodian mountains were from North Vietnam's 325th Division which engaged the US 1st Air Cavalry Division last November in the Ia Drang Valley in the Highlands.

The new fighting in the Central Highlands was said to be near one of the exit points for the Ho Chi Minh Trail which winds down through Laos and, some say, Cambodia."

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Department of the Army General Order No. 51, dated 27 September 1966, awarded the Presidential Unit Citation to both infantry companies that were in the Task Force "for extraordinary heroism" and "for distinguishing [themselves] by outstanding performance of duty against a numerically superior and heavily armed North Vietnamese Army force in Pleiku Province, Republic of Vietnam, on 28 - 29 May 1966."