

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
INTRODUCTION	3
The Existing Situation	3
The Enemy	4
The Terrain	4
The Battalion Plan	5
The Preparation	5
NARRATION	7
Initial Contact	8
Movement to Contact	9
Developing the Situation	10
The Attack	11
The Hasty Defense Due to Enemy Action	12
Conduct of the Defense	14
Reinforcement	17
Evacuation of the Casualties	18
SUMMARY	19
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM	23
TRAINING IMPLICATIONS	30
BIBLIOGRAPHY	32

MAP "A" 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry's Plan, 17-22 March 1967

MAP "B" Company C's Search of the Trail 1405 Hours, 21 March 1967

MAP "C" Company C (-) Movement to Contact 1550 Hours, 21 March 1967

MAP "D" Third Platoon, Company C in the Attack 1620 Hours, 21 March 1967

MAP "E" The Company (-) in the Hasty Defense 1633 Hours, 21 March 1967

(2)

OPERATIONS OF COMPANY C, 2D BATTALION, 35<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY, 25<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY DIVISION, IN A SEARCH AND DESTROY MISSION ON 21 MARCH 1967 IN KONTUM PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. (PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A COMPANY COMMANDER.)

INTRODUCTION

Operation "Sam Houston" began on 1 January 1967 in the Central Highlands, republic of Vietnam. During the period 1 January through 15 March, small scale guerilla activities, consisting mainly of mining incidents, increased throughout Pleiku Province. In the later part of January, numerous enemy sightings were reported in the panhandle area of Kontum Province. Elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division crossed the Nam Sathay River in mid-February. During the next five weeks, the Division conducted search and destroy operations along the Cambodian Border.

In addition to conducting routine search and destroy operations, the division was charged with securing highway 19E from Mang Yang Pass to Pleiku. Within the area of operations they also secured highways 509, 14N and 19W.

### THE EXISTING SITUATION

From late February through mid-March, the first Brigade, Fourth Infantry Division, with three battalions, assumed responsibility of an Area of Operations (AO) between the Se San and Nam Sathay Rivers. During the first three phases of the operation, the battalions frequently displaced in the AO to block exfiltration routes and to expand a number of potential Fire support Bases (FSB) Contact with the enemy was generally light. However, four significant contacts did occur during the first three phases of the operation.

As Operation "Sam Houston" moved into its fourth phase on 16 March 1967, both the first and second brigades moved from an area west of the

(3)

Se San River to an area bounded generally by the San River and 60 grid line on the north, the Pleiku defense sector and Tactical Areas of Responsibility (TAOR) on the east, the 20 grid line on the south, and the Cambodian Border on the west.

In mid-March, there were reliable indications that North Vietnamese Army (NVA) were infiltrating into an area west of Highway 14B. Mortar attacks replaced mining incidents. On the night of 13 March and continuing into the next morning, the division Tactical Command Post (TAO CP) and the forward Command Post (CP) of the first and second brigades situated at Landing Zone(LZ) 3 Tango came under mortar attack.

## THE ENEMY

The enemy forces engaged during operation "Sam Houston" were essentially the same as engaged by the 3d Brigade, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division during operation "Paul Revere IV", but they had changed their tactics. During operation "Paul Revere IV" the enemy would attack well dug-in positions at night following heavy mortar preparations. In operation "Sam Houston" he engaged company sized elements during daylight while they were still moving.

The enemy located the battalion FSB's and kept them under constant surveillance. When the companies moved out on patrol, the NVA would keep track of their movements through the use of small reconnaissance parties or trail watchers. At a time and place of his choosing, he would attempt to engage a rifle company while it was moving. The NVA would close quickly with elements of the company before supporting fires could be effectively employed. He would simultaneously attempt to surround the entire company and then fragment it into platoon size elements.

## THE TERRAIN

The area of operations was rugged and mountainous, containing many steep-walled valleys and ravines. There was only one road in the AO and a limited number of LZ's. The hill masses were covered with thick underbrush

(4)

The trees ranged from 20 to 25 meters in height with some as high as 45 meters. The dense, broadleaf, evergreen forest effectively screened all movement from aerial observation. Due to the dense undergrowth, ground observation was restricted and seldom exceeded twenty meters.

The thick vegetation and terrain irregularities limited target acquisition and restricted adjustment of indirect fire support weapons. Additionally, the thick underbrush frequently deflected small arms fire and limited the employment of grenade launchers and hand grenades.

## THE BATTALION PLAN

After the mortar attacks on the division Tactical Command Post (TAC CP), the 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry was given the mission

of conducting search and destroy operations in the northwest portion of the AO along possible exfiltration routes.

Two rifle companies, "A" and "C" would make a combat assault northeast of the battalion FSB. For two days following the combat assault, they were to search **west toward the Nam Sathay River. On the third day they would begin moving north towards the battalion FSB. As an additional security measure,** the companies were directed to link-up each afternoon prior to darkness.

On the move south, Company "A" would move on the west, between the 66 and 67 grid lines, and Company "C" on the east, between the 67 and 68 grid lines. (See Map "A")

Company "B" would secure the battalion FSB and be the battalion reserve. The company had suffered heavy casualties five days prior to the start of the operation and were receiving replacements.

#### THE PREPARATION

The two companies completed the combat assault late in the afternoon

(5)

on 17 March 1967. The move west towards the Nam Sathay River in the next two days resulted in both companies finding NVA battalion size base camps that had been used within the previous three days. There was no contact made by either element during this move. On the 20th of March, the companies began their sweep south, towards the battalion FSB.

On the morning of 21 March, the companies remained in the overnight location pending the arrival of replacements. The company commanders utilized this time to co-ordinate their respective routes for the day. Specific items closely coordinated were: the tentative location of the noon halt, the location for that evenings overnight position, and the routes for each of the subordinate elements in the companies. Captain Ronald B. Rykowski, the commanding officer of Company "C", completed a map reconnaissance and plotted artillery concentrations along the company's intended routes. The

preplanned requests were in turn submitted to the artillery Forward Observer, Lieutenant Emory, who had joined the company the previous evening. The company commander requested that the fires be placed on call, and the concentration numbers given to him as soon as possible.

After receiving the artillery concentration numbers, the company commander called the platoon leaders to his location and briefed them on the routes and concentration numbers. The concentrations served a dual purpose; they placed fires on likely danger areas along the routes from which the platoon leaders could quickly adjust fire, and they served as marking rounds for the platoons.

Because of the known enemy tactics, the company commander split the company into two elements. The east element consisted of the first and second platoons; the west element consisted of the third platoon and the headquarters group. This arrangement placed the headquarters

(6)

group nearest to Company "A" in the event of enemy contact.

The replacements were received at 0930. Prior to departing the overnight location, a sweep of the perimeter was conducted by the second platoon. When the platoon returned, the company commander requested the first artillery concentration. Company "A" left the perimeter under cover of the supporting fires.

Company "C" remained in the perimeter for ten minutes to allow Company "A" sufficient time to clear the area. During this time, Company "C" remained ready to react to a possible NVA ambush against Company "A".

#### NARRATION

The first and second platoons departed the perimeter from the eastern portion of the overnight location. Ten minutes later the company (-) departed the overnight location through the southern portion of the perimeter. The two elements moved abreast, about 600 meters apart. This allowed each element sufficient maneuver space and provided for rapid reinforcement.

At 1405, the company (-) located a well traveled, high speed trail. (see Map "B"). The company commander halted the company (-) until the first and second platoons reached the trail further to the east. The first platoon was then directed to search the trail to the northeast for 400 meters. The second platoon was directed to search the trail to the southwest and establish contact with the company (-). The third platoon was directed to send a reconnaissance element 400 meters to the southwest of their present location.

While the three platoons conducted the search along the trail, the company commander called in preplanned fires 500 meters south of the first and second platoons. At 1445, the element from the third platoon had completed the search to the southwest and rejoined the platoon.

(7)

Contact had been established between the second platoon and the company (-) and the second platoon moved back into position.

The company commander radioed the first platoon leader to determine the progress of their search to the northwest. The platoon had completed its search of the trail with negative results and was proceeding back. While the first and second platoons were reorganizing, the company (-) continued on its original route.

Upon completion of their reorganization, the first and second platoons again moved to the southeast. At 1525, the lead element of the first platoon was moving up a ridgeline when the rear security from the second platoon observed two NVA traveling south on the trail that had just been searched. The security element fired on the two NVA who fled back to the northeast.

The first and second platoons discovered a bunker complex at 1550 and began searching the area. The first platoon came upon a fresh grave containing one NVA body. The two platoons intensified the search of the area and notified the company commander. While continuing the search the two platoons began receiving fire from two NVA armed with AK 47's. The platoons immediately returned the fire, and the NVA fled to the southeast.

Hearing the firing, the company commander called the second platoon leader, Lieutenant Rutledge. The company commander was informed of the contact and that the second platoon had suffered one seriously wounded.

The company commander instructed the platoons to set up a perimeter and call for artillery fire to the south. The first platoon was directed to conduct a sweep of the area after the supporting fires were lifted. The company commander then radioed battalion to inform them of the situation and to request a Dustoff helicopter. As the company commander

(8)

talked to the battalion CP, firing again broke out in the vicinity of the first and second platoons.

The second platoon leader called the company commander to inform him that the two platoons were receiving fire from what was estimated to be five automatic weapons located to their southeast and southwest. Lieutenant Rutledge was directed to adjust indirect fires to the southeast and south of his location. He was informed that the company (-) was located about 500 meters southwest of his position, and that they were to maneuver towards his position from the southwest to envelop the enemy forces. (See Map "C")

The battalion was notified of the situation by the company commander. The proposed scheme of maneuver was explained and a request was made for company "A" to begin moving towards Company "C".

#### MOVEMENT TO CONTACT

The company (-) moved southeast initially. This would place them behind the enemy. The third platoon was placed in a column formation with a point element some 5 meters to the front. Flank security was placed twenty meters out from the column. The headquarters group brought up the rear.

To increase security and provide the company with a reserve, the Weapons platoon and Headquarters platoon had been organized into three fire teams. The 106 Recoilless Rifle squads were organized into two fire teams and provided flank security to the command group. The third fire team consisted of the company commander's driver, two additional RTO's, and the communications sergeant.

They provided rear security for the column which was under the control of the weapons platoon leader, Lieutenant Sudborough.

The company (-) moved southeast about 250 meters before turning northeast towards the first and second platoons. The company commander

(9)

radioed Lieutenant Rutledge and requested the status on the indirect supporting fires. The second platoon leader told him that the fires had been requested, but had not yet been received.

The company (-) continued its movement towards the first and second platoons without the use of supporting indirect fires. The artillery Forward Observer was given the locations of the first and second platoons and the company (-). The company commander requested immediate fires to the east of the company (-). Lieutenant Rutledge was directed to monitor the fire direction net to preclude shifting fires into his perimeter.

As the company (-) closed to within an estimated 300 meters south of the two platoons, the point element crossed a well used trail. To preclude the third platoon from walking into a possible ambush the platoon leader was directed to swing to the west of the trail and have his flank security move out further.

At 1620, the third platoon's point element made contact with an unknown size NVA force. The enemy were dug in to their northeast. The lead element was only 200 meters south of the first and second platoons. (see Map "C")

#### DEVELOPING THE SITUATION

The company commander radioed the second platoon leader to ascertain his platoons location relative to the third platoon. Once this information was received Captain Rykowski relayed it to the artillery Forward Observer. He requested immediate fires placed to the southeast of the third platoon and adjusted in until east of the company (-).

The battalion was notified of the contact and the location of the company (-) with respect to the first and second platoons.

The third platoon was directed to maintain contact and to maneuver

(10)

on line. The platoon used fire and movement until the platoon had formed a line formation. (See Map "D")

The weapons platoon leader, Lieutenant Sudborough, was directed to move the 106 Recoilless Rifle squad located on the left flank of the headquarters group to the west flank of the third platoon and provide the third platoon with flank security. The 106 Recoilless Rifle squad on the right flank of the headquarters group was moved by the company commander to a position on the east flank of the third platoon.

#### THE ATTACK

Lieutenant Alvarado, the third platoon leader, was directed to move north utilizing fire and movement and close with the enemy positions. The attack was slowed by the dense vegetation and the heavy enemy fire. At 1623, the company (-) began receiving heavy 60mm and 82mm mortar fire as the attack continued.

The east flank of the third platoon began receiving flanking fire from a small hill located twenty meters away.

The company commander requested that the supporting indirect fires be brought in closer. As the enemy fire continued to build up on the right flank of the third platoon, the company commander maneuvered the 106 Recoilless Rifle squad and a fire team from the third platoon against the small hill. The company command group provided flank security for the assault on the enemy held hill.

As the attackers seized the hill, they come upon an estimated NVA battalion moving toward them from the southwest. This battalion was moving along a trail, three abreast, and were less than forty meters away. The 106 Recoilless Rifle squad immediately took the advancing NVA under fire.

(11)

#### THE HASTY DEFENSE DUE TO ENEMY ACTION

Lieutenant Alvarado was immediately notified of the new threat, and was ordered to break contact to his front and to fall back

towards the small hill. Lieutenant Emory, the artillery Forward Observer was directed to bring all available fires to bear on the attacking NVA battalion.

After issuing orders to Lieutenants Alvarado and Emory the company commander called Lieutenant Sudborough, the weapons platoon leader, and directed him to fall back with his west flank security and tie in with the company command group. Lieutenant Rutledge, the second platoon leader, was notified of the situation and was directed to attack south with the first and second platoons to reinforce the company (-).

The company commander radioed the battalion commander and informed him of the new development. He requested immediate close-air support.

The battalion commander directed Captain Rykowski to break contact to allow full use of air and artillery support against the large enemy force. By 1633, the company (-) was heavily engaged on two flanks and unable to break contact. The NVA battalion had cut off the withdrawal route. (See Map "E")

As the company commander radioed the battalion commander to inform him that the company (-) could not break contacts intense automatic weapons fire laced into the command group from three directions. The company commander organized the 106 Recoilless Rifle squad, the fire team from the third platoon, and the command group in a hasty perimeter.

The third platoon fell back under intense small arms and automatic weapons fire. They tied in with the 106 Recoilless Rifle squad. The west flank Recoilless Rifle squad, under Lieutenant Sudborough, was unable to reach the command group on the top of the hill and tied-in with the fire team from the third platoon on the southern portion of the hill.

(12)

At 1637, the enemy launched an attack from three directions. (See Map "D") The third platoon was attacked from the east; the headquarters group from the southeast, the south, and the southwest.

Maneuvering under automatic weapons covering fire, the attacking NVA overran the fire team from the third platoon on the southern portion of the perimeter. The command group, located on the top

of the hill, took the attacking force under fire and repulsed the attack from the south.

At 1640, Captain Rykowski was severely wounded by enemy automatic weapons fire. The NVA attacking the hill from the southeast pushed the 106 Recoilless Rifle squad to the top of the hill where they overran it. The command group turned to meet the new threat.

By 1645, the attack on the southeast portion of the hill had been repulsed with heavy casualties suffered by the command group. The artillery Forward Observer and his Recon Sergeant were mortally wounded. His RTO was slightly wounded. The 4.2 inch Heavy Mortar Forward Observer was seriously wounded, and his RTO killed. The company commander was hit again. He and one of his RTO's were seriously wounded.

The command group had lost all of its assigned forward observers, and only one radio within the command group was still operational.

The attack from the southwest was repulsed by Lieutenant Sudborough's security element. Lieutenant Sudborough was killed and only two men in the rear security element and the remaining 106 Recoilless Rifle squad survived the attack.

The company commander informed the battalion commander of the situation and requested close in artillery and air support be employed. The battalion commander directed the company (-) to mark its location for the gunships on station.

(13)

Both Lieutenant Alvarado and Captain Rykowski employed all available smoke grenades during the next four minutes, but the smoke could not penetrate the thick double canopy.

Captain Rykowski directed Lieutenant Alvarado to employ hand held flares in an attempt to penetrate the jungle canopy and guide the command and control ship to their location. The company commander then directed his attentions to reorganizing the hasty perimeter.

Lightly wounded personnel were placed back on the perimeter after medical care. Claymore mines were taken from the dead and seriously wounded, passed up to the company commander, and placed across the top of the hill. Fragmentation and White

Phosphorous grenades were passed up to the company commander and the two RTO's.

No longer able to move on his own, the company commander had himself positioned near the top of the hill. From this vantage point, he could see most of the perimeter and directed personnel into positions along its southern and eastern portions.

#### CONDUCT OF THE DEFENSE

As wounded men moved into position on the east flank of the perimeter, the NVA launched a "Human Wave" attack from the south. As the enemy came across the top of the hill, passing through the gap left by the fallen 106 Recoilless Rifle squad, eight claymore mines were detonated simultaneously. This inflicted heavy casualties in the center of the attacking force and repulsed it. The NVA fell back under cover of automatic weapons and 82mm mortar fire.

The headquarters group of the company (-) had taken heavy casualties in the second attack. Only three men, the company commander and two RTO's, were left on the hill. The remnants of Lieutenant Sudborough's west flank security were moved to a position at the western base

(14)

of the hill. From this location they could prevent the NVA from flanking the hill in that direction.

To replace serious casualties on the eastern portion of the perimeter, the senior medical aidman was directed to assist less seriously wounded personnel into positions covering approaches around the hill from that direction. The senior medical aidman was the only trained medic left alive in the company (-). He was one of the four persons in the company (-) still capable of walking.

While the senior aidman was assisting men into positions, the NVA launched another "Human Wave" attack. The main attack was directed against the third platoon on the east, and the supporting attack directed against the hill on the south.

The third platoon initially engaged the attack with claymore mines. As the attack slowed, the third platoon placed a heavy volume of automatic weapons fire on the advancing forces. The

enemy closed with the third platoon and were repulsed by hand to hand combat.

The supporting attack moved below the topographical crest of the hill to the south. As the enemy attempted to flank the hill from the west, the RTO's began throwing grenades from the top of the hill. This forced the NVA to withdraw back down the slope into the direct fire of the repositioned west flank security.

On the southeast, the grenades held up the enemys' advance. This allowed the senior aidman time to complete moving wounded men into position. Once in position, they began to place effective fire on the enemy from less then ten meters, causing him to withdraw. They then assisted the third platoon by fire in repulsing the main attack.

When the attack was repulsed, the company commander had the four men capable of walking redistribute ammunition. While this was in progress,

(15)

he called the first and second platoons. He requested information on their progress towards the company (-) location.

The second platoon leader informed the company commander that both platoons were engaged from the east and the south and were unable to reinforce the company (-).

The company commander switched his only radio back to the battalion Command Frequency and relayed the situation to the battalion commander. At this time, further attempts were made by the company commander to guide the battalion commander's Command and Control helicopter to his location. All remaining hand held flares were fired; however none penetrated the canopy.

At 1717, gunships from the 170th Aviation Company were able to identify all friendly units in the area. As they began close-in support of the first and second platoons, the NVA initiated an assault on the two platoons.

To prevent close-in air support, the enemy pressed close to the perimeter of the two platoons. Lieutenant Stoner, the first platoon leader, directed the gunships in even closer. Supporting fires from the gunships fell along the perimeter. Lieutenant Stoner and several men in the first platoon were hit by machinegun fire from one of the gunships. This close-in,

effective fire broke the attack and killed a large number of the enemy.

At 1740, close contact was broken by the enemy. The first and second platoons began their reorganization and reconsolidation. Due to casualties, they were unable to proceed towards the company (-) to effect a link-up.

To the south, the company (-) was still surrounded. They were receiving heavy sniper and automatic weapons fire. however, the enemy made no further attempts to overrun the beleaguered elements.

(16)

The NVA, under cover of intensive fire, began policing the battle area. From his vantage point, the company commander observed the enemy's effort and requested artillery support be brought in closer. Due to the inability of Lieutenant Alvarado and Captain Rykowski to adequately mark their location, the battalion commander was reluctant to adjust indirect fire support closer to the company (-).

#### REINFORCEMENT

At 1825, Company "A" linked up with the first and second platoons of Company "C". Captain Barcena, the commanding officer of Company "A", assumed command of the force. Company "A" took over responsibility for the perimeter, and the two platoons from Company "C" began clearing an LZ for extraction of the casualties.

At 1845, the battalion commander led a seven man Command and Control party in a combat assault on an LZ 300 meters south of the company (-). As the battalion Command Group began moving towards the company (-), the point man spotted NVA moving to their front. The Command Group temporarily returned to the LZ.

The first and second platoons of Company "C" had cleared an LZ by 1900, and a Dustoff helicopter was requested. In addition, a request for the battalion surgeon, medical aidmen, and medical supplies was sent to the battalion CP.

The helicopter arrived at 2000. While hovering to hoist the wounded, it was shot down by an enemy B-40 Rocket. Two of the crewmen were killed and two were wounded.

The explosion of the helicopter ended any further attempt of evacuation at that location. The battalion commander, aware of the downed helicopter, was able to secure a more desirable LZ with his patrol. He directed Company "A" and the two platoons of company "C" to move to the new LZ.

(17)

The company (-) heard the dustoff helicopter approach the location of the first and second platoons. They heard the explosion of the B-40 Rocket and saw the flames of the helicopter as it crashed.

A platoon from Company "A" linked up with company (-) at 2100. The company commander directed the platoon leader from Company "A" to assume responsibility for the perimeter. Once the platoon from Company "A" was in position, Captain Rykowski requested assistance in moving down the hill.

#### EVACUATION OF THE CASUALTIES

At the base of the hill, the company commander briefed the platoon leader from Company "A" on the trace of the perimeter. He indicated the main avenues of approach into the perimeter and informed the platoon leader of the enemy's policing activities to the south.

As the platoon leader from Company "A" inspected the perimeter, medical aidmen from Company "A" began tending to the wounded. To hasten the evacuation of the wounded to the new LZ, the company commander directed Lieutenant Alvarado, the third platoon leader, to supervise the construction of poncho litters.

Once the litters were constructed, the company commander briefed the bearers. Before leaving the perimeter, the company commander instructed Lieutenant Alvarado to maintain contact with the battalion command group on the LZ. At 2150 the evacuation of the wounded began.

With a small security force to lead the way, the wounded were carried 300 meters southwest of the perimeter to the new LZ. The carrying party could hear the NVA policing the battle area: however, contact was not made. At 2210 the wounded arrived at the new LZ.

The first Dustoff helicopter arrived at 2220. It contained the

Battalion surgeon and an engineer team. The battalion surgeon was needed to evaluate priorities for evacuation of the seriously wounded.

(18)

At 2225, Captain Rykowski was evacuated from the LZ.

The first and second platoons from Company "C" entered the LZ at 2235. The battalion commander reorganized the forces into a task organization. Company "A" secured the perimeter. Lightly wounded personnel from Company "C" were employed as litter bearers. The battalion command group became the landing zone control team.

The extraction of all seriously wounded was completed by 0130, 22 March 1967, and the battalion command group departed the landing zone for the battalion FSB.

Company "A" and the remainder of Company "C" organized the perimeter and established security for the balance of the night. Only sporadic sniper fire was received throughout the night. At 0627, some 25 rounds of 82mm mortar fire fell around the perimeter. No casualties were sustained.

At 1030, Company "B" made a combat assault 300 meters south of Company "C" (-) point of contact. Company "C" moved to the LZ and was airlifted to the battalion FSB. They assumed security of the battalion FSB and began reorganizing their forces.

#### SUMMARY

On 17 March 1967, Company "C", 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry, made a combat assault northeast of the battalion FSB. Their mission was to conduct search and destroy operations west towards the Nam Sathay River blocking possible exfiltration routes. On the third day of the operation, Company "C" began moving southeast toward the battalion FSB.

Due to the company's relatively small size, 99 men including attachments, and the known tactics of the enemy the company was split into two elements. The first and second platoons moved on the east, and the third platoon and headquarters group moved on the west. During the conduct of the search and destroy operations, the two elements moved

(19)

some 600 meters apart. This positioned them close enough to permit rapid reinforcement, yet, left both elements sufficient maneuver space.

Prior to departing the overnight perimeter, the company commander would request preplanned fire along the day's intended routes. The preplanned fires served a dual purpose; they placed fires on likely danger areas along the route from which platoon leaders could rapidly adjust fire, and they served as marking rounds for the platoons.

At 1350, 21 March 1967, the first and second platoons began receiving fire from two NVA while searching a bunker complex. The NVA were taken under fire and fled to the southeast. While the company commander was reporting the information to the battalion CP, the first and second platoons were engaged by an estimated five automatic weapons.

The company commander informed the second platoon leader of his scheme of maneuver, requested Company "A" to move in his directions and began maneuvering the company (-) towards the first and second platoons.

As the company (-) maneuvered to the southeast, the second platoon leader was called again to inform him of the location and progress of the company (-). He was directed to place fires to the southeast of his location. The artillery Forward Observer was given the location of both elements and was directed to get immediate fires into the area.

The company (-) continued to close on the first and second platoons without the use of supporting indirect fires. The point element of the third platoon crossed a well-used trail 300 meters south of the first and second platoons location. To avoid moving into a possible ambush, the third platoon was directed to move to the west of the trail, and was further directed to increase the distance between the point and flank security elements and the main body.

At 1620, the point element of the third platoon made contact with an undetermined size enemy force. The third platoon was maneuvered on

(20)

line, to develop the situation. Flank and rear security was provided by the headquarters group. By 1623, the attack was slowed by the intense fire and thick underbrush.

The third platoon began receiving heavy small arms fire from the east flank. The company commander maneuvered the flank security and the command group against the threat. As the security element gained the top of the hill, they came upon an estimated NVA battalion moving toward them.

The elements of the company (-) were notified of the new threat and directed to fall back and form a hasty perimeter. Within minutes, the company (-) was decisively engaged and unable to break contact. The battalion CP was notified, the second platoon leader was directed to attack south, and all available indirect fire support was requested.

At 1637, the enemy launched an attack from three directions. By 1640, the company commander was wounded, all trained Forward Observers had become casualties, and the command group had only one radio left. Communication was established with the battalion commander and additional fire support was requested.

Due to the double canopy, the Forward Air Controller was unable to identify the friendly ground forces. Attempts to mark their locations with smoke proved fruitless. The third platoon leader was directed to continue his attempts at marking the location while the company commander began reorganizing the perimeter.

While the reorganization was being conducted, the enemy launched the first of three "Human Wave" attacks against the company (-). All attacks were repulsed, but the company (-) suffered heavy casualties.

Some 200 meters to the north, the first and second platoons were engaged on two flanks and unable to move towards the company(-). As the NVA launched an attack against them, the 170th Aviation Company, was

(21)

able to identify their positions. Close-in air support broke up the NVA attack and inflicted heavy casualties among the enemy.

At 1740, heavy contact was broken by the enemy. The first and second platoons began reorganizing. To the south the company (-) was still surrounded. They were receiving intense sniper and mortar fire.

Company "A" reinforced the first and second platoons at 1825. Work was immediately started on clearing an LZ. By 1900, a hole was cleared in the dense jungle, and a dustoff helicopter was requested. The helicopter arrived at 2000, but was shot down while hovering over the clearing. This ended all further attempts at evacuating wounded from the LZ. The two elements were directed to move to another LZ about 300 meters to the south.

A platoon from Company "A" linked up with Company "C" (-) at 2100. The platoon was given the mission of securing the perimeter while the wounded were being treated. To expedite matters, the third platoon leader of Company "C" supervised the construction of poncho litters. The company (-) began moving its wounded towards the new LZ at 2150.

Company "C" (-) arrived at the new LZ at 2210. The first dustoff helicopter arrived at 2220 and the evacuation of the seriously wounded began. The first and second platoons arrived at the LZ at 2235.

While the evacuation of the wounded was being conducted, the battalion command group controlled the LZ operations. The lightly wounded personnel from Company "C" acted as litter bearers. Company "A" secured the perimeter.

All seriously wounded were evacuated by 0130. Companies "A" and "C" reorganized the perimeter and set out security for the remainder of the night.

At 1030, 22 March 1967, Company "B" made a combat assault 300

(22)

meters south of the point of contact. Company "C" was extracted and returned to the battalion FSB to begin reorganization.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. Prior to departing the overnight location, the company commander made a map reconnaissance of the intended routes that his elements would move over that day. During this map

reconnaissance, he planned fires on the likely danger areas along the routes. These fires were placed on call and when approved issued to the platoon leaders. As the company moved during the day, the preplanned fires were called for prior to moving through a danger area. This measure would assist the platoons in adjusting fires in the event of contact. When the first and second platoons came under fire from the southeast, no attempt was made by either platoon leader to adjust from a preplanned concentration 200 meters to their south.

This preplanned concentration was placed on the hill that Company 'C' (-) defended later in the day. Failure by the platoon leaders to utilize the fires available resulted in the two platoons becoming pinned down by five automatic weapons.

2. In planning the day's route the company commander split his company into two elements. This action was based on the knowledge of the enemy's tactics of engaging company sized elements in daylight while they were moving. The enemy would quickly close with the company before close-in indirect fire could be employed effectively. The enemy would then attempt to further fragment the company into platoon sized elements.

Due to the company's small size, each of the two elements would have the relative combat power equivalent to a rifle platoon. This configuration gave each element what was considered by the company commander to be sufficient fire power to sustain itself in a fire fight.

(23)

until reinforcements could reach them.

3. Due to the limited observation in the AO, the company used a modified checkerboard (for) the conduct of the search and destroy operation. Movement through the dense underbrush was slow and difficult to control. The squad leaders did not have radio communication with the platoon leaders, and observation to the flanks seldom exceeded 25 meters. Since the company only had a zone of action 1,000 meters wide, the two elements were placed about 600 meters apart.

In coming to trails, the elements would halt. The lead elements would cloverleaf out to a distance of 400 meters. This effectively covered the assigned zone. It also allowed the rear elements to act as a reserve for the squads out on the cloverleaf.

4. Prior to either company departing the overnight location the second platoon conducted a sweep of the perimeter.

Although the time spent conducting the sweep of the perimeter was excessive it was deemed necessary. During the conduct of the sweep, one of the remaining platoons in the company was designated as a reaction force in the event of an ambush.

5. Once the sweep of the perimeter was completed, preplanned fires were called in around the perimeter.

This action was to prevent the NVA from moving into close proximity of the perimeter after the sweep.

6. Multiple routes, different than those used on entering the perimeter the previous night, were selected for departing the overnight location.

This measure minimized the possibility of an ambush along a previously used route. Sufficient time was allowed between elements to avoid confusion and possible engagement of one another.

(24)

7. As the first and second platoons completed their search of the well-used, high-speed trail, they were given ample time to complete their reorganization and place their security elements out.

Security during the move was provided by three man point and flank elements. This was approximately 1/3 of the combat power of the rifle platoons. Rear security for the two rifle platoons was provided by a fire team under the control of the platoon sergeant. In addition, an 81mm mortar Forward Observer was placed with the rear security. This allowed indirect fire to be placed on the enemy following the platoons, and it provided the platoon sergeant with a means of communication with the platoon leader.

The weapons platoon leader was responsible for providing security for the command group. To assist him the 106 Recoilless Rifle squads were organized into fire teams and employed on the flanks. The rear security was a fire team comprised of the

company commander's driver, the communications sergeant, and two RTO's.

8. Once the first and second platoons were engaged, they failed to register fires around their perimeter.

This allowed the NVA to close on the two platoons. From their location, the enemy were able to effectively engage them and prevented the two platoons from moving to the assistance of the company (-).

9. Once contact was initiated the situation reports to the company commander were vague and infrequent.

Based on available information, the company commander made an estimate of the situation. He informed the second platoon leader and the battalion CP of his proposed scheme of maneuver. He requested all available fires be brought on the known enemy positions. Prior to the third platoon's contact, the company commander was not made aware of any further build-up of enemy forces around the two platoons.

(25)

10. The scheme of maneuver selected by the company commander was based on the disposition of the enemy in relationship to his location.

To preclude the enemy from breaking contact, the company commander requested indirect supporting fires to block one flank while the company (-) attacked from the opposite flank and rear.

11. In moving to contact, the security elements of the company (-) were moved further out from the main body.

Due to the increased volume of small arms fire in the vicinity of the first and second platoons, the company commander elected to close on their location in a column formation. This formation provided maximum firepower to the flanks while providing a greater degree of speed and control.

12. Prior to maneuvering the company (-), the company commander requested that Company "A" begin moving towards his location.

This request was based on the knowledge that it would take Company "A" a considerable time to traverse the dense underbrush and reinforce the company (-) if needed.

13. When the point element of the third platoon came upon the well-used, high-speed trail, the company commander directed the third platoon to move to the west of the trail.

Although it took several minutes to accomplish this maneuver, the company commander wanted to avoid walking into a possible ambush.

14. As the company (-) closed to within 300 meters of the first and second platoon, artillery fires were placed to the southeast of their location. These fires were coordinated with the first and second platoon leaders. The company commander elected to continue the movement to contact without waiting for the fires to begin.

It was felt that the company (-) could achieve an element of surprise

(26)

if it reached the enemy position at the same time that the indirect fire support was brought to bear on the opposite flank. The company commander also considered speed essential. At the time it was felt that the enemy would soon move to surround the first and second platoons.

13. The point element of the third platoon made contact with an undetermined number of NVA.

The third platoon was directed to maneuver on line and develop the situation. The third platoon closed on the enemy's positions using fire and movement. To allow the platoon to bring maximum fire to bear on the enemy, the security elements from the command group were placed to the flanks and rear of the third platoon.

16. As the third platoon closed to within 25 meters of the enemy positions, 60mm and 82mm mortar fires began falling on the attacking elements. Flanking fires were directed against the platoon from a small hill. The heavy fire and thick underbrush slowed the attack.

To maintain the momentum of the attack in the face of increasing enemy fires the company commander committed his small reserve. The hill was key terrain from which the enemy could direct effective fire on the third platoon. Seizure of the hill would

relieve the pressure on the third platoon and would allow them to continue their attack. Artillery fires were directed in closer to support the attack. The attack was successful and timely. It placed an element on the key terrain as the NVA maneuvered his reinforcements into position.

17. Based on the enemy actions, the company (-) was forced to break contact and form a hasty perimeter under enemy pressure.

Fragmentary orders were issued to all elements. The situation was relayed to the second platoon leader and the battalion commander. A request for all available indirect fire support was made to the battalion commander.

(27)

18. Close-in Air Support was on-station in the vicinity. However, the double canopy effectively screened all elements from aerial observation.

Attempts to signal the Command and Control helicopter were in vain. The smoke dissipated prior to breaking through the canopy. Handheld flares were employed by the third platoon leader, but they did not penetrate the double canopy. The lack of adequate means to mark their location precluded both elements from utilizing the available fire support of the gunships. The battalion commander was reluctant to direct close-in air and artillery support until the friendly elements could be identified.

19. In organizing the perimeter, the company commander determined the small hill to be key terrain. He placed the 106 Recoilless Rifle squad and the fire team from the third platoon around the southern portion of the hill. The command group occupied the top of the hill and were the reserve for the company (-).

Although only a few minutes were available to form the perimeter, the company commander deemed it necessary to retain a reserve rather than place all personnel on the perimeter initially. When the perimeter was penetrated in the initial enemy attack, the reserve was employed successfully to stop the penetration and to eject the enemy from the perimeter.

20. The loss of all trained Forward Observers seriously hampered the effectiveness of the supporting fires.

Due to his wounds, the company commander lapsed into periods of unconsciousness and was unable to adjust fires adequately and continually. The third platoon leader was wounded and his radio was inoperable. The loss of both the close-in air and artillery support allowed the NVA forces unrestricted movement in the battle area, and they were able to mount coordinated attacks against the company (-).

(28)

21. The company (-) was unable to break contact to permit full utilization of all available fire support means.

Had the headquarters element immediately fallen back, the third platoon would have been cut off. This would have facilitated the enemy's first objective of fragmenting the company into platoon sized elements. The seizure of the small hill forced the enemy to deploy prematurely. Further, it denied him key terrain in the battle area from which he could place effective small arms fire on the two friendly elements.

22. The initial attack on the hasty perimeter was repulsed, but heavy casualties were inflicted on the command group. Continual reorganization off-set the enemy's numerical superiority.

Placing lightly wounded personnel back on the perimeter allowed the company (-) to maintain mutual support around the periphery. The employment of claymores to block the most dangerous avenues of approach and to reinforce all available fires broke one attack and slowed another. Maximum use was made of breaks in the action to redistribute ammunition. All ammunition was removed from the dead and seriously wounded by the senior aidman and was given to personnel manning the perimeter.

23. Alternate means of communication between the platoon leaders and the company commander was not established.

Enemy pressure did not allow time to lay wire. The extra RTO's in the rear security element were unable to reach the top of the hill, and they were killed in the initial attack. The lose of three radios in the command group within the first 17 minutes seriously affected the company commander's ability to communicate on the three nets Company, Battalion, and Fire Direction.

24. Platoon medical aidmen moving during a firefight expose themselves needlessly.

The failure of the platoon leaders to keep the platoon medical aidmen under their control during the heavy fighting resulted in all four platoon medics becoming casualties. The loss of the medical aidmen seriously affected the treatment of the wounded.

#### TRAINING IMPLICATIONS

1. preplanned fires placed on call are essential to the success of the operation. Platoon leaders must become thoroughly familiar with the procedures for calling in supporting artillery and air support.

2. In organizing the company for combat, the company commander must consider the Mission, Enemy, Troops Available, Terrain, Time, and Space, (METTTS). Based on the known enemy tactics, the terrain, and the space, the company commander split his company into two elements. Both had sufficient combat power to sustain itself in a firefight.

3. Commanders of the next higher headquarters must be continually kept abreast of the rapidly changing situation. The vague, infrequent information given to the company commander led him to select a scheme of maneuver to flank what was estimated to be five automatic weapons. The company (-) did not move to the immediate assistance of the two rifle platoons.

4. Maximum utilization must be made of all available supporting fires. The failure of the platoon leaders to call for fires immediately responsive to their needs caused the two rifle platoons to become pinned down. The company commander did not employ the indirect fire support to the fullest extent possible while moving to contact.

5. In organizing a perimeter defense, maximum use of offensive actions must be employed. The failure of the first and second platoons to sweep the immediate area around their perimeter and to set out listening posts permitted the NVA unrestricted maneuver and observation while closing on the perimeter undetected.

6. Maneuver elements must have effective means available to clearly define their disposition. The inability of the two

elements to mark their location and disposition for the battalion commander and Forward Air Controller delayed critically needed close-in air and artillery support.

7. Medical personnel must be controlled by leaders at all echelons of command. The loss of the four platoon medical aidmen hampered the treatment of the seriously wounded personnel. Medical aidmen moving during a firefight often become the focal point of the enemy fire.

6. In a perimeter defense, a small reserve must be maintained. This reserve must be positioned to block the most dangerous avenue of approach into the perimeter. From this location, the reserve must be able to limit a penetration, execute a limited counterattack, and restore the perimeter.

(31)

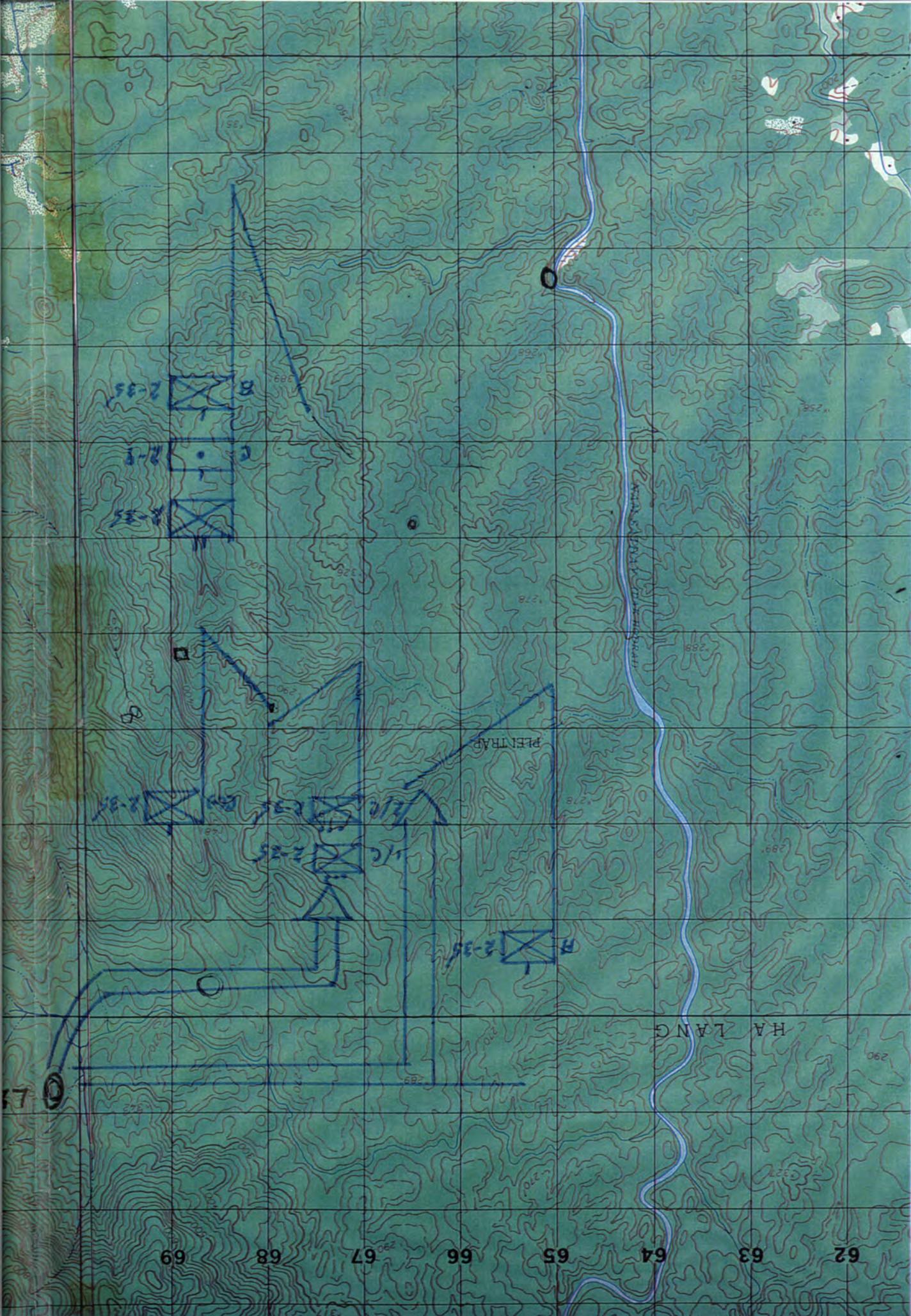
#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

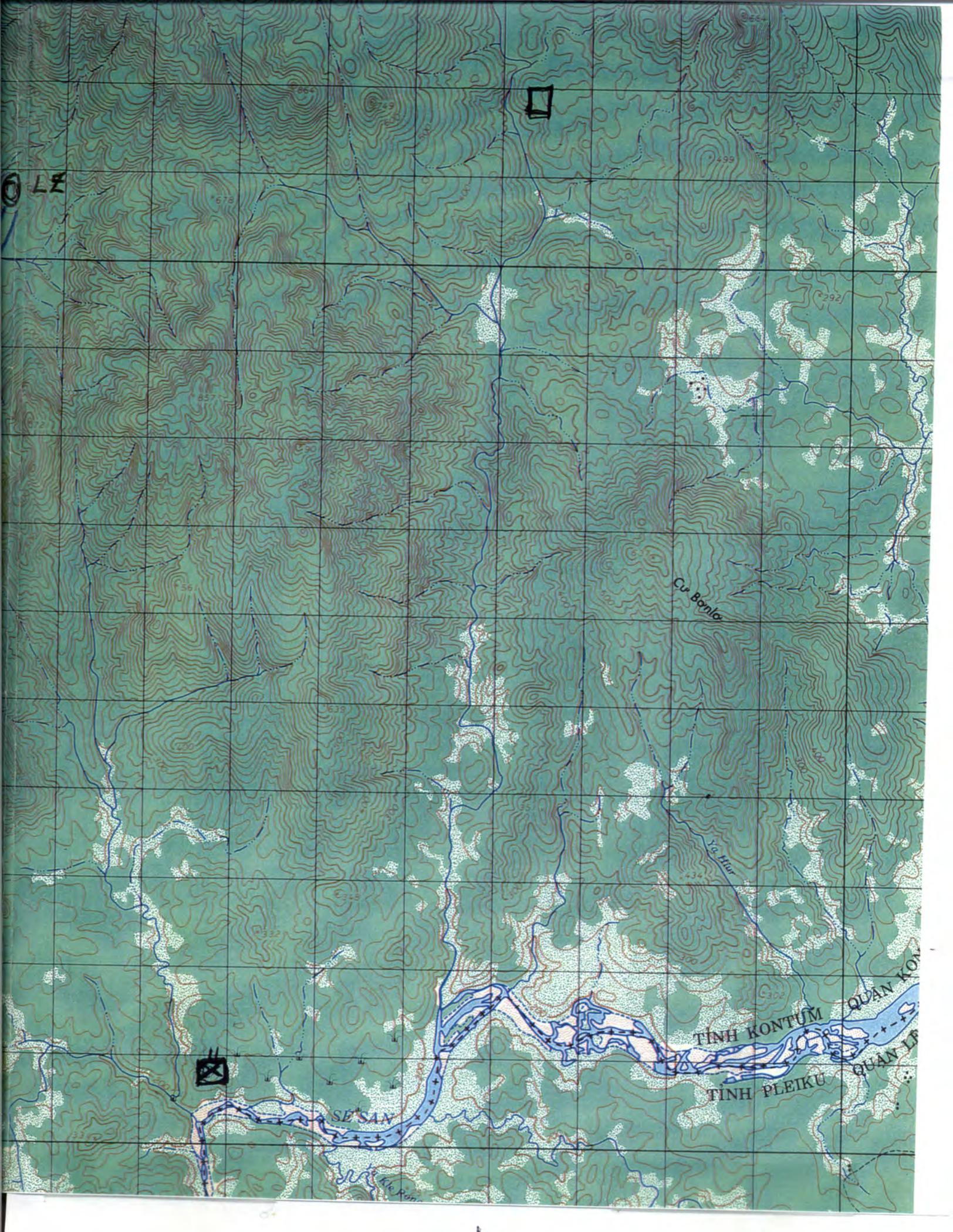
1. Garland, Albert, *Infantry in Vietnam* (Georgia: Infantry Magazine, 1967).
2. "Combat Operations After Action Report" (Pleiku, Vietnam: 2d Bn, 35th Inf, 3d Bde, 25th Inf Div, 12 April 1967).
3. "Combat Operations After Action Report" (Pleiku, Vietnam: 4th Inf Div, 16 May 1967). (CONFIDENTIAL)
4. FM 7-11, *Rifle Company, Infantry, Airborne Infantry, and Mechanized Infantry* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, January 1968).
5. FM 31-16, *Counter guerilla Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, February 1963).
6. "General Order Number 3384, Award of the Silver Star to Captain Ronald B. Rykowski" (Pleiku: 4th Infantry Division, 15 October 1967).

(32)

50

55





6 LZ

Cu Benla

TINH KONTUM

TINH PLEIKU

QUAN KON

QUAN LI

SE SAN

Ng Ilur

Ng Pon