

1st Air Cavalry Division
Republic of Vietnam
Office of Information and History

THE BATTLE OF

CHARLIE 1ST & 5TH

ON THE CAMBODIAN BORDER

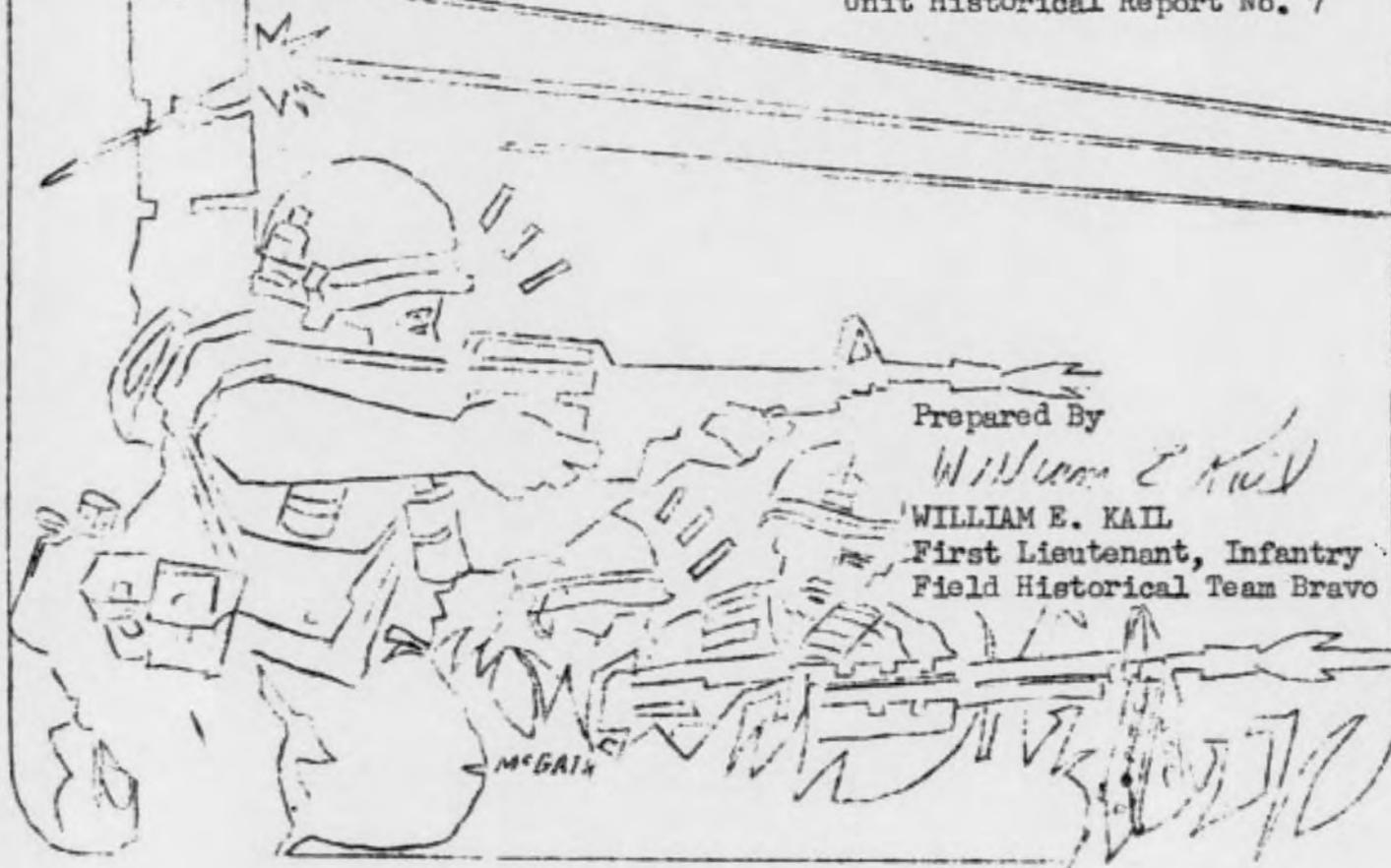
21 November 1966

Unit Historical Report No. 7

Prepared By

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On November 21st 1966, as part of the 1st Air Cavalry Division's Operation Paul Revere IV in the southwestern corner of Pleiku Province, the 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry (1/5), under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Siegrist, continued its reconnaissance in force operations along the Cambodian border with three companies. (Map 1)

The operations had begun on November 17th when the rifle companies of the 1/5 air assaulted into three widely dispersed landing zones (LZ), each contiguous to the Cambodian border. They were to conduct a reconnaissance in force along the border within their respective areas. Each company was given a definite area of operations (AO) in order that the battalions's sector of the border could be fully searched. Little contact was made until 9:30 on the morning of November 21st when two platoons of Company C encountered an aggressive enemy force of superior size.

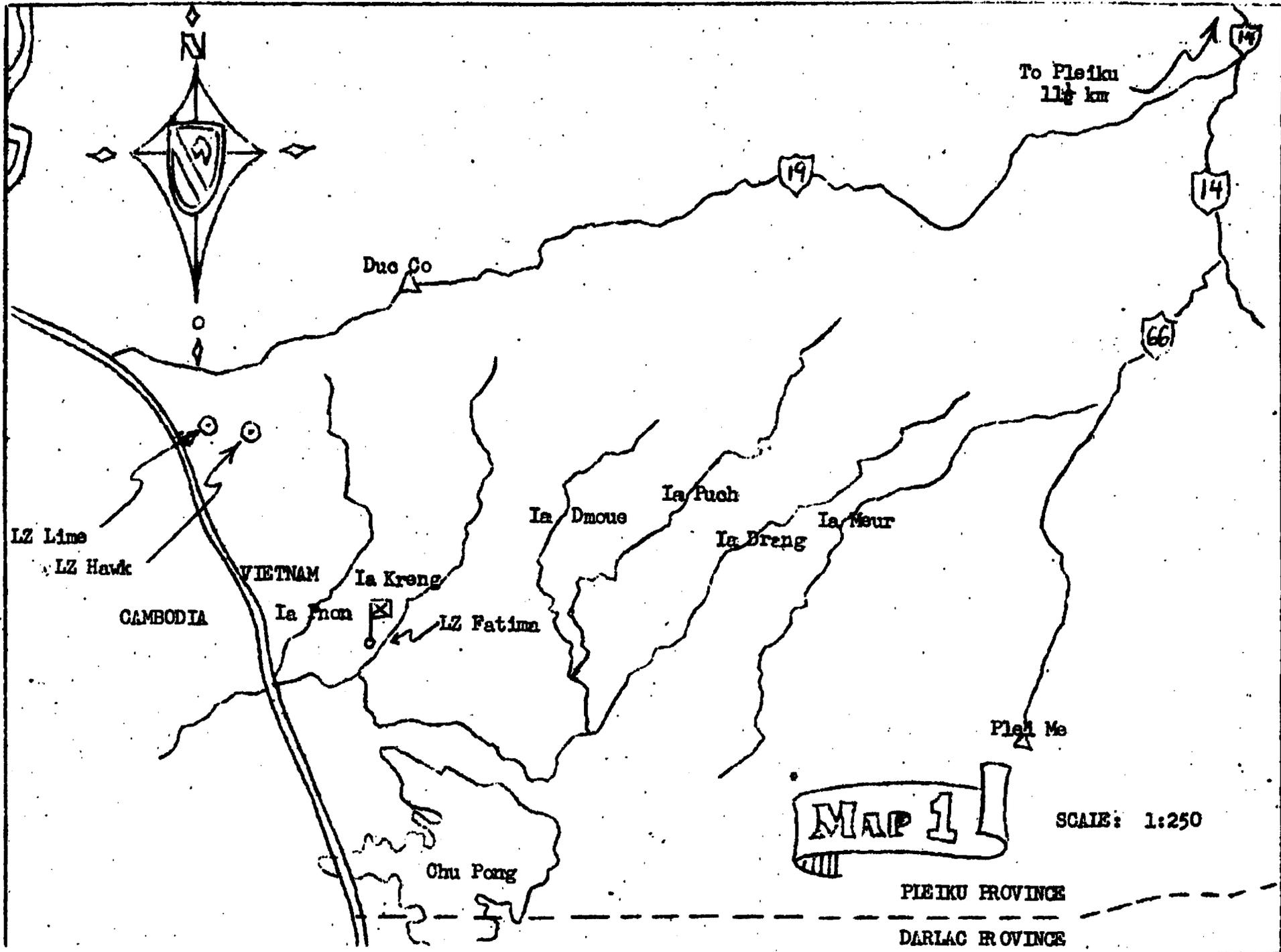
The mid-November days were pleasant. Seven knot winds and partly cloudy skies took the edge off the daily ninety degree highs while sixty-eight degree lows prevailed during the nights. Seven mile visibility and four thousand foot ceilings created optimum flying conditions. The lack of rain left stream crossings uncomplicated, and the infantryman remained dry and comfortable.

Within the battalion area of operations, the terrain was gently rolling with occasional gentle rises of twenty to thirty feet. Vegetation ranged from clear forest in the northern and southeastern portion of the area to the heavy forest or jungle in the central area of operations. Brushwood, elephant grass clearings, and occasional bamboo groves were found along the border. Shallow intermittent streams and fast-running creeks wound their way south into the Ia Drang River just north of the Chu Pong Mountain. Many trails with varying degrees of usage facilitated movement. The terrain was not entirely prohibiting, though the heavy forest did restrict routes of movement and limited observation.

This area had long been used as an infiltration route from Cambodia. Previous operations in the area had never failed to turn up numerous caches, assembly areas and well-traveled trails. Montagnard agents coming in from Duc Co had recently reported regimental-size North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troop assembly areas north and west of Duc Co on the Cambodian side of the border. The enemy situation appeared to warrant another reconnaissance in force operation, in order to determine the extent of enemy activity, keep him off balance, and deny him unrestricted use of the area.

Colonel Siegrist's battalion celebrated its seventy-second day in the field on the 17th of November. He described the battalion as in good shape that day, as each company had an average foxhole strength of one hundred and eight to one hundred and eighteen men. On the 21st of November Company C had 110 men in the field (less the 4th platoon at LZ Hawk) with platoon strength as follows: 1st platoon - 30; 2d platoon and CP group - 45; and the 3d platoon - 35. Including the fourth platoon the company strength was one hundred and thirty-two. Slightly over one-third of C Company, forty-six men, were replacements who had been in the company from two to six weeks. The company commander, Captain Harold J. Wunsch, had been in command for approximately two weeks; however, he was familiar with the operational conditions and knew the battalion since he had been serving on the Brigade and Battalion staff for three months previous. Captain Donald Sims whom Wunsch had replaced recalled that "two thirds of the 3d platoon were new men. Master Sergeant Letbetter was one of the newest men." Letbetter had joined the platoon on October 15th when his predecessor was wounded during operations near the Iron Triangle (heavily vegetated Viet Cong haven located east of the Kim Son Valley destroyed by 1st Cavalry during Bong Son Campaign Jan - Mar 1966). On the 21st of November, First Lieutenant James B. Wolf, C Company's executive officer, was enroute from a rear area to take command of the platoon.

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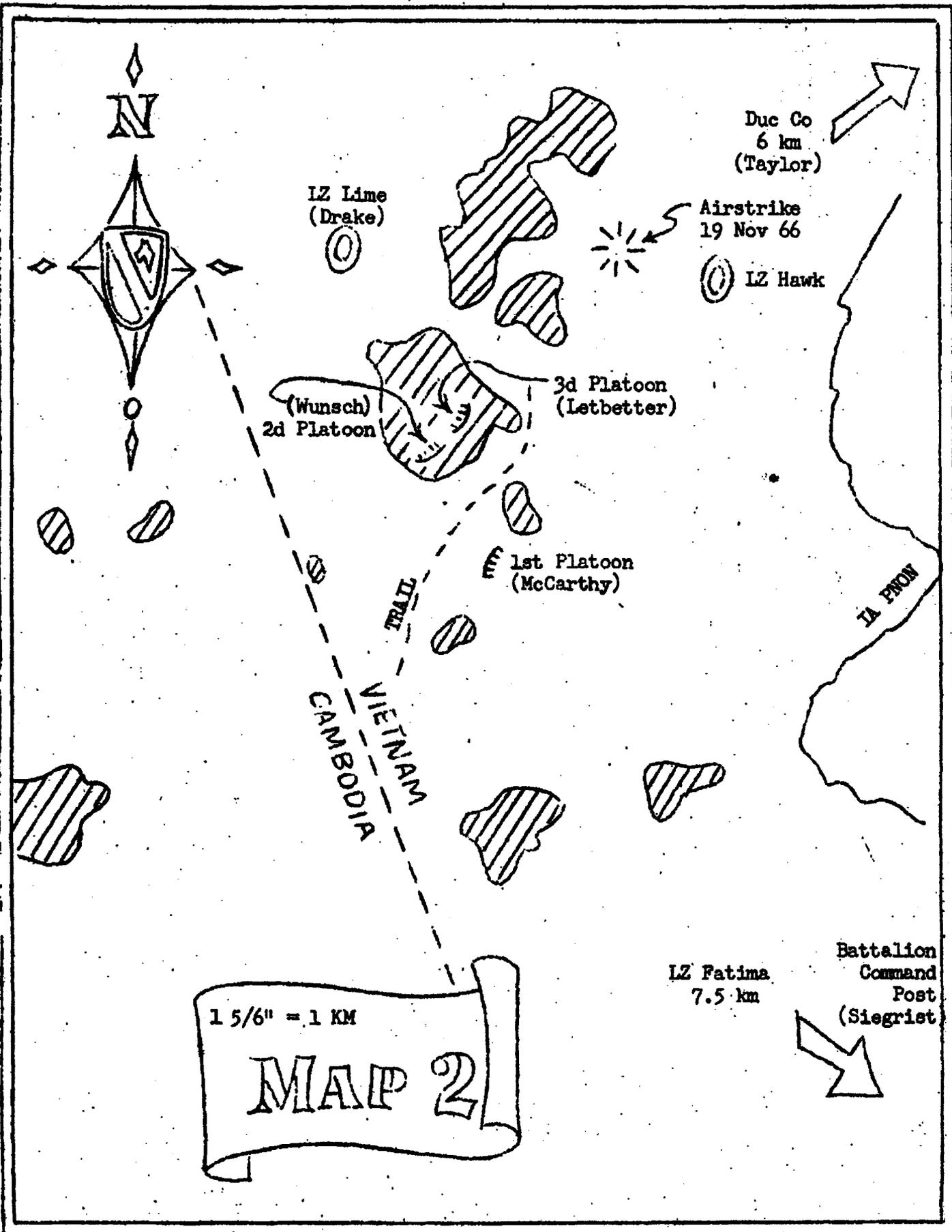


The 1/5's reconnaissance in force resulted in two specific contacts between the 17th and 21st of November. On the 17th the second platoon of A Company, while reconnoitering to the northwest of LZ Hawk, made contact with an NVA squad at 1:00 p.m. The fight lasted for forty-five minutes before the NVA broke contact and fled southwest. Pursuit in an effort to regain contact failed and the final result was one friendly killed, four wounded and one NVA killed. This contact lent credibility to suspicions that there were reconnaissance elements of a larger NVA force operating in the area. On the 19th the sector forward air controller (FAC), reported sighting twenty NVA six hundred meters west of LZ Hawk.

The FAC was performing a visual reconnaissance mission from his Ol Bird Dog aircraft armed with four 2.75" rockets. Equipped with UHF, VHF and FM communications capabilities, the air controller can establish contact with the ground commander as well as the Air Force aircraft he controls. His task, when working with troops, is to contact the commander to determine the target for the incoming high performance aircraft, to adjust their bombing and strafing runs and finally when possible to relay damage assessment to the aircraft when the strike has been completed. On the 19th he was on a visual reconnaissance mission patrolling the battalion area of operations and not working in conjunction with ground troops and therefore need only clear his mission with the battalion before calling in the strike. Feeling that there were more enemy present than he was able to observe, the FAC directed three air strikes into the area between five and seven o'clock in the evening. (Map 2)

Suspecting that his A Company now located at LZ Lime was between a large force and the border, and hoping to drive that force into A Company, Colonel Siegrist followed up immediately by air assaulting Company C into LZ Hawk from where they moved to the edge of the strike area, arriving at approximately 10:00 that night. Siegrist also wanted another company in the vicinity as his A Company was operating uncomfortably far from other friendly forces with too much of an area to cover. Charlie Company checked the area the following morning finding blood on the ground, a bloody khaki shirt as well as fresh signs of exfiltration.

After four days of searching and reconnoitering the area and due to an added mission assigned to the battalion on the 21st, the 1/5 was widely dispersed on the 21st. Company B's third platoon and company commander air assaulted thirteen kilometers to the northwest of Duc Co on a search and cordon mission. The battalion command post and the first and second platoons of B Company remained at LZ Fatima, fifteen kilometers south of Duc Co where they secured the battalion firebase. Company A was located at LZ Lime, eleven kilometers northwest of Fatima and southwest of Duc Co. The weapons platoons of Companies A and C, secured by the second platoon of A Company, were located two kilometers west of Lime at LZ Hawk with their six 81mm mortar tubes which were to provide fire support. Eight inch and 175mm guns located at Duc Co and 105mm howitzers located at LZ Fatima were available for artillery support. Fifteen hundred meters southeast of Lime, Company C, commanded by Captain Harold J. Wunsch, was situated in an ambush posture along a well-used trail they had discovered the previous day. (Map 2) Major Harold Johnson, the artillery liaison officer attached to 1/5, recalls C Company as being beyond the range of the howitzers at Fatima, but well within the range of support from Duc Co and Hawk.



1 5/6" = 1 KM
MAP 2

Wunsch had set three ambushes along the trail the night of the 20th, each consisting of a platoon. The second and third platoons had established their ambush sites from two to three hundred meters apart, approximately fifteen hundred meters southeast of Lime. The first platoon ambush was located eight hundred meters down the trail from the second and third platoons. Wunsch and his command post were located with the second platoon. A five-man NVA patrol walked into the third platoon ambush that night. When the ambush was sprung, one NVA soldier was killed and the others dispersed. The dead soldier wore new clothing and equipment; however, he carried no documents identifying him or his unit. Staff Sergeant Henry Brown, squad leader of the platoon's third squad, felt that there was a great deal of activity around the ambush site that night as he heard movement in the brush throughout the night; however, no further contact was made. Captain Wunsch, however, suspected that this "activity" was the result of nerves and indicated to Siegrist that there was no enemy movement.

On the morning of the 21st, Siegrist instructed Wunsch to continue his reconnaissance to the south. Wunsch requested and was granted permission to leave the third platoon where they were as he felt that there was an enemy force in the area. He based his suspicion on the ambush results of the previous night and he hoped to ambush them again. Wunsch ordered his first platoon to search the general area in which it was located the night before and to continue moving southward. The second platoon's mission was to move down the trail to the first platoon's vacated location. Captain Wunsch remained with the second platoon as they moved out of their ambush position at 8:40 AM to pass through the third platoon's area. Having arrived there, Wunsch halted the second platoon while he gave instructions to Sergeant Letbetter, platoon leader of the third platoon.

Letbetter was ordered to move to another ambush position four hundred meters to the east of their present location. Letbetter was also to send a patrol back to LZ Hawk approximately fifteen hundred meters to the north-east. SGT Brown was to lead the patrol. This detail was to evacuate the weapon and equipment taken from the NVA soldier killed in the previous night's ambush. The scout dog and its handler, which had been attached to the third platoon, were also to return with the patrol because the dog was sick. Specialist Four Hummel would likewise return to receive medical treatment for his abdominal pains. The company commander directed Letbetter to send a total of thirteen men. He felt that the dog handler, sick man and someone to carry the captured material was too small a patrol if there was an enemy force in the area. The extra squad would provide the patrol security and enough men to defend itself in the event contact was made. The thirteen-man patrol was to accomplish its business at LZ Hawk and then return to Letbetter's location. Letbetter was to take his platoon (-) and move four hundred meters east where he was to receive a ration resupply and establish an ambush in the vicinity while awaiting the patrol's return.

Captain Wunsch and the second platoon moved on to the southwest along the trail with three squads abreast. The third squad was located in the center moving on the trail and slightly forward of the first and second squads which were on the right and left respectively guiding on the trail.

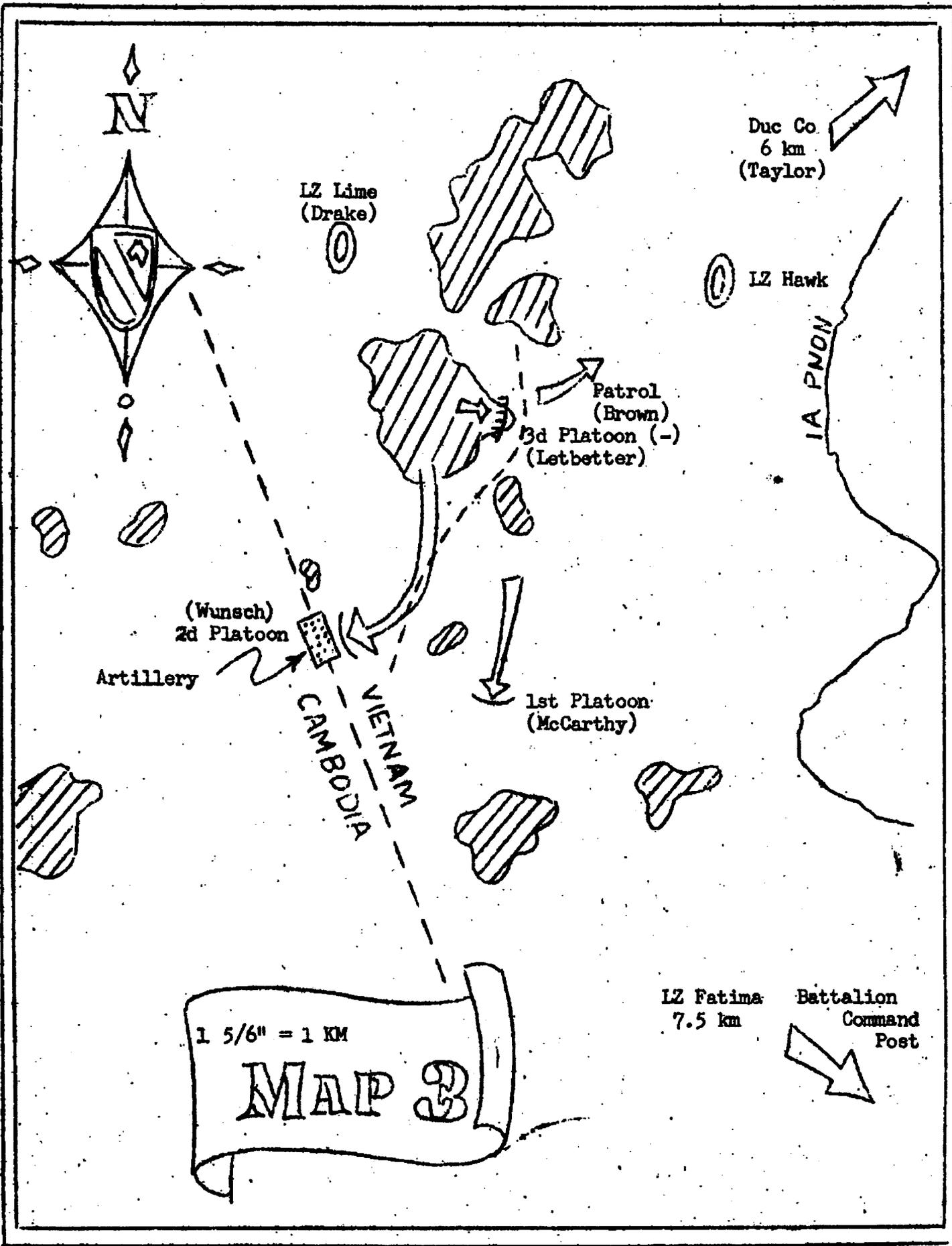
and following a general southwesterly azimuth. The platoon moved with both flank and point security covering a one hundred to one hundred fifty meter front.

The platoon had moved approximately five hundred meters in this formation without incident when, at approximately 9:30 AM, Private First Class George Turner spotted five NVA soldiers to the west, just east of the border. The NVA were moving parallel to the second platoon approximately three hundred meters to the west and were located about fifty meters south of a small knoll. The platoon immediately knelt down in the tall grass to avoid detection while Captain Wunsch made an estimate of the situation. He decided that they had observed a small NVA patrol returning to its base or parent unit located somewhere to the north. He ordered the platoon into a skirmish formation with everyone on line and moved west in pursuit of the enemy. The platoon had lost visual contact as it knelt down; however, they moved in the direction in which the NVA had last been observed. They had moved approximately one hundred fifty meters to the west when the men began to recon by fire. No movement was observed as they continued to sweep west to the border where Wunsch halted their movement and called in artillery fire along the border in the direction he thought the enemy had gone. The results were negative. The company commander reported the sighting and the negative results to Colonel Siegrist and moved the platoon back toward the trail to continue its southwesterly movement. (Map 3)

Colonel Siegrist was on the ground with the B Company elements involved in a search and cordon mission to the northwest when Wunsch reported this initial sighting of the enemy. The battalion commander radioed his command helicopter which was refueling at Duc Co to pick him up. While flying to C Company Siegrist informed Wunsch that he was sending a white team (OH-13 scout ships of the 1st Squadron of the 9th Cavalry) to recon the area from the air. Siegrist made the same request to brigade and the two helicopters were shortly on station. They remained over C Company's area until they had to refuel at which time they were replaced by a red team (UH-1B gun ships armed with twelve 2.75" rockets and two M-60 machine guns, also from the 1/9 Cav).

Meanwhile the first platoon was continuing its search farther to the south and was about one thousand meters away. At the third platoon's location Letbetter had dispatched Sergeant Brown and his patrol to LZ Hawk. Letbetter had moved his platoon to the new ambush position, distributed his ration resupply, after which, he set out security to the right and left. A canteen cup of coffee found later at this location suggests that at least some of the men had settled down to warm their "C" ration breakfast.

Near the border the second platoon reorganized on the trail, and as they began to move, four more NVA were observed about seventy-five meters to the rear. The enemy were still moving northwest around the same knoll and in an open area. Captain Wunsch quickly decided that the chances were slight for a first round hit with mortars or artillery, and by the time those fires could be adjusted the enemy could have escaped. He decided to engage them with his platoon and its small arms. The platoon moved back into a skirmish formation and began maneuvering in the direction of the knoll.



$1 \frac{5}{6}'' = 1 \text{ KM}$
MAP 3

Wunsch gave the order to open fire when he observed more enemy on the knoll who had not observed the platoon's movement. He called Siegrist who was returning from a refueling run and reported this second sighting. "Some have their backs to me. They don't see me. I'm going to take them - (opens fire) - we dropped eight of them. We're going in after the rest." The enemy immediately dropped to the ground, and it appeared that all except one or two had been killed. In the opening moments of the battle, return fire from the knoll was slight; however, its intensity gradually began to build.

The platoon was crawling toward the knoll through the tall grass. The enemy took advantage of the moving grass and directed their fires into that area making friendly movement difficult. High grass also prevented the platoon from returning fire as they could not see the enemy. As the individual soldier crawled around under fire attempting to get into a firing position that allowed a decent field of fire, control became more and more of a problem. (Map 4)

Wunsch reported to Siegrist that he was in contact. Colonel Siegrist acknowledged the transmission and informed Wunsch that he intended to "close Company A in from the north as quick as they can get there from LZ Lime." The battalion commander cautioned Wunsch to alert his people that A Company would be coming in from the north. He then called the commander of A Company, gave him the situation and told him "to get down to C Company's location as fast as he could make it."

Wunsch meanwhile ordered the first and third platoons to move to his location. The intensity of enemy fire continued to build up and the company commander instructed Specialist Four William D. Tuey, reconnaissance sergeant and forward observer for C Company, to call in artillery fire on the knoll.

The men of the second platoon were still struggling forward in the tall grass in an effort to position themselves to place effective small arms fire on the enemy. Sergeant Timothy T. Workman's second squad was on the left where they observed more than a dozen weapons on the southern slope of the knoll. Private First Class Edward McCain, Wunsch's radio-telephone operator (RTO), located on the far right, felt that the enemy fire into his location was coming from his left on the knoll rather than directly from his front while Staff Sergeant Lee, squad leader of the third squad, which was located in the center, experienced fires from his direct front as well as the left and right front. It appeared that the enemy was all over the knoll.

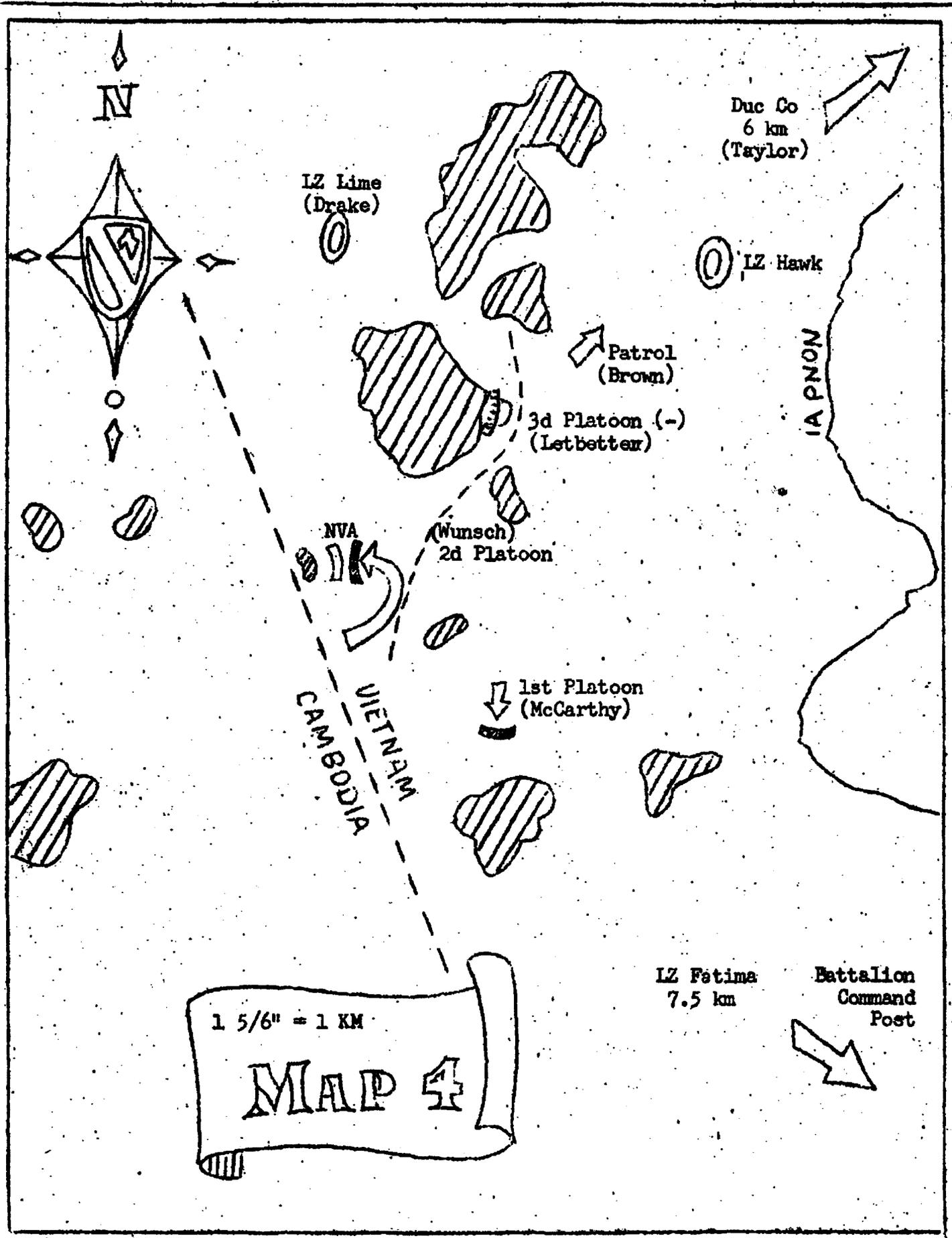
Approximately fifteen minutes had passed since this second sighting of the enemy when suddenly small arms fire erupted from the third platoon area. Just prior to this, Wunsch had ordered the third platoon to move to the second's location. Assuming that the third platoon was firing on the same enemy location and fearing the second and third platoons would get in a fire fight with one another as each attempted to link up in the tall grass, Wunsch told McCain, "Call the third platoon and tell them to quit their damn firing."

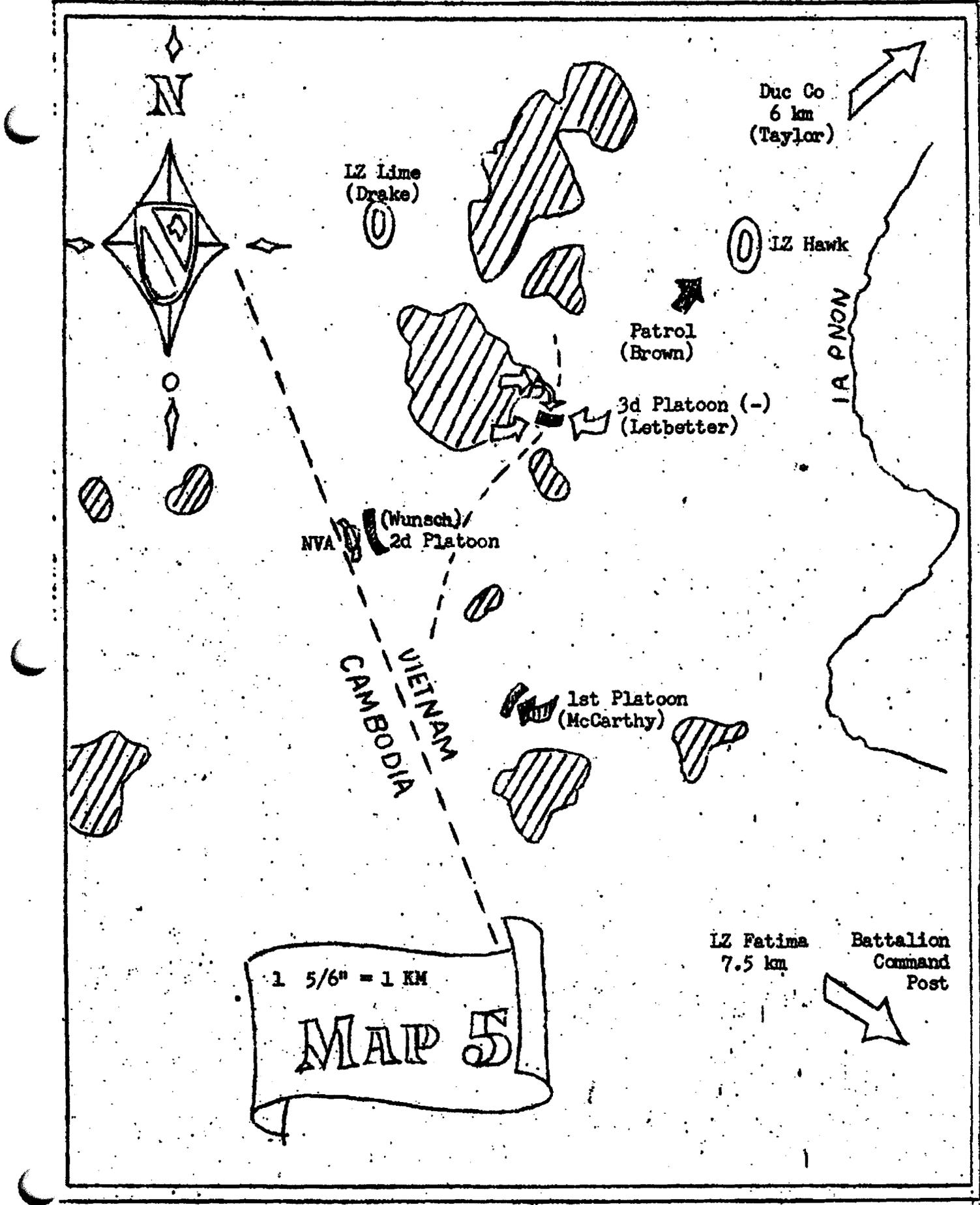
Almost immediately, Private First Class John Godfrey, the third platoon's RTO, called Captain Wunsch and informed him that the third platoon was receiving small arms fire; he then went off the air. About one minute later, Godfrey was back on the air and reported that the third platoon was hit, surrounded, the enemy was within hand grenade range, and requested that he "bring artillery in on top of us."

The ambush site the third platoon had selected that day, and where it was located when it received Wunsch's call for help, was on the crest of a small finger which ran to the east of the low broad hill the company had occupied the night before. To the south about two hundred meters away was another small hill. Upon receiving Wunsch's order to move to assist the second platoon, Letbetter instructed his men to "saddle" up and sent for his right and left security elements to return.

The platoon quickly assembled on the small finger and moved off to the south behind Letbetter, one man following another. They moved down the finger into the low ground between the hill to the south and the finger they had just left. They had just reached the low ground to their front when they suddenly began to receive small arms fire from their right flank, from the hill mass to the west. The platoon took cover and immediately returned fire. This return fire had prompted the call from the company commander to the effect that they should cease fire, to which Godfrey had called back that they were taking small arms fire and were surrounded. In a few moments enemy fire came from the third platoon's left flank, and unexpectedly an NVA machine gun opened up from their right rear. This gun was located on the finger they had just left. The platoon was surrounded and was under fire from the high ground on all sides. Letbetter instructed Godfrey to call the company commander and request artillery fire on their position. Evaluating the situation, Letbetter decided he had to get out of this tactically untenable area of low ground surrounded on three sides by dominating high ground. He chose the high ground to his left front and attempted to fight his way to that objective. Sergeant Julius C. Durham, acting Platoon Sergeant, and one of two survivors of the third platoon, gives the following account (Map 5):

The new men were down on the ground, they were firing, but it was hard to get them to move. Letbetter had put me in the rear to keep them closed up. I was the acting Platoon Sergeant, but I had to make each man move individually. Some of them I had to lift up. Sergeant Letbetter was leading us toward the hill to our front. He kept hollering back 'fire and maneuver', and he was firing all the time. He was standing up running from tree to tree. The men were getting strung out, but they were firing. Every man was putting up a real fight. There was some trees half way up the hill to our front. Sergeant Letbetter was leading us up there because with the machine gun firing in back of us, that was our only safety. Letbetter got within an arm's reach of the trees when he was killed; they rolled a grenade right down in front of him. Then grenades killed the men who were just behind him. I was no longer in the rear; I had run up. We





could see them in the trees to our front, running from tree to tree. I shot some, I know. There was one near Sergeant Letbetter, I saw his head come out two times, and the third time I shot him. By then no one else was moving, and the fire slackened off. . .then I was the only one firing. . .then I played dead.

Durham survived by smearing blood from his wounded arm all over his face as at least an NVA company closed in on three sides of the platoon (-) killing the wounded and picking up all the weapons as well as the platoon's radio. They then moved off toward the southwest in the direction of the second platoon which was now heavily engaged.

The third platoon patrol enroute to Hawk was approximately five hundred meters and forty-five minutes to the northeast when the fighting broke out at the third platoon ambush site. The patrol had heard rifle fire after they departed the platoon and felt that they were being fired upon by snipers. Sergeant Brown had been informed by one of the patrol members that an enemy soldier had been observed following them and that the scout dog had alerted signaling possible enemy presence. Cowan received a call from Godfrey informing him that Letbetter had been wounded. These incidents spurred the patrol on and they covered the remaining thousand meters to Hawk in slightly over an hour. Once back at Hawk the patrol set up a security perimeter. "We were pretty shook up and excited. . .we did not try to go back to the company," Brown recalled.

When Wunsch lost radio contact with Godfrey, he thought the platoon was lost. Colonel Siegrist had called and instructed Wunsch to have Letbetter throw a smoke grenade to pinpoint his location. The platoon threw red smoke which Siegrist and his artillery liaison officer observed from the command helicopter. Using this smoke they adjusted artillery fire from Duc Co into the area. As they continued to fly over the platoon, the enemy began to fire on their helicopter. Siegrist sent in two aerial rocket artillery ships which made several rocket runs despite the enemy small arms fire that wounded two crew members.

Wunsch instructed the first platoon led by First Lieutenant Timothy McCarthy to move to the third platoon area. McCarthy was still struggling through the heavily vegetated terrain attempting to retrace his steps north over the nearly one thousand meters that separated his platoon from the rest of the company.

Tuey experienced considerable delay in getting the artillery into the third platoon area. He requested that the fire mission he had in progress for the second platoon be cancelled and called for a shift to the defensive concentration that had been planned in the third platoon area on the night of the 20th, Uniform Charlie 118. Several helicopters in the air had to clear the area and a new mission computed before he could fire. When Uniform Charlie 118 was finally fired, Godfrey sent a correction of right two hundred, drop one hundred which Tuey relayed to the battery. The second round was on target and Godfrey requested that Tuey keep it coming. This

was the last transmission Tuey or anyone else had from the third platoon. Tuey turned his attention to Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA) while indirect fires rained down in the third platoon area, and at approximately 11:05 AM, the first ARA pass was made to the west of the second platoon. Two ships flying north to south fired marking rounds one hundred meters east and west of the knoll. The rockets were adjusted in twenty-five meter increments until they were on target. While Tuey handled the artillery, Wunsch was talking to the battalion commander requesting close air support. Colonel Siegrist immediately radioed the Second Brigade requesting a tactical air flight every thirty minutes. Only two were sent to the battle area; however, they were enough to do the job.

Wunsch asked that the strikes be brought in from the southeast to the northwest. He ordered the second platoon to pull back into as straight a line as possible and to mark their flanks with smoke showing the trace of the friendly forward units. Siegrist turned the forward air controller (FAC) over to Wunsch and they made final coordination for the strike.

The Second Brigade forward air controller, Captain Mizell, was notified to proceed to the second platoon's area at approximately 11:30 AM. Mizell was briefed on the situation by Colonel Siegrist when he arrived on station. Mizell contacted the Second Brigade Air Force Liaison Officer and requested air support as fast as possible. There were no planes in the air that could be diverted so Skyraiders (A1E's) from Pleiku were scrambled. Thirty minutes later they were over the second platoon's area and ordnance was continually placed on target from 12:05 to 12:35 AM. The Skyraiders made from ten to fifteen passes placing on target six 500 pound napalm pods, four 250 pound napalm pods, ten CBU's as well as many rounds of twenty millimeter cannon fire.

Colonel Siegrist remained overhead in his helicopter; however, the thick canopy below frustrated his efforts to land or observe the action on the ground. Most of his information came from Captain Wunsch who was wounded in the arm approximately 11:45 AM. The bullet had caused a painful wound, severing a nerve and chipping a bone. The wound dressed and morphine administered, Wunsch's radio transmissions, Siegrist recalled, evidenced a calm, rational commander and obviously a commander who remained in command.

In the thirty minutes it had taken to get the close air support on station, the second platoon remained heavily engaged. Their right flank had been hit hard shortly after the third platoon battle had ceased. Approximately fifteen minutes after Wunsch had called for air support, someone on the left flank began shouting for an M-79 grenade launcher and Wunsch sent McCain over to the first squad area to locate the needed weapon. Working his way over to the first squad area, McCain remembered a strange sounding muzzle report which sounded like some sort of grenade launcher. When he returned, McCain informed the company commander that he had gotten into a firefight on the right flank; he had killed six or seven NVA getting out of the area and everyone on that flank seemed to be dead. The two NVA companies had shifted from the third platoon area to the second platoon's

right, taking cover and concealment in a heavily vegetated stream bed running to the north of the knoll. A two company attack was launched against the second platoon right flank. When the attack on the right flank began, Private First Class John M. Dalton moved his machine gun to the right and set it up. As the NVA advanced he repulsed them several times with a withering volume of fire. Wounded by shrapnel, Dalton remained at the gun frustrating attempts to overrun the platoon. Wounded again by a bullet, the determined gunner remained at his weapon firing until he lost consciousness. Dalton, who died at his gun, had managed to save the second platoon from being overrun before the air strikes ended all such plans for the attacking NVA.

The initial napalm run delivered by two A1E Skyraiders was on target. Sergeant Frank C. Giordano reported, "It looks good and didn't hit anybody, put some more in there." The airstrike knocked the enemy from the top and rear of the knoll. Captain Wunsch and Sergeant Lee watched as six or eight of the enemy came down the knoll towards them. Napalm burst in the trees above the enemy, splashing them with flame and setting them ablaze. Sergeants Lee and Giordano shot and killed four of them. The second strike, delivered by two F-100 Super Sabers caught a large part of the enemy attacking the right flank of the second platoon. The jets dropped napalm and cluster bomb units (CBU's - anti personnel bomblets ranging in size from golf balls to tennis balls which are rained from the rear of a pod resembling an external fuel tank). This second strike routed the enemy breaking up the attack and the panic stricken NVA scattered to the north and northwest. With the exception of occasional sniper fire, the battle was over.

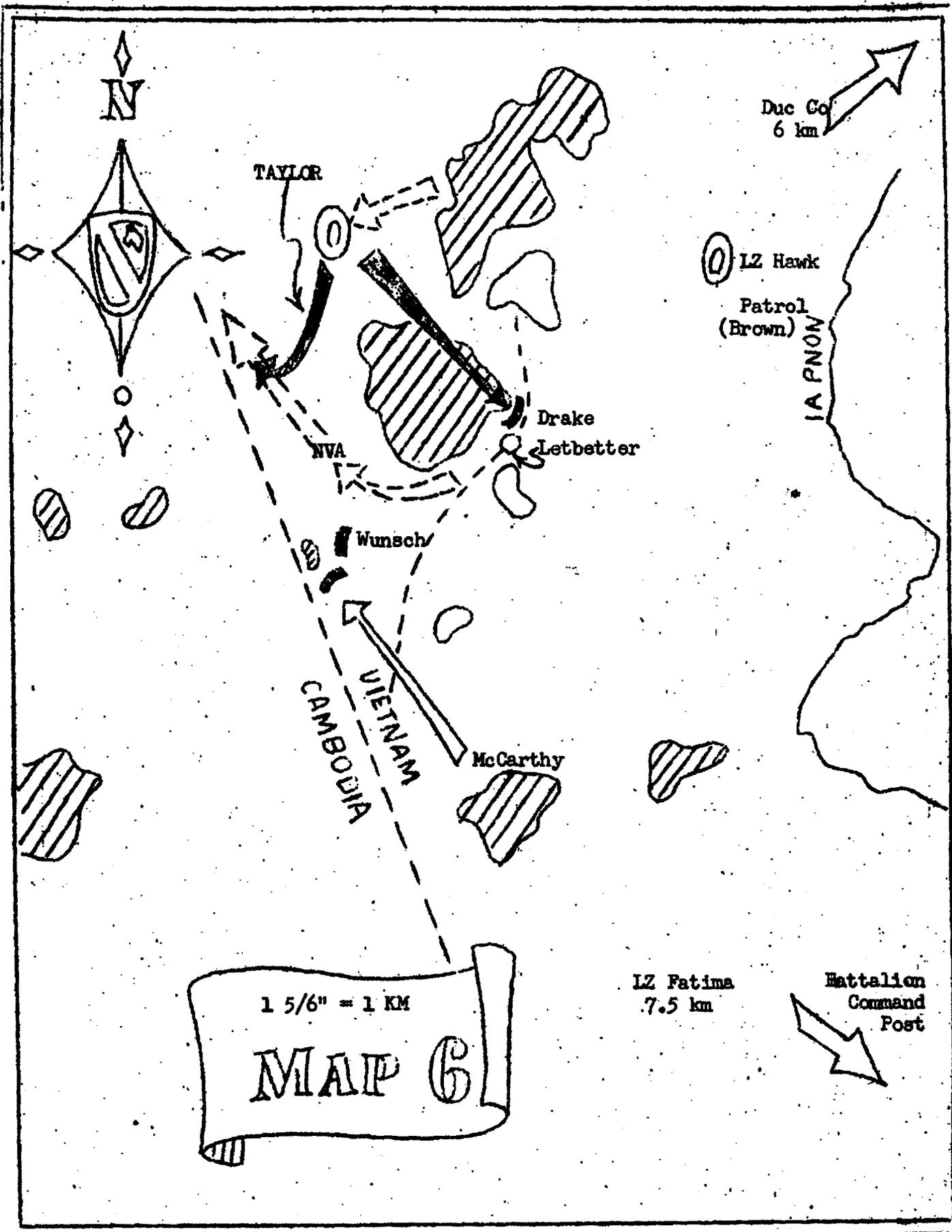
Within minutes after Wunsch's fight had started, Company A, under command of Captain James W. Drake, had been directed to leave LZ Lime and proceed on foot to C Company's third platoon location. Speed was imperative for Colonel Siegrist's orders had been to move rapidly. Forty minutes later and one hundred meters short of the third platoon area, A Company and an NVA company fleeing the second platoon area, passed very close to each other moving in opposite directions, the enemy company to the west. The area was heavily wooded and neither unit could see the other; however, a thirty second fire fight developed when A Company received fire from two or three weapons to the southwest. They answered with a heavy volume of fire which Captain Drake soon ceased, thinking he might be exchanging shots with C Company. (Colonel Siegrist later found three bodies in this thicket which were identified as being from the Third Company, Fifth Battalion, 101C Regiment.) Drake moved his third and first platoons on line through the third platoon area, dropping off one squad and his medics to look for wounded while the rest of the company established a perimeter and checked the area to their front. Sergeant Julius C. Durham appeared to be the only survivor. He was wounded in the left arm and Drake described him as "pretty well self-possessed." As the police of the third platoon area progressed, it was discovered that they had suffered nineteen killed and three wounded (one man died later of his wounds). SGT Durham was lightly wounded and one man, Private First Class Gray, was seriously wounded. Captain Drake reported finding two NVA bodies on the finger. Drake also noted that all the third platoon dead were lying face down and to the west in the depression between the two hills. He

found them clustered together in groups of two or three. The predominance of large gaping wounds and the many dud Chicom grenades in the area suggested that most of the men had been killed by grenades. The dead had not been molested; however, their weapons were taken and Godfrey was found with the handset of his radio still in his hand. The radio had been taken off of his back but the handset had been disconnected and left in Godfrey's grasp. Someone discovered the canteen cup full of coffee on top of the finger to the rear of the third platoon suggesting that the men had left their ambush site rapidly in response to Wunsch's instructions. The following day Colonel Siegrist flew into the area joining A Company on the ground in the search. Sixteen splotches of blood on the ground and trees; bark and leaves shredded by intense small arms fire; enemy equipment found to include twelve conical hats, two enemy canteens and two cooking pots; a great deal of expended ammunition; and two additional enemy bodies found hidden in the brush convinced the battalion commander that the platoon had fought well and inflicted punishment. (Map 6)

The first platoon was guiding into the second platoon's area on the ARA and close air support. With the exception of the sniper fire, the fight had ended by the time they arrived. McCarthy halted his platoon about fifty to sixty meters to the rear of the second platoon where they could support and he moved up to Captain Wunsch's location to coordinate. Wunsch, who had been wounded earlier, ordered the first platoon leader to secure the hill to the front, telling him that no one was left up there.

McCarthy sent a detail up the knoll to check the fallen NVA to insure they were dead while the rest of the first platoon assisted in the cleanup and medical assistance within the second platoon area. McCarthy had somehow gotten the mistaken impression from Wunsch that no one had been killed, leaving him unprepared for what he found when he moved over to the right before going up the hill and discovered that eleven men including the entire first squad had been killed on that flank. He found most of the dead behind trees, the bodies about ten-twelve meters apart. McCarthy, who was subsequently killed in action on December 22d, noted a great number of dud Chinese Communist (Chicom) hand grenades, and several craters in the ground caused by the detonation of some sort of an area-type projectile. He moved from the first squad area to the top of the knoll checking the NVA dead on the way, discovering that they were heavily armed with automatic weapons and hand grenades. The source of the strange sound McCoin had reported and the instrument of the craters McCarthy had noted in the first squad area was discovered near the top. A two man NVA gun crew had been firing on the platoon with a Soviet model 40mm anti-tank grenade launcher. The crew with their weapon was found dead. The weapon fires an 82mm caliber grenade to an effective range of 150 meters and is capable of penetrating six to seven inches of armor or, used as an area type weapon, has a limited casualty producing radius.

The second platoon gathered up its fifteen dead and ten wounded; wrapped the bodies in ponchos and gave the wounded first aid. It was getting late and they had to set up for the night. They began to cut an LZ which



TAYLOR

Duc Co
6 km

LZ Hawk

Patrol
(Brown)

IA PNOV

Drake
Letbetter

NVA

Wunsch

CAMBODIA
VIETNAM

McCarthy

1 5/6" = 1 KM

MAP 6

LZ Fatima
.7.5 km

Battalion
Command
Post

had to be finished the next morning. All of the dead and wounded had been hoisted out by helicopter winches by 8:30 PM.

Company B, commanded by Captain James R. Taylor had listened to the fight on his battalion radio while conducting his search and cordon mission northwest of Duc Co. Taylor had his third platoon with him and his first and second platoons were still at Fatima. Approximately 11:00 AM Taylor was alerted to stand by for pickup. Colonel Siegrist had sought permission to air assault B Company into a landing zone which was located four kilometers inside Cambodia and astride the enemy route of withdrawal. Permission to do so was denied and Siegrist had to consolidate the company at LZ Lime from where Taylor was to proceed on foot to the battle area. The first and second platoons of B Company were air lifted to Lime at 1:00 PM and at approximately 2:30 PM Taylor and the third platoon completed their lift to Lime. The company commander quickly organized his company, and at 2:45 PM Bravo Company moved out on a 245 degree azimuth. After moving almost eight hundred and fifty meters, Taylor came to a very fresh trail leading to the northwest; Taylor recalled, "I was amazed at the breadth of the trail. It would have had to be a large force to make one this wide. The grass was still springing up along the enemy trail so they had just come through the area." The trail was about seventy-five meters wide and the signs indicated that the enemy had moved with flank security. Taylor followed the bent grass in the direction of the Cambodian border for approximately three hundred meters before the battalion commander ordered him to turn around. Due to the uniformity of the terrain, it was difficult for either commander to pinpoint their location with respect to the border. It was possible that B Company had entered Cambodia and as Brigadier General William A. Becker, the Assistant Division Commander for tactical operations, had instructed Siegrist, the only legal grounds to cross the border hinged on the somewhat doubtful point of "hot pursuit." Colonel Siegrist gave Taylor the order to turn around and return to the east. Company B moved another forty minutes before they stopped and set up for the night at a location north of A Company. Colonel Siegrist thus had three companies poised "if the NVA wanted to continue the fight on the border."

The next morning Taylor completed the move. His company moved to the hill in front of the battle area of C Company's second platoon and began a thorough police of the battlefield. It soon became obvious that the "second platoon had put up one hell of a fight." Twenty-seven enemy bodies were found within a two hundred meter radius. Most of the NVA had been killed by small arms. An M-60 machine gun taken from the second platoon's first squad was recovered on top of the hill where the enemy had left it and some of his dead in the haste to escape the air strikes. In the area of one napalm strike twenty-eight enemy bodies were counted and twenty-four more enemy bodies were found in the area where the CBU's were dropped. An aerial body count over the routes of withdrawal resulted in the discovery of an additional sixty-six bodies found in a clearing 600 meters northwest of C Company's fight. They had been killed by airstrikes and artillery. The final body count was one hundred and forty-five enemy dead while Company C suffered thirty-four killed and eleven wounded. Enemy weapons included four Soviet model RPK 7.62mm light machine guns, one B40 rocket launcher, twenty-seven Soviet model AK47 7.62 assault rifles (the standard infantry weapon used in the USSR and most other

Communist bloc nations), one AK56 assault rifle and four Soviet model SKS 7.62mm carbines. In addition, large quantities of hand grenades, rockets and small arms were destroyed in place. Friendly weapons lost included twenty-four M-16 rifles, three M-79 grenade launchers, three M-60 light machine guns, eight forty-five caliber pistols and one ANPRC 25 radio. Colonel Siegrist placed his estimate of enemy losses, killed and wounded, near the 300 mark.

Subsequent evaluation of documents taken from the NVA bodies identified three companies of the 5th Battalion, 101C NVA Regiment. The 5th Battalion was believed to be the lead element of the 101C Regiment in its move from the assembly areas northwest of Duc Co to attack the artillery position located at Duc Co. C Company's reconnaissance in force had interrupted that move forcing the regiment to abort the attack plan as it had lost the element of surprise.

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