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"FIRST BATTLE"

Alfa Co, 1/35th Infantry

15 March 1966

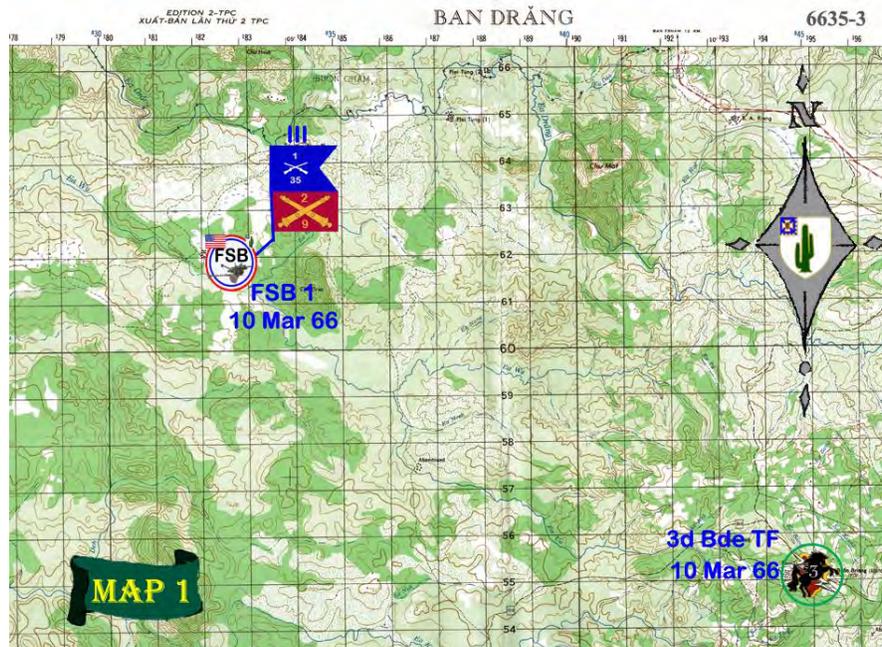
"I was fortunate to have so many great grunts working for me – real pros that gave a lot more than they took." Cpt. Tony Bisantz, CO Alfa Co. 1/35th Infantry, 25th Infantry Division.

Combat experience submitted by Captain Bisantz for use by Project Share.

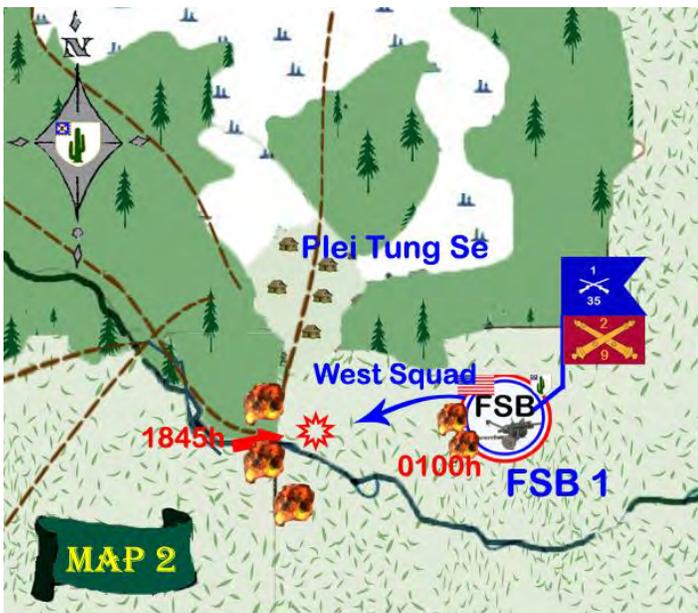
Introduction:

The 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division arrived in the central highlands during the 1965 Christmas Season. On 22 February 1966, following local base area security operations and extensive route security work along Highway 19, the Brigade jumped off on OPERATION GARFIELD. This was a search and destroy, border surveillance operation. Initially the Brigade air lifted from Pleiku to Ban Me Thout where a forward base was established. Working north, in the area bounded by Highway 14 on the east and the Cambodian Border on the west, the battalions met little resistance although there were extensive Indications that NVA forces had been in the area recently. About 10 March the 3d Brigade Task Force base camp moved north to the abandoned air strip at Buon Brieng.

On 9 March an Eagle Flight from Company A, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, received ground fire while reconning an LZ. Subsequently the entire company was lifted into the area, but contact was not regained. On 10 March the remaining elements of the 1/35th were lifted into the area; and extensive patrolling activity began. A battalion base consisting of the Battalion TOC CP, the Recon Plat, the 4.2 platoon and a battery of 105mm Howitzers was established. Company A was given the mission of securing the battalion base and providing the battalion's ready reserve force. Up to this time no element of the 3d Brigade had had any major contact with the enemy. **(MAP 1)**



Narrative:



dark. On the orders from battalion, the squad returned to the perimeter and prepared to occupy their ambush positions later in the night. There had been no friendly casualties, and enemy casualties were unknown.

Extensive mortar H & I (Harassment and Interdiction) fires were initiated in the contact area and continued through the evening. At approximately 0100 hours the base was hit with a heavy enemy mortar barrage. An estimated 125 to 130 mortar rounds fell in a tight dispersion pattern in the western, unoccupied end of the LZ. Counter mortar fire was immediately started with unknown results. There were no friendly casualties, and the enemy fire came no nearer than 50 meters to friendly positions. H & I fire in the area were resumed with new intensity, and the 3d Platoon of Company A was alerted to prepare to move out on a combat patrol at first light. **(MAP 2)**



River. **(MAP 3)**

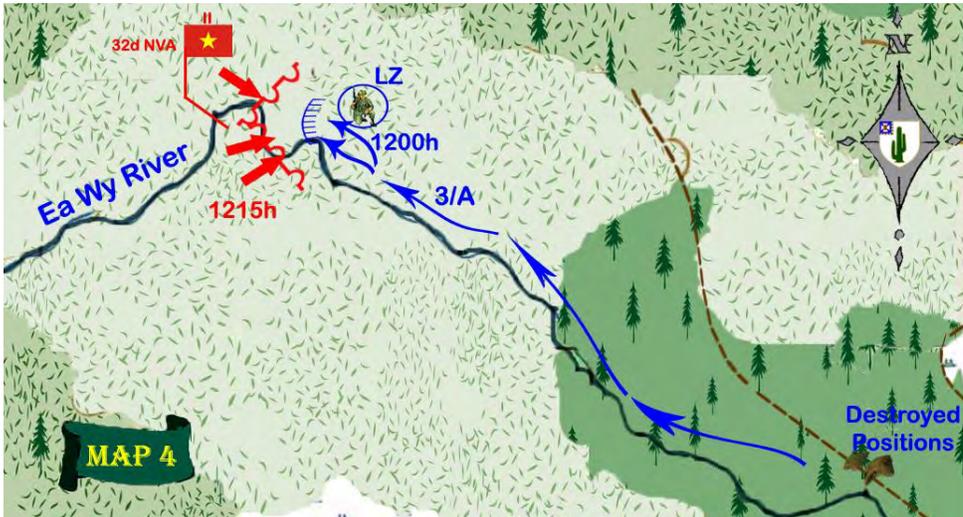
About 0600 hours the 3d Platoon reached the point of the previous night's contact and found many blood trails in the area. Moving on a little bit further they found approximately 18 rounds of 81mm and 82mm mortar ammunition. The mortar round canisters had been damaged by small arms and M-79 fire. They also found a document showing the attacks the unit had conducted in the past year. The captured ammunition and documents were returned to the base camp.

The platoon was directed to continue its patrol west along the trail complex adjacent to the stream. At about 0918h, the platoon discovered fortified positions which they destroyed. Once completed the platoon continued on their mission along the Ea Wy

By noon they had moved about 2500 meters and requested further instructions. At the same time, as the Platoon Leader, 2LT Pat Lenz, was receiving orders to return to battalion, the point man, SP4 Hood, came upon some WD-1 phone wire laid along the edge of the stream bed. He passed the word

back and cautiously moved forward. The platoon leader ordered his trail squad to move up on the left side of the platoon to cover the other bank of the stream. Almost simultaneously the point element of the platoon opened fire on a squad of NVA soldiers deploying to their front.

The platoon leader immediately sent his platoon SGT, PSG Jones, and an RTO to check a clearing on the platoon's right rear. He deployed his platoon on line and began to assault the enemy. The



volume of enemy fire increased greatly, and the platoon was almost immediately on the defensive. The platoon leader received a wound in the thigh, and several other men, including two squad leaders; SSG's Holbrook and Williams, were wounded and killed in the first few seconds. The enemy as initially believed to be company sized; later changed to a reinforced company or two companies. Realizing he was greatly outnumbered; the

platoon leader ordered a withdrawal toward the clearing at his right rear. **(MAP 4)**

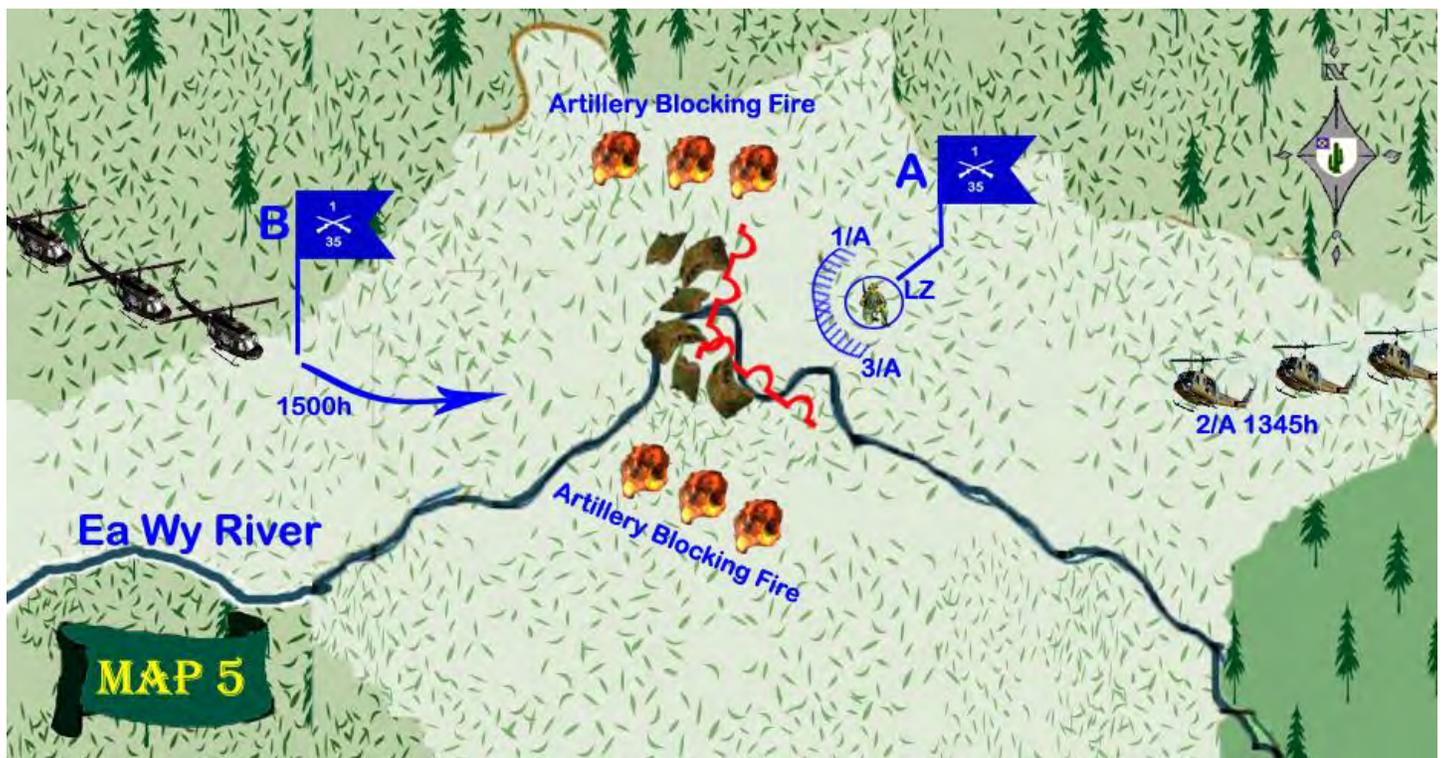
Throughout this period radio, contact with the platoon leader's RTO had been sporadic at best, due to his location in the stream bed; however, the platoon's second RTO, who was with the platoon SGT, was able to relay messages between the platoon leader and company commander.

Once reorganized, the Platoon leader called for an artillery smoke round to mark his position. Although the jungle canopy was not extremely heavy, he was not able to spot two smoke rounds that were fired due to the heavy ground vegetation in the area.

At 1230h, a FAC from a sister battalion was orbiting the scene, and after some difficulty he was able to locate the platoon, mark its position with smoke and direct an air strike. A1Es were able to drop Napalm and employ 20mm cannon were within 50-75 meters of friendly forces and stopped the NVA assault just as it was about to overrun the platoon. This was the first of sixteen sorties flown in support of the American troops during the action. The Platoon leader, wounded himself, requested assistance and a resupply of ammunition at approximately 1240 hours.

At 1315h, the 1st Platoon was lifted into the LZ, along with the company commander, an artillery FO and the 4.2 Mortar Platoon FO. Upon their arrival, the enemy made a suicidal charge toward the LZ, inflicting many casualties, but at a great cost to themselves. The artillery FO was able to fill the gaps between air support missions with artillery fires.

2d Platoon, commanded by 2LT James Kelsey, was lifted in about 15 minutes behind the 1st Platoon. They immediately deployed to form half of a pincers against the enemy force which had retreated into prepared positions. As the fight progressed the Battalion S3 had gone airborne in an OH-23 to coordinate the troop lift and supporting artillery fire. The area south of the contact was kept sealed off with steady fire from two 105 batteries. At about 1500 hours Company B 1/35 was lifted into an LZ about 2 kilometers west of the contact area and ordered to sweep east in an attempt to catch the fleeing NVA forces. They were successful in killing two and capturing one.



By 1500 hours it was apparent the enemy had decided to quit the battlefield under the cover of a cleverly concealed small stay-behind-force which was effectively slowing the advance of Company A. Reduction of these positions was a bunker by bunker operation requiring the use of M-72 LAW and grenades. **(MAP 5)**

The enemy positions were cleared by 1630 and Company B came from the west to link up at 1730 hours. By dark all captured enemy material had been evacuated, and a perimeter had been established.

The enemy suffered 35 KIA by body count with a possibility of 100 KIA; through subsequent interrogations of prisoners of war. Intelligence gathered from captured enemy documents indicated that the 3d Platoon had been opposed by the C-2 and C-3 Companies, 635th Bn, 32d NVA Regiment. Approximately 18 individual weapons (CHICOM carbines, AK-47) and 2 light machineguns were captured along with numerous packs, documents, and field gear. Friendly losses were 10 KIA and 27 WIA. Six Bronze Star Medals with V device were awarded to personnel of Company A.

For its actions, Company A, 1/35th Infantry was awarded the Valorous Unit Award