

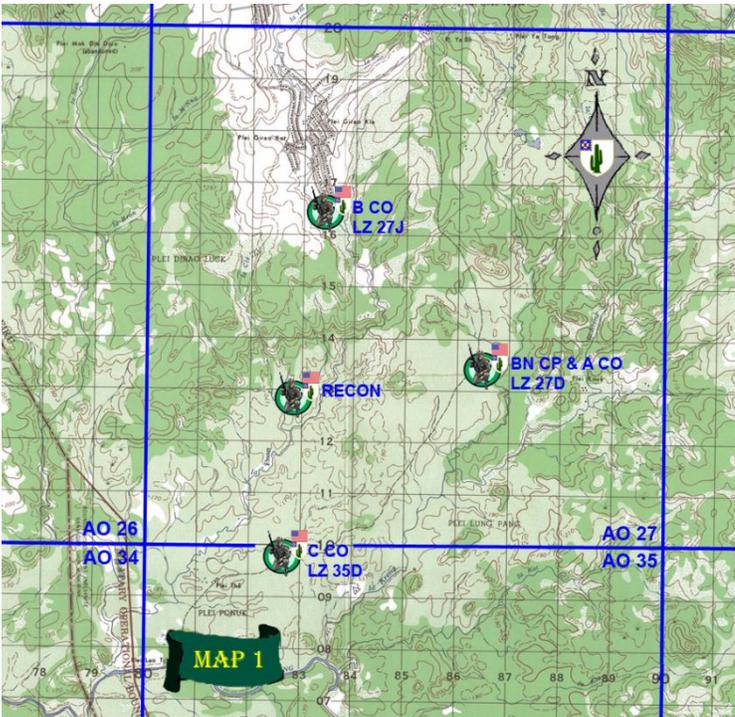


WELCOME TO "A WALK WITH THE 35TH"



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1st Bn, 35th Infantry Moves into AO 27



LTC Kingston's 1st Bn, 35th Infantry moved from Oasis into AO 27 in the afternoon of the 22nd with the battalion's command post (CP) and Company A located at well used LZ 27D (YA865133). Company B moved into LZ 27J (YA833166) and C Company into YA834078 and then north to LZ 35F (YA829027). Recon was located to the west at YA828128. The 4.2" mortar platoon and the 3/4th Cav were split between the battalion CP and Co C's location.

The disposition of troops thus covered most of the Area of Responsibility (AO), with Alpha at the Bn CP in the west, Bravo to the north, Charlie to the south and Recon to the west to observe the Cambodian border area. There was a road, such as it was, from north to south of the BN CP and then cutting diagonally from east to the Cambodian border. **(MAP 1)**

While this aided rapid movement of the units of the 3/4th Cav, it wasn't without its hazards. On the first day of patrolling, on the 23rd, four armored vehicles were hit with mines. One of their M48 tanks was destroyed with three of their men KIA.

Border Battle of 24 June: Narration of Mike Kellermeyer and Ed Hill

(Kellermeyer) The acting Platoon Leader, SFC Shishido, called a meeting of the squad leaders right away. Being part of the headquarters element of the platoon, I was invited to all such councils. Battalion had determined that we were not in the correct position. We needed to move a couple of kilometers further west to fill in the line of "cords". This was a little distressing to the squad members because they had spent so much time the evening before creating comfortable fighting positions in which they expected to languish for the next week or so. Also, our meager rations had diminished to the point that necessitated re-supply. Battalion promised to re-supply as soon as we had reached the new positions. We grumbled a little as we "saddled up" but it wasn't anything that we weren't already accustomed to so we checked each other's gear, assumed a march formation that would minimize ambush and moved out.

We moved out of the heavily wooded area into a region of rolling grassland strewn with large thickets. The grass was yellow from the blistering summer sun, but the base of the grass was green and sweet to chew on. We took a course that would allow us the most cover, moving from one island of thickets to another. About an hour into the move we took a short break to sip a little water from what was left in our canteens and have half a smoke. In the thicket I was in there was Sgt Warren Knepper and a

few members of his squad. Sgt. Knepper was one of the fellows that I knew in recon. I knew him in Hawaii, before we came to Vietnam. He was a natural leader and well-liked by everyone who knew him. His squad members felt lucky to have him as a leader in combat.



Resupply chopper photo by Walt Shields

Re-Supply

Shortly after the break we were moving toward a substantially wooded area when Battalion advised us that the re-supply choppers were on the way. We replied that we had not attained our assigned positions yet but we were told to accept the re-supply enroute. We moved to the grove of trees and when we heard the sound of rotors, we contacted the pilots and advised them that we were popping a yellow smoke grenade. The pilots located the smoke and two UH1B Iroquois ("Huey") helicopters landed in short order, sending the

smoke in rapid spirals in every direction. It was remarkable that no matter where these choppers sat down, in desert or in a grassy field, they managed to hurl some kind of debris that stung our faces and arms as we approached.

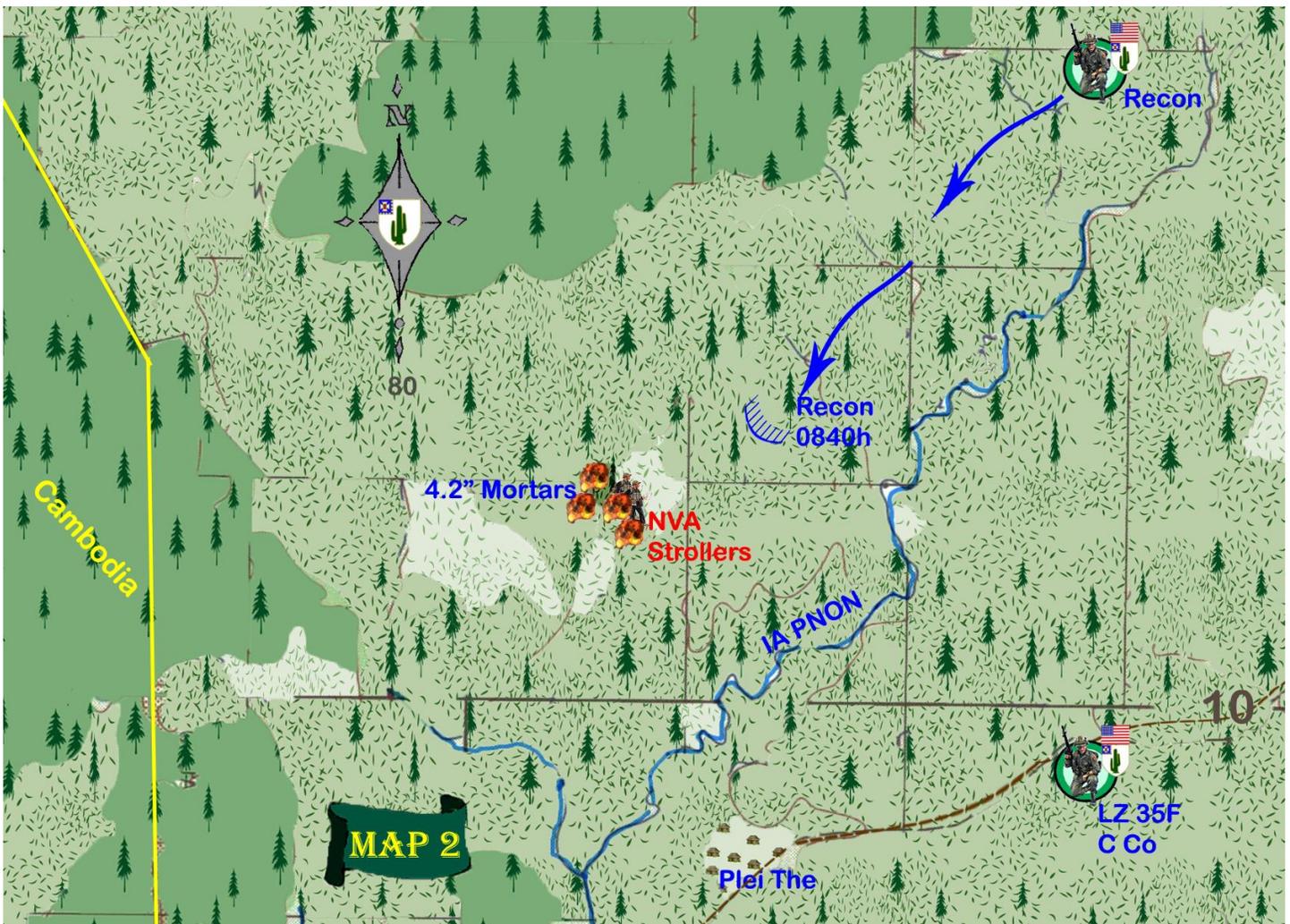
Quickly, we off loaded a lot of jerry cans of water and cases of c-rations off of the helicopters who lifted off as soon as the last ration was relinquished. I remarked to my RTO, the aforementioned Mr. Herb Daily that Battalion must be expecting this hunkered down observation of the border area to last some time judging by the number of rations that were delivered. There were so many, in fact, that we decided to set two guards on the rations while the rest of the platoon moved to the new positions where we would send back men to ferry the rations up to us.

I believe it was at this point that battalion informed us to detach a squad to ambush a suspicious trail to our northwest. A squad was picked, and they moved out, taking a jerry can of water and a case of c-rations with them. The rest of us moved off to the southwest to establish the new positions about 800 meters distant.

Two NVA Strollers

As we moved through the sparsely wooded grass, we came upon a huge field of grassland about 500 meters long and 200 meters wide. As we approached the sparse wood line at the edge of the field, the point man made a subtle signal and the entire platoon immediately went flat on its collective belly. I saw the acting Platoon Leader, SFC Shishido, crawling up to where the point man was and, after a few minutes, I crawled up there as well. SFC Shishido, kneeling by a bush at the edge of the field looked at me, pointed toward his own eyes and then in a direction across the field. I removed my binoculars from their case and focused them across the field in the direction he had pointed. There, on the other side, very near the wood line, there were two NVA soldiers walking, hand in hand. In Vietnam, two men walking and holding hands was merely a sign of friendship. The remarkable thing about the pair was that they were carrying no equipment whatsoever. They were not North Vietnamese troops on the move, they were bivouacked nearby! We reported their presence to Battalion who advised us to recon by fire.

Recon by Fire



0840H: I signaled Herb, my RTO, to join me and I got on the radio and called a fire mission in to the 4.2-inch mortar platoon. Beyond the two strolling NVA soldiers and to the right, was a heavily wooded knoll and I used it's coordinates to fire the first round. Amazingly, the round detonated in the center of the hill and I immediately corrected to "drop 100, left 100, fire for effect!" I was hoping that this would put a six-round salvo on or near the wood line where the two NVA were looking with alarm at the plume of smoke remaining from the first detonation. To my delight the rounds came in and walked right down the wood line, 5 meters in and about 50 meters apart. Textbook.

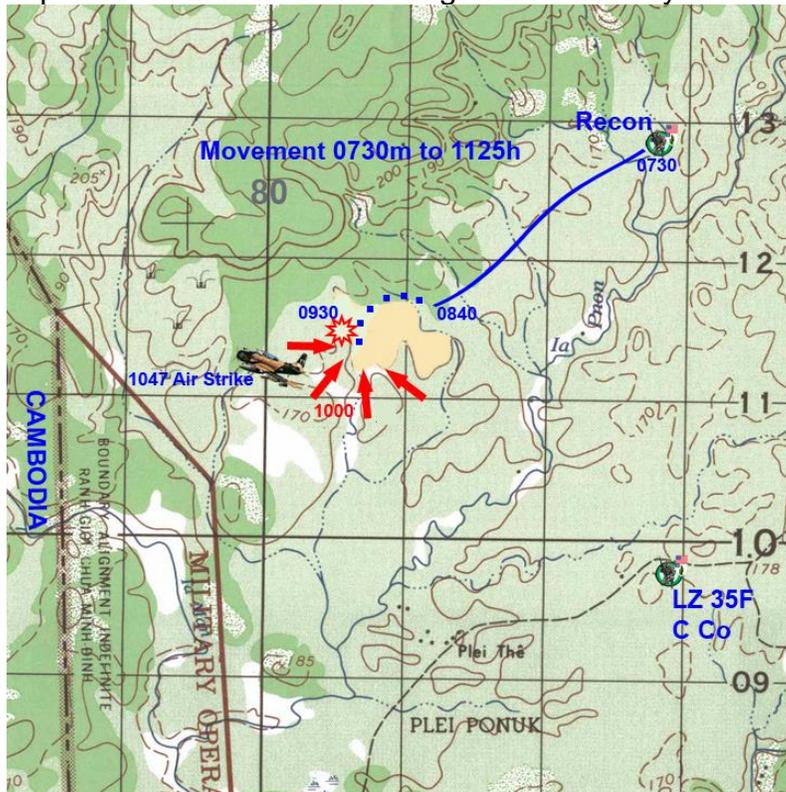
In the midst of the yellow-orange explosions trees were toppling and tree limbs were spiraling up into the air. There were also distant screams accompanying the deafening explosions and we could see brown uniformed people running among the trees. We were hitting a North Vietnamese unit, sure as hell. I called for another salvo on the same spot and then moved the next salvo to the left, hoping to cut off where it appeared the enemy was running. Then I moved the next salvo to the right of the first and then deeper into the wood line. I had an inkling that the NVA may have been using the far side of the little hill for a headquarters location, so I sent yet another two salvos of three rounds each thundering into the far side of the hill.

I was still firing barrages and the enemy was still running and screaming when the Mortar Platoon advised me that they were running low on ammunition and would have to desist until resupplied unless there was an emergency.

We reported to Battalion that we had struck a large NVA contingent and that we were undiscovered. We were feeling pretty full of ourselves when Battalion called back and ordered us to physically recon the area that was hit by the shelling. Incredulous, we called back to advise Battalion that there were significant numbers of enemy troops in the area, trying to intimate that there were perhaps more enemy troops than our depleted platoon could handle, if push came to shove. Battalion was unimpressed by our subtle whining and once more ordered us to physically recon the area. Another day in the life of a grunt.

Skirting the Field

We assembled and began to move down the wood line to the end of the field. We would have to walk along the end of the field (inside the woods, of course) to get to the other side. We felt that the open field left our left flank unprotected so we placed a machine gunner, a recent Hungarian immigrant by the name of Valentine, at the corner of the field so he could shoot across the field and protect our exposed left flank. Then we began to cautiously traverse the woods at the end of the field. It was slow



going even though the woods were not that dense. We knew we were about to encounter the enemy and we were being very careful. (Kellermeyer)

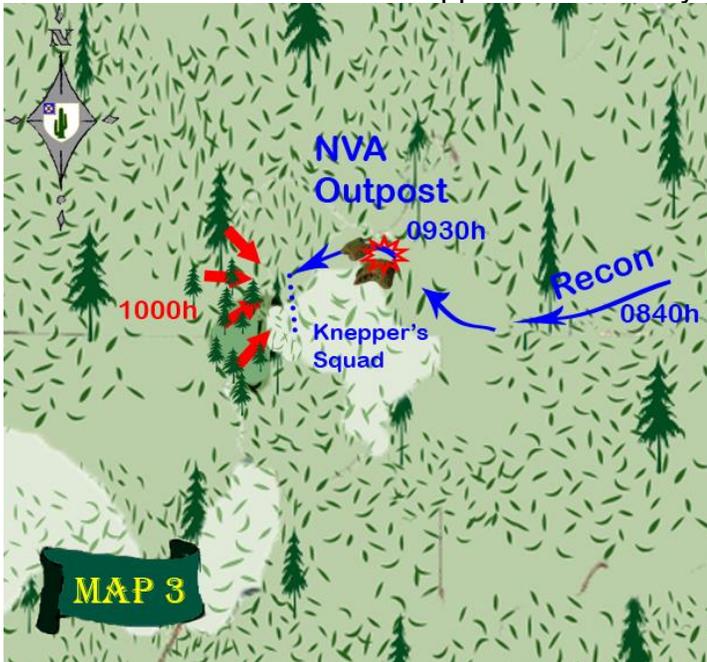
0930H: (Hill) Staying inside the tree line, we found an NVA outpost. We got online and charged the outpost position. During the charge, I tripped over some commo wire that led to that outpost. My buddy, Sp/4 Dale Johnson thought I was hit. Sgt. Damien K. Kaaihue charged into the bunker and killed every man. Later in the day, Sgt Kaaihue was wounded in the left shoulder. (Damien's cousin, Kenneth Kaaihue, was KIA this day while serving with C Company, 1/35th who later were engaged by the NVA) "Plat" radioed our situation to our battalion commander, LTC Bob Kingston. His orders were to "check it out".

We were soon crossing a little stream. SSG Quillen told us to fill our canteens. He said as soon as we checked out this situation, they were going to pick us up and take us back to the oasis for a well-deserved rest. Some of us felt a little casual about filling up our little canteens and just took a big drink of water because we were getting picked up shortly. (Hill)

The Opposite Corner, the Fight Begins

(Kellermeyer) 1000H: When we reached the opposite corner of the field, we encountered a small clearing that ran nearly a hundred meters back into the woods. Turning this corner to the left would put us on the opposite side of the field from which we observed the 4.2-inch mortar fire. To go around this clearing would take time. It was decided that Sgt Knepper's squad would dash across the clearing while the rest of us were prepared to give covering fire if needed. We were not prepared enough.

Knepper's squad had reached the center of the small clearing when automatic weapons fire erupted from both the right and left side of the clearing. At first it was about four weapons using an interlacing crossfire concentrated on Knepper's now totally exposed squad. They didn't have a chance. They were struck down as a group by the hail of bullets converging on them. (Kellermeyer) **(MAP 3)**



(Hill) We formed up and then started moving out online (probably five or six feet apart) toward the target area. Recon numbered about 25 to 30 men. I was located about in the center of the formation. I remember Clarence LaFrance was on my left. Allan J. Altieri, and my good buddy, Billy Green were on my right. We passed by some freshly dug NVA holes. When we had moved maybe 30-40 feet, one round went off. We all hit the ground. Someone told me later it was an NVA officer signaling to open fire on us. We had run into an NVA (battalion). They were well trained and organized. They fired low to the ground where we fell, causing many GI casualties within minutes. It seemed like the whole world had opened up with incoming

machine gun rounds being fired at us and hand grenades being thrown at us. I had landed in a relatively open area and was lying flat on my face. I could hear the NVA talking.

Keeping my head down, I threw a grenade in the direction of the voices. Someone from behind me yelled that I had thrown it about 100 yards (adrenaline I guess) and overthrown them. He yelled to "throw it a little shorter this time, Hill". I managed to throw a shorter one that did some damage because we could hear the NVA shouting and screaming.

I yelled to Sp/4 Clarence LeFrance to my left and asked if he could cover me because I wanted to get out of this open area and get to his position. His position was behind a mound of dirt about 2-3 feet wide by a foot high, and a little tree. So LeFrance jumped up on one knee, shot off a burst of about five rounds before his magazine ran out, as I am scrambling toward him. My helmet fell off. I scrambled back, got the helmet, and scrambled over to his position. Machine gun fire was everywhere. LeFrance and I fought from that position for the rest of the day.

1047H: NVA would pop up. We would knock them down. To hold the NVA off us, during the course of the battle, Forward Air Control (FAC) brought in A1-Es, and jets (or as we called them Fast Movers) with bombs. (Hill)



(7th AF AAR 1966) Cpt Hoon was the first FAC to reach the embattled platoon, whose situation he describes as follows:

They had the enemy located to the west and to the south of them wrapped around this tree line. Now they started receiving small arms fire from across the clearing area and... they had our guys pretty well tied down... One Seven Alpha (the radio call sign for the platoon leader) popped a yellow smoke for me; so, it located him in the

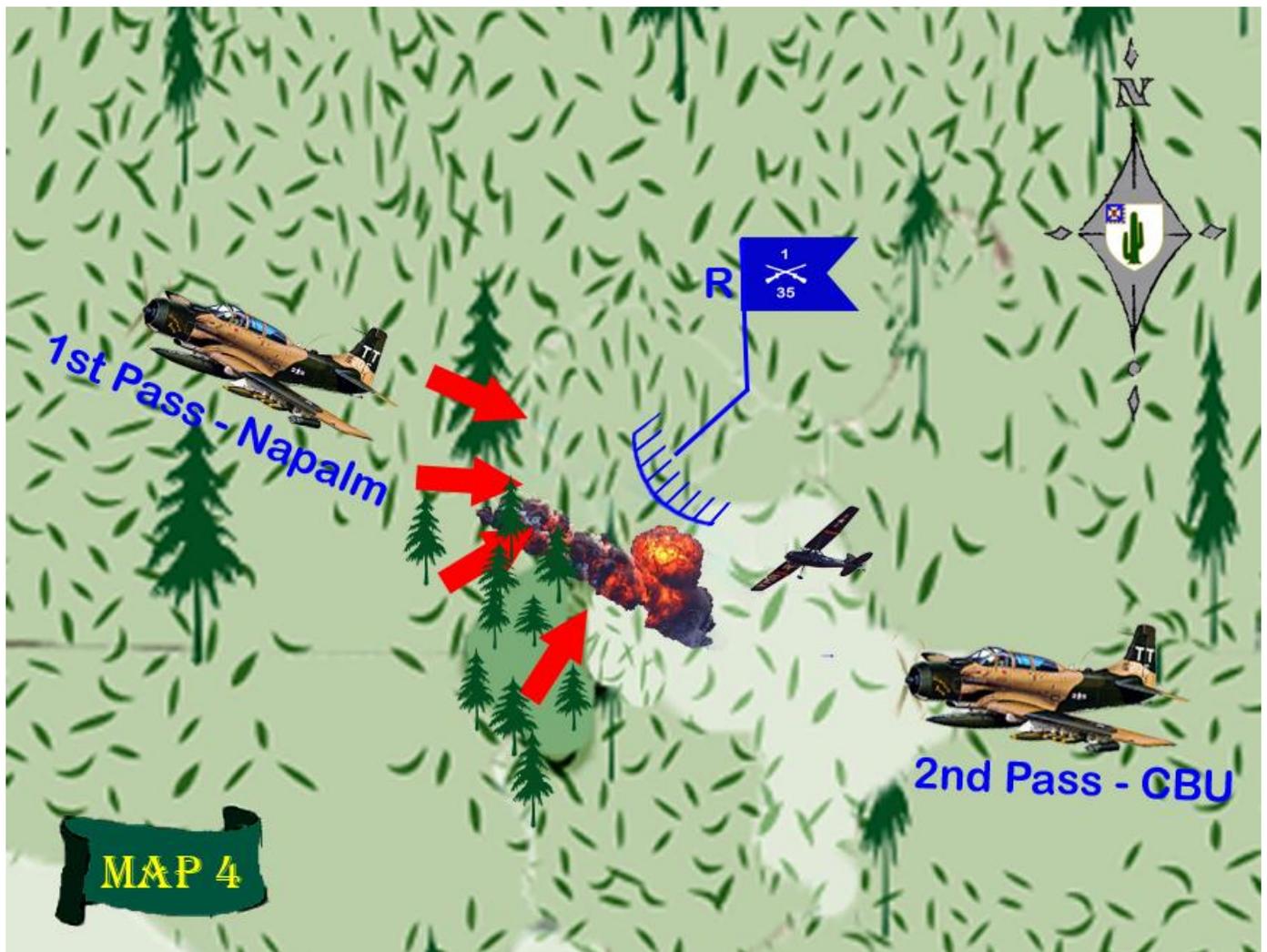
trees positively and I asked him to make sure that he gave me an idea how far his people were spread out. He said they were in the thin trees; they were spread out in a fifty to hundred-meter radius of where the smoke was. This put the enemy about a hundred fifty meters away from them at this time.

After I put the smoke rocket in for the A1-Es and they started making the passes, the first being napalm and the second aircraft coming in with CBU (Cluster Bomb Unit), the Charlies started coming out in the open; trying to close with our troops as rapidly as possible so we wouldn't deliver any more ordnance on top of them.

I told One Seven Alpha that I could see them coming out of the trees and they were closing with them, trying to rush them. I passed the word on to the fighter aircraft and they set up their miniguns underneath the wing.

(1125h) I told the fighters 'I got fifteen of them in the open' and lead says, 'I see them down there, right along underneath the edge of the smoke.' They took about two passes, one apiece, and we stopped all fifteen of them right there. Then they finished with the rest of the ordnance they had, spreading it around in those heavy trees.

Four more airstrikes were employed before the enemy finally broke contact. (7th AF) **(MAP 4)**



(Hill) Battalion brought in gunships, and artillery. The NVA tried to charge us a few times, but our return fire accuracy kept them in their positions. Sgt. Franklin Robinson, I found out later, was the only one to survive to the right of me. He alone was holding the flank and doing a real great job.

Every time the NVA would try our right flank, Robinson would knock a few of them down and they would retreat.

There was an NVA machine gun shooting at us off to my left front. He was shooting too close for comfort, just inches from us. This kid from Chicago, Dave Preston I think, kept firing his chunker (M-79 Grenade Launcher) into that hole. It would be quiet for a while, then the next thing you knew there would be more gun fire from the same machine gun hole. We later found out that there was a trench leading to that gun and when a gunner was knocked out, they would send in another gunner and Preston would knock him out, too.

Doc had all or most of the wounded to my left behind a huge ant hill and he was firing away doing his part to keep the enemy from overrunning us. During another outburst of enemy fire, one of our machine gunners, SP/4 Aaron M. Hopkins, got stitched across his body and was killed. The assistant machine gunner, whose name escapes me, was a new guy. The new guy was hit and completely knocked onto his back. A little later, I saw that same assistant machine gunner back in the fight and firing his machine gun. Later, he told me that a round had hit him directly in the front of the helmet and knocked him backwards. It stunned him for a while, but he managed to get back under his machine gun and kept up steady fire and did a great job the rest of the day. (Hill)

(Kellermeyer) I had taken cover behind a giant anthill that measured some 3 to 4 feet high by 6 to 7 feet in length. On the left end of the anthill a tree, at least two feet in diameter was growing out of the anthill itself. I immediately dialed in the four-deuce (4.2-inch mortars) platoon and called a fire mission based on the data I had previously used on the far side of the big empty field. (It was the far side now that we were on the other side) I don't remember the sequence of events that occurred after that except that I ran the four deuces completely out of ammo then began spotting for an artillery battery.

Even as the salvos crashed into the far side of the little clearing, the NVA continued to reinforce until our entire front and to both the left and right were filled with chattering automatic weapons fire, including a number of dreaded .51 caliber machine guns. Those are the kind of guns that you can dig in against and they will dig you right back out.

1200H: SFC Shishido was on the horn (radio) with battalion who claimed that a column of infantry had been dispatched to relieve our beleaguered position. Forty-five minutes later the recon ambush element arrived at our rear, claiming to have fought their way through heavy sniper fire. Thus, we realized that the NVA were cutting off our only escape route to the rear. (Kellermeyer)

Alpha to the Rescue...Sort of..

(Kellermeyer) 1227H: About this time, when things could get no worse without our total capitulation, or fighting to the last man, we were informed that elements of Alpha Company were on the ground near our location and would be joining the fight within minutes. The NVA tried to mount another attack from our left front but Carlos Lopez and the boys in his squad fought them off with excellent marksmanship.

1300H: Then the point man from Alpha Company arrived at our rear. As it happened, the fellow was a Hawaiian of oriental descent and his appearance caused a little apprehension, given the fact that we had already seen the NVA wearing our equipment. Soon the men of Alpha Company began filling into our sparse ranks, passing around canteens and cigarettes and, oh yeah, extra ammunition. From my position at the anthill I watched with great joy as new faces joined us. I noted that there were not enough men to constitute the entire company, but maybe Alpha was depleted as well.

What happened next was not only unexpected, but ghastly. The company commander, a captain who was carrying his M16 rifle by the handle, like a briefcase, walked right up beside the tree I had been

been used against armor during Operation Paul Revere I. The Cav's tank was abandoned and later destroyed with friendly fire.

(Kellermeyer) 1642H: The forest was rapidly darkening as we made our way, without further incident, to the place where the helicopters had re-supplied us so much earlier in the day that it seemed like weeks ago. The two troopers we had left to guard the rations were frantic but glad to see us. They had listened to the sounds of the battle to their south all day and knew that recon was in a desperate fight. Coinciding with our arrival were several "medevac" choppers who whisked the wounded off to emergency hospitals to be treated within minutes. Alpha company put out a defensive perimeter and almost everyone in recon collapsed in exhaustion. Seven or eight hours is a long time to have your adrenalin pumping. (Kellermeyer)



As the day began to close, the units withdrew to await the next morning's action. The number of NVA KIA was unknown at this time, but the Americans had suffered twenty-three men wounded, four killed and another eleven missing, ten of whom were known to be dead. The one unknown was the disappearance of A Co's William Ellis. As Alpha Company moved from their landing zone to the vicinity of the recon platoon, William saw a wounded soldier and returned to the LZ to get help. William then disappeared. When friendly forces evacuated the area, William's was not to be seen. The man William was trying to help was removed with the

group during withdrawal. Searches were conducted for three or four days and into July with no trace of William. He was classified as Missing in Action. William was officially declared dead on 10/31/1977.

25 June: The next morning, a platoon from Co A and members of Recon returned to the site of the previous day's battle to retrieve their dead. There were a few sightings of straggling NVA, but the units were largely unopposed. All of the KIA were found and extracted. As the search of the area widened, more and more NVA KIA were found, as well as numerous weapons. By days end the enemy body count stood at 73, with an estimate of 100 killed and 150 wounded. A full helicopter load of weapons was extracted. The 1/35th had been in contact with a full battalion of the 49th NVA Regiment.