



WELCOME TO "A WALK WITH THE 35TH"



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LZ 36J – 2-3 August 1966 3d Platoon, A Co and Recon, 2/35th

August 1, 1966 found the 2/35 Infantry entering phase II of OPERATION PAUL REVERE. On this date Company C conducted a heliborne assault into LZ 29X without enemy contact. Company A 2/35 INF was rested and reorganized after heavy contact on 31 July 1966. 2/35 INF(-) continued search and destroy, ambush, and blocking positions in AO.



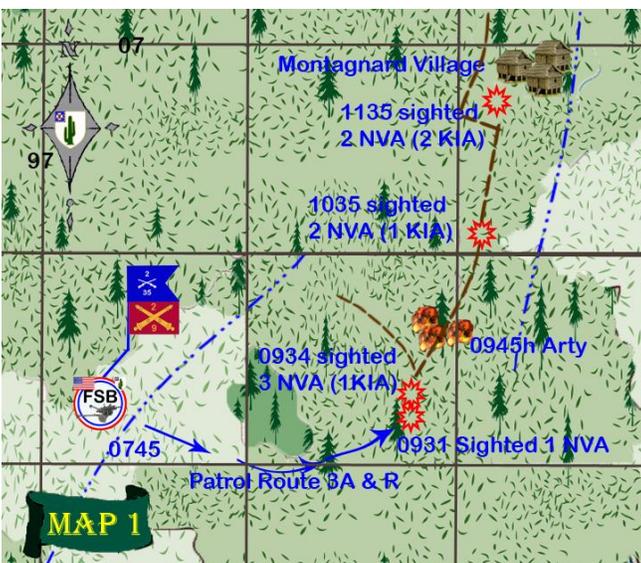
A Co Officers; Cpt McDonough 2nd left Photo by Lt George Jacunski

On August 2, 1966, Company A was given the mission of returning to the 31 July 66 scene of action. Rather than approach from the southwest, Captain McDonough was directed to move due east of LZ 36J (YA973053) until he crossed a north-south trail that previously had been detected by airborne visual reconnaissance.

Once astride this trail, Captain McDonough was to proceed north following and mapping the trail and its major offshoots, if any. In this fashion he was to proceed north of the 08 east-west grid line, turn west, and come into the 31 July 66 scene of action from the northwest. The area of contact

would then be thoroughly searched. Inherent in the assigned task was a concurrent search and destroy mission.

Company A's force of about twenty-four men consisted of the command group and the Third Platoon. Lt Brennan's Recon Platoon was placed under the operational control of Co A and held about 45 personnel.



At 0755 on 2 Aug 66, the composite group departed LZ 36J (YA973053). The force was commanded by Captain James M. McDonough, CO, Company A. The reconnaissance platoon was given the mission of providing the point. Since there were no trails running east from LZ 36J, Lt. Brennan, the reconnaissance platoon leader, selected a route to the SSE. This route was selected because it avoided a hill mass and some very thick vegetation.

At 0931 the north-south trail was discovered, and the point element of the reconnaissance platoon sighted one NVA at YA988052. This NA soldier was engaged

with results unknown.

At 0934, three NVA were engaged at coordinates YA988053. One of the three was KIA. As a precautionary measure, Capt. McDonough instructed his arty FO, Lt. Knutson, to call fire on the area to the north of the previously mentioned coordinates.

At 0945, the artillery fire completed, Company A moved northward. The trail formed a junction. Many footprints indicated that a platoon or more had recently used the branch heading to the northeast, therefore Capt. McDonough instructed Lt. Brennan to follow that branch but, to exercise extreme caution. After moving approximately 400 meters, the trail turned again to the north. Two NVA were spotted in a tree line. Artillery fire again was called in. When completed, Company A swept through the area without positive results.

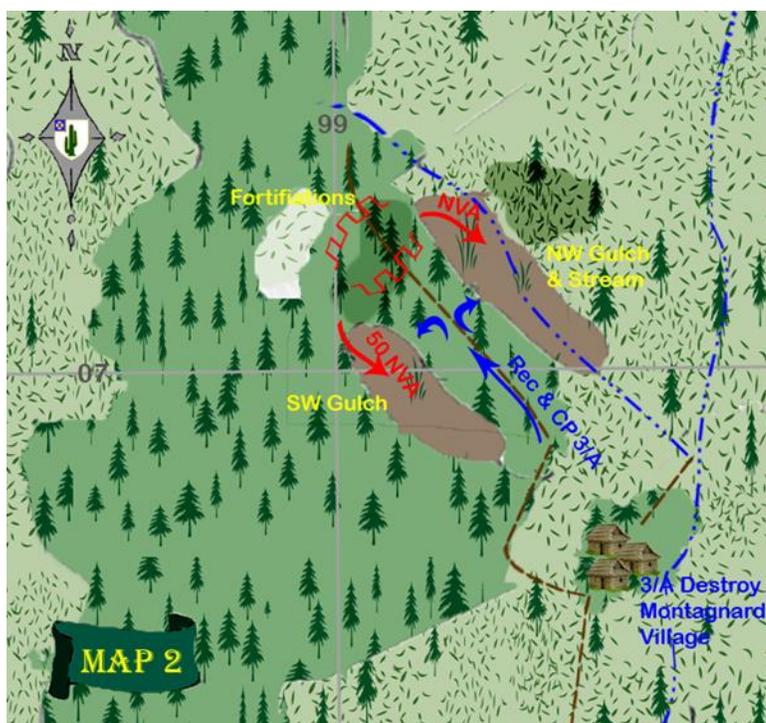
At 1035, two NVA were observed at YA991061 and were engaged with an M-79 grenade launcher. One NVA soldier was killed and the other pursued for a short distance to no avail.

Movement was continued to the north guiding on the trail. At 1125, two NVA were sighted and taken under fire at YA992067. Both were killed.

Just north of this skirmish, an abandoned Montagnard village containing twenty huts was discovered. A detailed search indicated that the huts had been used for sleeping within the past few days. At the southern edge of the village, the trail turned west. Footprints still were visible. Signs showed movement in both directions and indicated very recent use. **(MAP 1)**

Captain McDonough instructed his 3d platoon leader, Lt. Tragakis, to remain behind with his platoon and destroy the village. The company command group and reconnaissance platoon would continue to follow the trail. Lt. Tragakis was further instructed that he would rejoin Capt. McDonough upon the completion of the village destruction mission. After approximately 200 meters, the trail again turned north. Evidence of recent use by a large group persisted.

At 1200, the point squad observed two NVA at coordinates YA991071. Both were engaged by the point and both were killed.

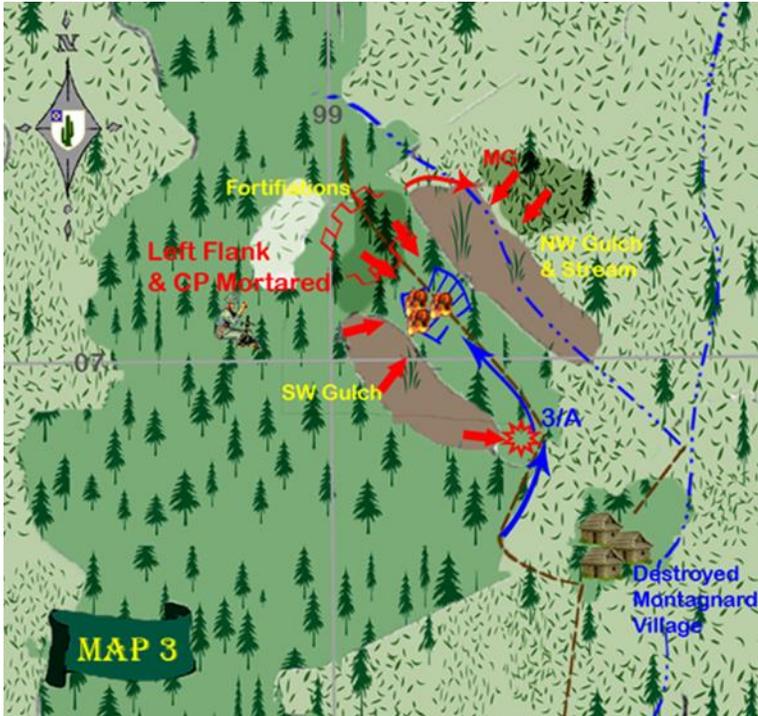


Concurrent with this action, fifty or more NVA were observed running on the flank. The enemy appeared to have been caught totally off guard. The reconnaissance platoon immediately engaged the NVA force. Both reconnaissance platoon flank security elements observed NVA to their flanks firing automatic weapons. Clearly the NVA were reacting rapidly and were moving to surround the friendly forces.

Capt. McDonough ordered the 3d platoon to the scene of action. Lt. Tragakis had heard the firing and already had started to move. The left flank element of the Reconnaissance platoon was pinned down by automatic weapons fire. In an attempt to maneuver

against the enemy machinegun position, Sgt Munoz, SP4 Gardner, and SP4 Trueluck were killed almost immediately. SP4 Ledebur, the fourth member of the maneuver group, was wounded in both legs.

Pvt Sanderson, the reconnaissance platoon medic quickly ran to the aid of SP4 Ledebur. In the process, Pvt Sanderson was wounded three times. SP4 Ledebur was killed as the result of an additional head wound. A base of fire was provided for Pvt Sanderson and he was able to return to the platoon position.



A three-man enemy machinegun team was observed moving into position on the high ground to the north, SSG Dean, the acting reconnaissance platoon sergeant, took the team under fire and killed all three.

As the 3d platoon maneuvered to assist the reconnaissance platoon, they were engaged by a small force; however, they were able to break through and closed in with the reconnaissance platoon at approximately 1300. By this time, the NVA had maneuvered two separate elements to each flank.

Captain McDonough reported his situation to battalion headquarters. His estimate was that he had entered a base area and that he was in contact with an enemy force of at least battalion size. As his brief report terminated, his estimate was confirmed as a mortar round

was heard as it fired from the tube. The first mortar rounds hit to the left flank. Both flank elements were heavily engaged at this time. Three more mortar rounds were fired and traced a path across the area from west to east. The second of the three rounds hit on the trail between Lt. Brennan and Captain McDonough. Captain McDonough was wounded by fragments. Moments later a machinegun firing in his direction hit him in the chest. Capt. McDonough died within seconds.

1st Sgt Perez moved quickly and spontaneously to the aid of Captain McDonough only to be killed instantly by a third mortar round. This group of three mortar rounds caused more than twenty casualties, including Lt. Brennan and SSG Dean. **(MAP 3)**

Though wounded, Lt. Brennan immediately took command, made a quick estimate of the situation, and determined that he had too many wounded to attempt to break contact. He then instructed Lt. Tragakis to strengthen the perimeter using all available personnel, including the wounded that could still function. At this time, the US Force was completely encircled. Because of the thick terrain, Lt. Brennan could not readily determine his exact location.

The artillery FO, Lt. Knutson, called for smoke rounds; however, during the adjustment a FAC appeared on the scene with two A1E's on station. By this time, the perimeter was firmly established and the dead and wounded had been gathered into a central location. Enemy fire still was so intense that digging of positions was hazardous (had to be done from the prone position) and clearing of a LZ to extract the wounded was impossible.



The perimeter was marked with smoke and the A1E's dropped "mini-bombs" all around the perimeter. Prior to this all signs indicated that the enemy had regrouped for a large scale coordinated attack against the perimeter. Yelling, screaming, and whistle blowing was heard. Some of the NVA were heard to yell in English "1st Cav" and "Lt. Brennan." (It is believed that Lt. Brennan's name was picked up from wounded personnel who called for him on several occasions).

Before the A-1Es made their bomb run, enemy troops were observed rising to the standing position, a clear indication of impending attack. At this instant, a second mortar attack of twelve rounds fell along the trail. An undetermined number of casualties were caused by these rounds.

The bomb run by the A-1Es broke up the mortar attack and, in all probability, aborted a mass attack by the enemy at this time. On completion of the A-1E ordnance, two gunships arrived on the scene. Smoke was used to mark the friendly positions, after which the gunships worked over the east and west flanks.

Upon completion of the gun ship activity, A-1Es were again on station. They laced the area to the south. Until the second air strike, enemy fire was still being received; however, upon completion of the air strike to the south, enemy fire ceased. It was thought that the enemy had broken contact. Preparation of a LZ was started at this time. As the LZ preparation neared completion, enemy automatic weapons again opened fire. Three more mortar rounds fell. Work was discontinued on the LZ and personnel were directed to return to their defensive positions.

A machine gun team from the reconnaissance platoon observed fifty NVA in the draw to the left flank. As the group came into range, it was taken under fire and ten NVA were KIA. Those remaining quickly dispersed. One Soviet LMG (7.62), one 1 LMG (7.62), six AK-47's, and three SKS's were subsequently captured in this action.

Work again was resumed on the LZ. During this period, sporadic firing continued. Upon completion of the LZ, a DUSTOFF aircraft attempted to come in to extract wounded. The DUSTOFF aircraft was fired upon, therefore Lt. Brennan instructed the pilot to leave the area.



Because of the large expenditure of ammunition and the need for materials to improve the small LZ, a resupply mission was attempted at 1700. As the re-supply aircraft came into the area, Lt. Brennan popped smoke; however, the pilot identified the wrong color. It is presumed that the NVA were using smoke to lure the aircraft into their area. The resupply aircraft flew over the LZ and attempted to push the supply items out. This effort was a total failure in that all items landed outside the perimeter and either were broken

Pop Smoke photo by Walt Shields

open and scattered or were damaged as a result of hitting the ground. This attempt to resupply apparently caused a flurry of activity by the enemy. A fire fight which lasted for 45 minutes developed.

As soon as the fire fight slowed down, teams were sent out in an attempt to recover the supplies. The only items the recovery teams retrieved were a few blocks of C4, one broken chain saw, and one case of smoke grenades.

Because of the relative quiet that prevailed at this time, Lt. Brennan led a six-man group outside the perimeter in an attempt to recover the reconnaissance platoon flank security group which had been killed earlier. The attempt failed because the NVA had the bodies covered with a MG; however, the NVA likewise were prevented access to the bodies and equipment as Lt. Brennan placed one of his machine guns in position to foil any NVA attempts. In the meantime, work on the perimeter defensive positions, on protective holes for the wounded and on the LZ continued.

Shortly after it became apparent that Captain McDonough's force was in contact with a large enemy unit, Battalion headquarters began efforts to constitute a relief force. Companies B and C, both deployed well to the north in blocking positions, were directed to assemble and prepare to be lifted by helicopter to LZ 36J. Both units assembled in good order, commenced movement, and closed into LZ 36J.

Company C commanded by Captain Robert L. Ord III was directed to move overland to effect relief. Captain Charles A. Murray, newly designated commander of Company A, accompanied the relief force. Company C departed LZ 36J at 1615. **(MAP 4)**

At 1830, lead elements made link-up without major incident. On arrival at the scene of action, Captain Ord made a hasty estimate of the situation and decided to defend the perimeter with personnel of Company C only. Personnel of Company A and the reconnaissance platoon who still were functioning were given the mission of establishing an inner perimeter, protecting and preparing positions for the wounded. As personnel from Company C moved into the perimeter, automatic weapons fire was received from the north. When fire was returned, enemy fire would cease, and then pick up again when friendly fire stopped.



At 1900, Captain Ord learned of the fact that there were four casualties from the reconnaissance platoon outside the perimeter. Lt. Davis, Platoon Leader, 1st Platoon, Company C, was directed to send out a four-man team, plus a guide from the reconnaissance platoon, to attempt recovery of the bodies before nightfall. Unknown to Captain Ord, Lt. Davis took out the group himself. Only ten meters out, sniper fire wounded the point man, Pfc Pettit. Sniper fire was so intense that repeated attempts to rescue Pfc Pettit were driven back. The recovery group returned to the perimeter under covering fire, which was later discovered to have killed the sniper. There were now five casualties outside the perimeter. Captain Ord decided it was not worth sacrificing more men in recovery

attempts. Later, a medic, Pfc Doolin, crawled out and brought back Pfc Pettit, who died later that night.

A seven-man engineer squad had been attached to Company C. From arrival, this squad worked on the LZ and had improved it to the point that it easily could accept one aircraft and the strengthened perimeter. At 1945, because of the improved condition of the LZ, Captain Ord attempted to get DUSTOFF into the area to extract the more seriously wounded.

As the DUSTOFF aircraft came on short final and almost to a hover, an enemy light machinegun began firing. It was later learned that the pilot and door gunner had been wounded. The aircraft immediately withdrew as Company C troops put down a heavy base of fire to cover the departure. By this time, darkness as well as enemy activity precluded further attempts by DUSTOFF aircraft.

At 2000, four mortar rounds fell within the perimeter. It is believed the distribution was one round of 60mm and three of 82mm. This mortar attack caused the following casualties in Company C; from the one 60mm round, two WIA; from the three 82mm rounds, two KIA (including Lt. Davis) and sixteen WIA. These rounds landed on the perimeter positions. Lt. Davis was killed in the process of checking his portion of the line.

The battalion reconnaissance platoon and the 3d Plt. had no casualties since they were occupying positions on an inner perimeter as previously mentioned. The relatively heavy number of casualties resulting from this mortar attack is explained by the fact that the men of Company C were establishing the new perimeter and had not yet had adequate time to finish their positions. Concurrently with the start of the mortar attack, enemy small arms were fired into the perimeter from the N and NE. Again, enemy fire immediately ceased when a large volume of fire was returned. Artillery fire was adjusted into the area in which the enemy mortar was believed to be positioned. As the artillery rounds landed, a secondary explosion was heard.

Work began again on improving positions. At 2130, an alarm was given that mortar rounds again were incoming. Personnel dived for their positions, however, the rounds landed outside the northeastern corner of the perimeter. There were no casualties from this mortar attack. Counter mortar artillery fire again was brought in, after which work resumed on the defensive positions.



NVA Mortar Crew

At 2145, two NVA approached the perimeter from the north-northeast. It appeared that they did not realize they were approaching the perimeter. The lead individual carried a light machinegun on his shoulder and an AK-47 in his hand. The second man did not have a weapon. SSG Pasowicz, a squad leader of the 1st Platoon Company C, permitted the two NVA to get within two meters of his position, and then halted them in English. Regardless of whether they understood English, the NVA halted, answered in Vietnamese, and SSG Pasowicz immediately replied with an automatic burst of fifteen rounds from his M-16. The remaining four rounds were expended on the second NVA who turned, took a step, and fell. The second body was not found at daylight.

7th US Air Fore

Things had remained fairly quiet until 2040 hours when the friendly positions began to receive mortar fire. An AC-47 was diverted and began expending flares overhead, but the attack gradually built up in intensity and soon the friendly perimeter was threatened.

Cpt Hoon, FAC, reached the area about midnight. The AC-47 had already expended his guns in a box around the American perimeter and he was reloading for a third run. Just before firing the third salvo, "Spooky" picked up ground fire which he marked with a 45-minute ground flare. At this time, Cpt Kenneth Beaird and Cpt Peter Hegseth, of the 1st Air Commando Squadron, reached the target.



AC-47 Puff the Magic Dragon

Cpt Hoon described the conditions that existed that night in a letter to the 1st ACS, citing the two A-1E pilots for the action that followed:

"The weather was unsuitable for tactical fighter operations due to heavy overcast, layered clouds below, and a fast-moving cloud bank about to engulf the target. It was further complicated by the darkness of the night and the confusing light of illumination flares being dropped approximately four kilometers north over another unit."

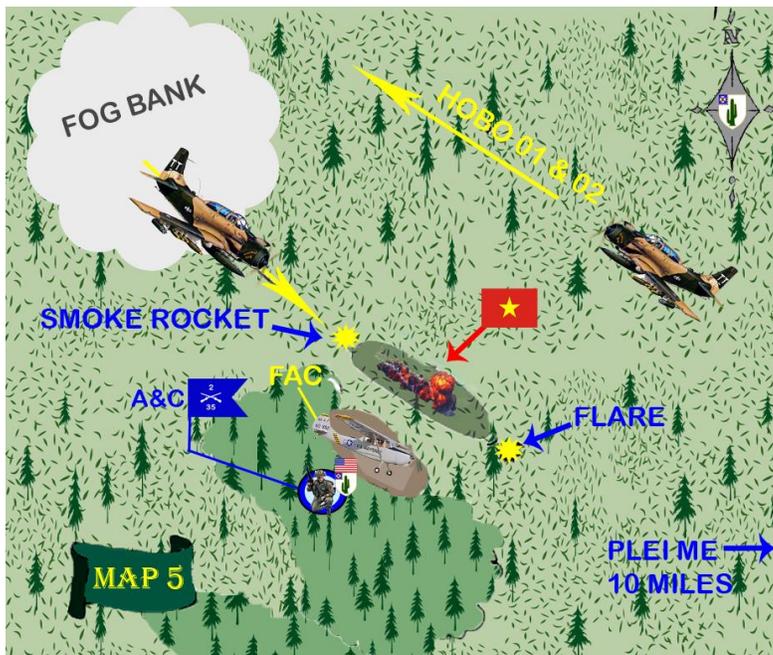
On the ground the situation was so critical that the commander had briefed the FAC over the radio in a whisper to avoid compromising the position of the Command Post. He then marked his position by using a small pen flashlight. The enemy troops could be heard shouting and screaming a couple of hundred yards north of the ground troops, apparently preparing to launch an all-out assault.

Cpt Hoon described the air strike this way:

"I put my smoke mark in two to three hundred meters north-west of the ground flare which the AC-47 had dropped. The wind carried my smoke straight to the flair just like an arrow. At that moment the ground lit up like a Chinese New Year with small arms and automatic weapons fire.

"Cpt Beaird initiated the attack with napalm on three separate passes, totally blanketing the area of the ground fire. Cpt Hegseth alternated passes in the firing area with CBU. After all droppable ordnance was delivered, Cpt Beaird, suffering mechanical difficulties that rendered him unable to fire his miniguns, made simulated passes over the battle area. Cpt Hegseth observed each pass and was able to pinpoint a new area for each run. This continued until there was no longer any ground fire. This was confirmed by the ground commander who said that all hostile fire had ceased.

"It was heartwarming to hear the ground commander, who had suffered heavy casualties in the preceding twelve hours, say that he could rest easy for the rest of the night. **(MAP 5)**



Thereafter, Captain Ord devoted attention to the task of bringing in continuous artillery and mortar fire plus the fire support ordnance provided by USAF. The artillery FO attached to Company C, Lt. Zschoche, adjusted DEFCONS (Defensive Concentrations) around the perimeter. Extensive H&I fires were planned and placed throughout the area for the entire night. Lt. Knutson, the artillery FO who had been accompanying Captain McDonough's force, although wounded earlier in the action, assisted in the fire planning and adjusted the fires of another artillery battery.

During the remainder of the night, the perimeter received sporadic automatic weapons fire and two relatively light probes.

At daylight, sweeps were pushed out 25, 50 and finally 75 meters.

The bodies of the four men from the reconnaissance platoon were found undisturbed. The NVA KIA body count in the immediate area was completed. During the sweeps, contact was made on two occasions, each with one NVA. The first contact was made from a distance of 75 meters. The NVA was not armed. He carried only a pack or case. It is assumed that he was a medic or else simply was policing the battlefield. He was not hit by friendly fire and he successfully evaded capture. The second contact was made in precisely the same manner, again without positive results. Early morning weather conditions on 3 Aug 66 precluded aerial medevac, however, at approximately 1200 DUSTOFF moved into the LZ, landed, and loaded two WIA. While loading the third WIA, firing broke out to the south. Two positions on the perimeter engaged a six-man NVA force. The DUSTOFF ship immediately withdrew, receiving several hits on liftoff.

Meanwhile, Company C, 1st Bn, 7th Cav, 1st Air Cav Div, which had begun moving shortly after first light, was pushing toward the scene of action from the south. At 1230, link up was made with Captain Ord's elements. The remainder of the 1st Bn, 7th Cav, followed.

At 1335, detailed sweeps of the area were completed, and the entire 1/7 Cav had closed. Company C, 1/7 Cav, killed two armed NVA during the sweep. The entire area was secured and DUSTOFF and resupply aircraft were able to get into the area without incident.

The first aircraft to arrive brought in a volunteer physician (Dr. Reber) from the brigade clearing company. He immediately administered needed aid to the seriously wounded. His selfless and courageous act brought quality medical attention to several of the seriously wounded and undoubtedly was instrumental in saving the life of one if not several individuals.

Enemy losses were put at 106 KIA, with an estimate of 132 KIA and 150 WIA. Forty NVA packs, over forty rifles, five machine guns, one M-79 Grenade Launcher and RPC-2 Rocket Launcher were captured.

For her actions in the battle on 2-3 Aug, Co A, 2/35 Infantry was awarded the Valorous Unit Award.