

**Colonel Wallace "Stan" Tyson**

**TF TYSON COMMANDER**

**PLEIKU PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM**

**LANDING ZONE 10 ALFA**

**28 - 29 MAY 1966**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The following is a description of the contact between TASK FORCE TYSON and the 66th North Vietnamese Army Regiment at Landing Zone 10 ALFA, Pleiku Province, Republic of South Vietnam, 28 and 29 May 1966. Combat elements within the Task Force were Companies A, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry and B, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, and a Section of 107 mm Mortars from the Headquarters Company of each of the line battalions. This account was compiled from an After Action Report written by Major Wallace S. Tyson; a Monograph written by Capt Anthony Bisantz at the Infantry Center, Fort Benning, GA; the Annual Historical Supplement, 1966, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry; the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Bronco Bugle; and from personal experiences provided by others who had firsthand knowledge of the battle. Excerpts from the After Action Report are shown without an '\*'. All others are identified by an '\*...\*' and source recognition at the end of the segment. The narrative of this battle is presented in four primary sections BACKGROUND; OPERATION PAUL REVERE; TASK FORCE TYSON; and REINFORCEMENT. Conflicts in sequences of events and times are to be expected depending on recollections of the individuals, their understanding of events as they unfolded and the inherent confusion common with any battlefield.

### **BACKGROUND**

The 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division began its departure from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii on Christmas Day, 1965, en route to the Republic of South Vietnam. In conjunction with the overall plan of deployment of US forces in-country against areas of known enemy presence, or because of input from intelligence sources, into areas of anticipated activity, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigades were kept under Major General Fred C. Weyand's Divisional control and were deployed to Military Region Three. They were positioned at Cu Chi, twenty miles northwest of Saigon. Because of building pressure against the Central Highlands by North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regulars moving out of sanctuaries west of the Cambodian border, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry was designated "Separate" and was deployed directly to Pleiku Province in the western portion of the Highlands. The Advanced Party arrived in Pleiku on 26 Dec 1965, and the remainder of the Brigade, under the command of Colonel Everett A. Stoutner, completed the air movement of 4,000 men and over 9,000 tons of equipment in twenty-five days. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was composed of the 1/14th Infantry Battalion; 1/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry and 2/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalions; 2/9<sup>th</sup> Artillery Battalion; 1/69<sup>th</sup> Armor Battalion; 3<sup>rd</sup> Provisional Support Battalion; C Troop, 3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry; and D Company, 65<sup>th</sup> Engineers.

Pleiku was the capital city of Pleiku Province and was located at the junction of Highway 14, a north/south artery that paralleled the Vietnamese/Cambodian border and connected Kontum, Pleiku and Ban Be Thout with regions farther south, and Highway 19. The latter was little more than a dirt track from the Cambodian border east to Pleiku, and macadam from that city to Quin Nhon, some seventy miles farther east and on the coast of the South China Sea. Pleiku

served not only as a Provincial Center and Headquarters for General Vihn Loc and the ARVN (Army, Republic of Vietnam) II Corps, but also as a major supply point for ARVN Regular and Regional Forces in the area. An airfield just outside the city provided a critical logistical link for the Special Forces Teams that were positioned in fortified camps, at extended intervals along the border, for the purpose of providing early warning against enemy movement of personnel and supplies from the west. Prior to the arrival of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bde, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry, the major US ground force in the region was the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division, based approximately forty miles east along Highway 19 at An Khe. Even with the tactical advantage of unchallenged air mobility, the Central Highlands presented an area of high mountains and dense jungles greater than the Cavalry could reasonably be expected to cover. Intelligence from Special Forces and ARVN sources had indicated a heavy buildup of NVA strength to the west and predicted a major thrust against Highway 19 and its connections north, south and east. One report estimated that as of 01 Jan 1966, Pleiku City had a life expectancy of two to three weeks. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was positioned in the Highlands to help block the NVA effort, and from the onset, was tagged as the "fire brigade".



*Search and Destroy Operations along the Cambodian border.*

The NVA objective to seize the Highlands, cutting the Republic in half and severing ground communications and the logistical link between the northern and southern portions of the country, began the previous year with attacks from the west against Pleiku and Kontum in conjunction with the onset of the summer monsoon. The potential disaster for the Republic was turned back by the US 1st Cavalry Division and ARVN units, with the troopers of the Cav earning their Combat Infantry Badges several times over in the fighting that began on 27 Oct 1965, centered in the valley of the Ia Drang and the Chu Pong massif.

With the Brigade base camp established outside of Pleiku City, the 3<sup>rd</sup> began its acclimation to the climate, terrain and local enemy units. Operations were expanded as expertise and familiarity grew, and these included company and reinforced battalion-sized "search and destroy" missions north of Kontum along the border with Laos, medical assistance visits to isolated Montagnard villages in the back country, and road clearing and convoy security missions along both Highways 14 and 19. One such security mission placed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry high in the Mang Yang Pass above Highway 19 on Easter Sunday. The road into the pass still bore the evidence of the destruction of French Mobile Force 100 in July, 1954, and the rusted hulks of the French vehicles and the numerous clusters of French and

**Vietnamese graves along the approaches to the pass testified to the effectiveness of the ambush and the Viet Minh fire power that destroyed them.**

**10 MAY 1966**

**Intelligence was received by Headquarters, First Field Forces Vietnam (IFFV), Lt General Stanley "Swede" Larson, Commanding, through the network of Special Forces Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) camps along the border of the Central Highlands that a major ground force was moving out of Cambodia into either Pleiku or Kontum Provinces. Additional information indicated the NVA had been given the contingency mission of attacking one or more of the isolated Special Forces camps en route. Earlier contact with the NVA in that area had identified both the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> NVA Regiments, and it was reported that both had spent sufficient time in "sanctuary" to recover from their defeat in the Ia Drang by the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cav six months earlier. Replacement of personnel and resupply had been accomplished by use of the trail network (Ho Chi Minh Trail) in Cambodia and Laos reaching back into North Vietnam.**

### **OPERATION PAUL REVERE**

**Operation "Paul Revere" was set in motion by IFFV, using forces available within the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav Div and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bde of the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Its stated mission was to intercept the enemy force along the border by inserting US forces to cover the primary routes of entry into the highlands. The Cav was sent into the northern sector of the area of operations. Command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bde was passed to Brigadier General Glenn D. Walker, Assistant Division Commander, Maneuver, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Div, and the Bde was moved southwest of Pleiku to search out a portion of the remote border area that measured almost eighty kilometers (forty-eight miles) in length by forty kilometers in width. Brigade Forward (Bde Fwd) was established twenty-five kilometers from Pleiku at a base named OASIS. The site was near Highway 19 and took advantage of a location and an abandoned air strip that had been used by the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cav the previous year.**

**\*OPERATION PAUL REVERE I began the first of four phases of Operation Paul Revere which started 10 May 1966 and ended 25 December 1966.**

**22 MAY 1966**

**\*The Reconnaissance Platoon, 2/35<sup>th</sup>, conducted a heliborne assault into LZ 29A and began a long range patrol in the North and West portions of the AO. During its patrol, the platoon accounted for four NVA KIA and one NVA WIA. There were no friendly casualties.\* (Annual Historical Supplement, 2<sup>nd</sup> BN, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1966)**

**As the summer monsoon gained momentum, the area was subjected to heavy rainstorms that fell from just before noon to dusk every day. Shortly after dark, periods of clear skies would follow. Star and moonlight were available, if and when they could penetrate the double and triple canopy of overhead forest growth. By daylight, the clouds would begin to rebuild and any advantage gained during the respite would soon be lost to the next day's deluge. During May, 1966, the rainfall totaled 28 inches. Gen Walker assigned his combat battalions sectors of the area west of the brigade base camp, and "search and destroy" operations were started.**



Each battalion moved out from OASIS into its assigned Area of Operations and set up a Battalion Forward (Bn Fwd), usually with a Battery of 105mm artillery attached and positioned so as to provide support to the infantry companies that would range westward to the border. The 105mm's fire support range was approximately ten kilometers (six miles), and that set the operational limits for the infantry.

\*The initial deployment placed the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry far to the south of the Chu Pong Mountain; the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry generally north of Chu Pong, in the la Drang Valley; and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Area of Operations Number 11, south of Plei

Djereng Special Forces Camp. The entire area of operations for Operation Paul Revere was subdivided into smaller, numbered areas; e.g., Area of Operation (AO) Number 10, AO 11, AO 12, etc. Landing Zones (LZ) within each numbered AO were designated with an alphabetical suffix. Hence, LZ 10A was the first landing zone used in AO 10, LZ 10B the second, etc.\* (Captain Anthony Bisantz: A/1/35).

25 MAY 1966

\*B Co 2/35 was airlifted out of OASIS to an Area Southwest of Pleiku as part of Operation Paul Revere. The first night out I took an Ambush Patrol to an area just outside of a large abandoned village. The next morning we returned to the company perimeter and were getting ready to move out when we heard 1SG Harris call for help (he had gone outside the perimeter to take a dump) and three armed Vietnamese came up to him and surrendered.

\*After that we began our Search & Destroy mission, my squad had the point for the company. Later that afternoon we came up to a Montagnard village. As we were working our way around/through the village, a squad (8) of NVA soldiers came walking single file from the brush on our right about 20 meters in front of us. We looked at each other in surprise and opened fire simultaneously. They ran behind some big trees and we exchanged fire for a few minutes. They faded into the brush leaving their packs and blood trails. Meanwhile, the rest of the company behind us ran in to some NVA towing a wheeled Soviet machine gun. A fire fight ensued resulting in SGT Norkett of 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt WIA. By the time the company reached our position it was getting dark, and it was obvious that we were in the midst of an enemy concentration. There was some high ground on our direction of march and Capt Maisano opted to set up there for the night.

\*The next day we went on a killer hump and joined the rest of the BN in a large open field. That night after mid-night we were alerted by SGT Clapper of 1st Plt B2/35 LP/OP that an enemy force was moving somewhat parallel/diagonally toward our position.

**They ran into our LP/OP and a fire fight took place. We killed 10-12 NVA, and B Co had its first KIA, the Company Senior Medic.\* (SGM (Ret) Charles Beauchamp, 3:B/2/35)**

**26 MAY 1966**

**The 2/35<sup>th</sup> had been conducting operations in an area measuring approximately thirty kilometers from north to south that lay between Special Forces camps located at Duc Co and Plei Djereng. While Duc Co enjoyed the advantages afforded by its nearness to Highway 19, Plei Djereng was isolated and served as a blocking position in the mountainous terrain to the north. There were three east to west valleys that divided the terrain to the west of the battalion, each with its primary stream that served as part of the watershed and that eventually fed into the la Drang River. LTC Philip R. Feir, Commanding, 2/35<sup>th</sup>, was faced with the decision to determine which route the enemy would chose if they were to attempt passage through the Bn's AO. The two Special Forces camps were located adjacent to the northern and southern approaches, but each was positioned to the outside of the high ridges that flanked the three valleys in question. All three approaches led into the highlands, had ample water and their heavy overhead cover would serve to conceal a main route of advance for units up to regimental size. However, the advantages of the two routes to the outside were flawed because of their proximity to the Special Forces camps, and their use would be subject to discovery by aggressive patrolling, characteristic of the units stationed within the camps. Because of that, LTC Feir determined that the NVA would probably select the middle valley because it had the advantage of remoteness, coupled with flank security provided by the terrain. Further, if his mission included an attack against one of the Special Forces camps, the center route would allow the NVA Commander freedom of movement to the north or south as a later situation might dictate.**

**01 MAY - 26 MAY 1966:**

#### **ENEMY SITUATION**

**Lt Col La Ngoc Chau, Commander of the 66<sup>th</sup> NVA Regiment, moved his unit across the Cambodian border into South Vietnam in early May, 1966. (Intelligence reports listed LTC Chau as the Commander of the 66<sup>th</sup> as late as November, 1965) The 66<sup>th</sup> had three infantry battalions assigned: the 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. Each battalion contained approximately 450 officers and men. Because of the heavy losses experienced during the la Drang campaign against the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cav, many of the line units were made up of untried and inexperienced personnel fresh out of the Ho Chi Minh pipeline. In addition, the 66<sup>th</sup> carried an anti-aircraft battery of 12.5mm, tripod mounted, heavy machineguns.**

**The mission of the 66<sup>th</sup> was to attack the Special Forces camp at Plei Djereng, unite with two other regiments of the NVA 325<sup>th</sup> Div, also infiltrating eastward into the Central Highlands, and exploit any success against American and South Vietnamese forces that might be developed. Failing this, he was to move back across the border to the sanctuary provided by Cambodia.**

**The 66<sup>th</sup> established a base camp about ten kilometers inside South Vietnam and 1000 meters to the north of a swampy clearing that was later to be designated by the 2/35<sup>th</sup> as LZ 10 ALFA. The Commander placed elements of his force around that clearing and at other sites within the vicinity of his headquarters that might serve as landing zones for the American helicopters. At the clearing closest to his base camp, (LZ 10 ALFA) he positioned five tripod mounted 12.7mm anti-aircraft guns, and firing pits were dug into the swampy ground along the tree line and camouflaged. The infantry units that comprised the main body of his regiment, and other troops not required in the Headquarters area or occupied with defense of**

possible LZ's, were moved to the east along the stream and parallel ridges that formed the middle avenue of approach to Plei Djereng.

27 May 1966

\*The 2/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry conducted a heliborne assault into AO 11 and 12 with companies A and B at LZ 12A (YA 908385). The battalion (-) landed at LZ 11A (YA 873369). Companies A and B later closed to LZ 11A after conducting search and destroy operations to the northwest and southwest, respectively.

\*Based on a terrain analysis, the valley associated with LZ 10A (YA 769376) appeared to be a likely area for use by enemy forces, hence Company B was directed to prepare for a heliborne assault into LZ 10A 28 may 1966.\* (Annual Historical Supplement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1966)

The 2<sup>nd</sup>/35<sup>th</sup> Bn Fwd was established at Landing Zone (LZ) 11 ALFA and consisted of the Headquarters and Command Group, Company "C", Reconnaissance Platoon, and an attached Battery from the 2<sup>nd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Artillery Battalion. In addition to the artillery that was dedicated to a specific infantry battalion, additional fire support was available and "on call" from batteries of 155mm and 8-inch Howitzers at Bde Fwd and 175mm Cannons located at the Special Forces camp at Duc Co.

\*In the early morning of that first day, the Bn/HQ Firebase LZ was attacked, and we managed to get a machine gun with our 81mm mortars. That machine gun had the Bn HQ pinned down, and we got a direct hit on him. LTC Phil Feir talked with me that morning and I told him we were packing only about 12 rounds as we humped the mortars and that we would be more effective if we ammo flown into the LZ. He ordered up an ammo lift for that night just before the LZ 10A of B Co. We didn't expect to need it all on 10A as we didn't expect to stay on the LZ that night. We were cleaning up from the attack on the Bn HQ when we got the word of heavy contact on 10A. Feir sent the mortars and A Company right away and diverted the ammo to 10A. That was fortuitous as we used all of it and then some.\* (Ray Pollard, Wpns Plt Ldr: B/2/35)

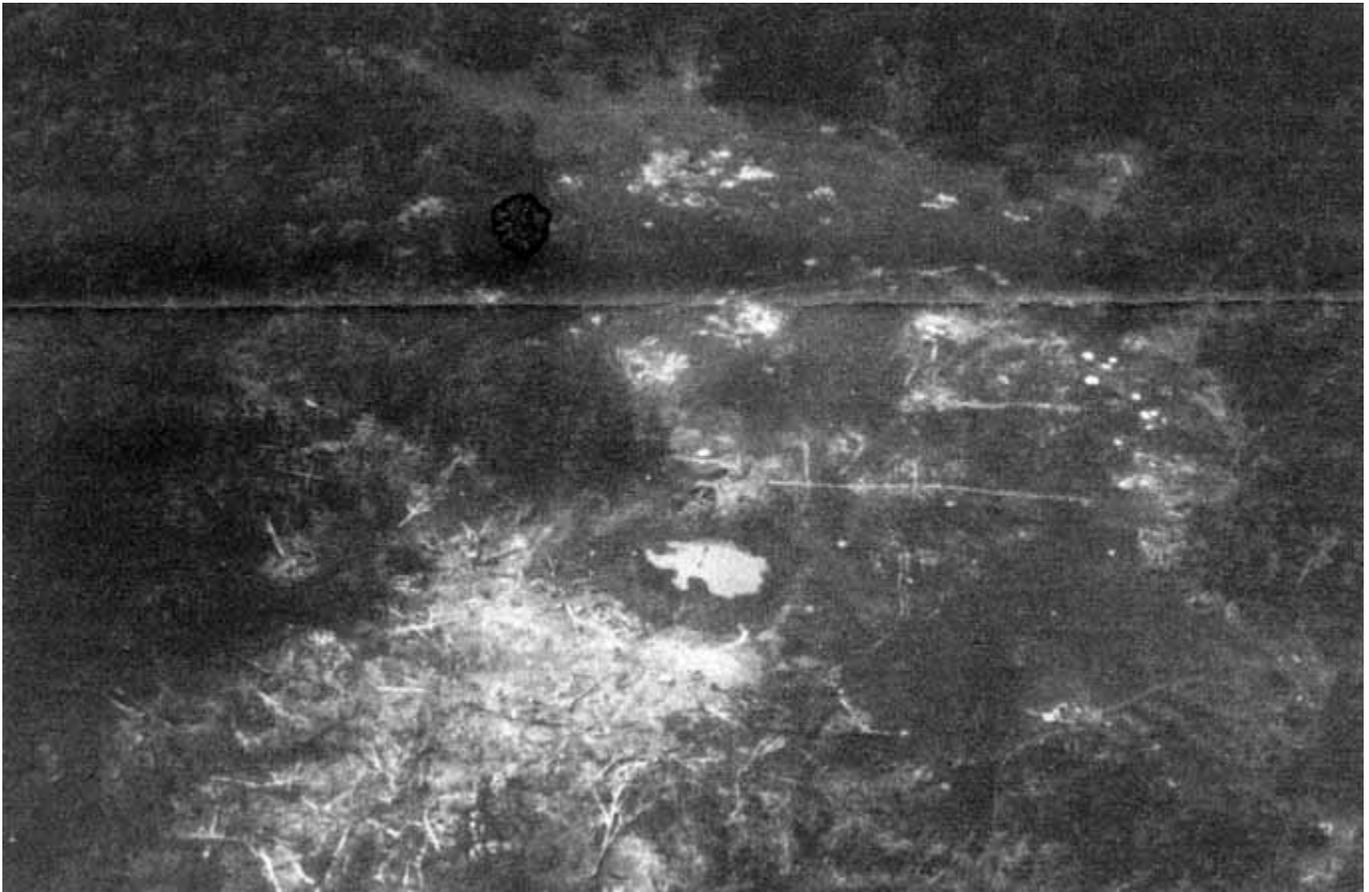
28 MAY 1966

\*Company B, commanded by Capt James R Maisano, conducted the heliborne assault into LZ 10A. Following the assault, the mission assigned was to conduct a search and destroy operation along an assigned axis to the east along the valley floor, establish a company ambush at night, and return to the battalion base (YA 873369) on 29 May 1966.\* (Annual Historical Supplement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1966)

28 MAY 1966: 1100 HOURS

Each heliborne assault was preceded by a preparatory barrage fired by the 105mm Arty Battery supporting the Bn. The thirty to fifty round artillery prep was positioned to destroy or disrupt any enemy around an LZ and to buy time for the first lift to get in and place its troops on the ground, secure the LZ and provide security and support for subsequent lifts. However, the prep for 10 ALFA was plotted in error using incorrect map coordinates and was fired on a clearing some 3000 meters to the south. Thus, the assault at 10 ALFA went in without artillery support. Although that in itself could have been critical, it actually served as an advantage for the troops from Bravo Company. When the helicopters carrying Lt Robert Ponder's 1<sup>st</sup> Plt landed in the three to five inches of water that covered much of the LZ, the element of total surprise worked in Bravo's favor, and the NVA soldiers who were supposed to be manning the

five 12.7mm anti-aircraft weapons that had been positioned around the clearing were not in the water filled pits, but were back from the guns on higher and drier ground. Men from the 1<sup>st</sup> Plt captured two of the guns before their crews could react to the assault landing. Fire fights erupted around the other three positions, and they were quickly overrun. The NVA took immediate action by committing men to reinforce their unit fighting to recapture their guns and regain control of the LZ. The second lift, carrying Capt Maisano and his Command Group, an 81mm mortar section, and part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt, Lt Michael Glynn, came in under fire and joined the action. With fire fights breaking out all along the unit's restricted perimeter, Bravo called for fire support from the artillery. In so doing, the support mission ringed the LZ and precluded the rest of his company from coming in. Trail elements were forced to return to 11 ALFA. Bravo (-) was on its own to deal with the situation on the ground for the better part of two hours.



Aerial photo of LZ 10 Alfa courtesy Stan Tyson

\*The first lift of nine HU-1D helicopters placed 63 men (1<sup>st</sup> Plt, company HQ, and part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt) into the LZ without incident. As the 1<sup>st</sup> Plt secured the NW portion of the LZ, suddenly they began to receive heavy enemy small arms fire from an estimated reinforced squad. After the initial contact, which resulted in four casualties, the LZ appeared secure; however, as DUSTOFF medevac aircraft attempted to land, extremely heavy ground fire was received from the NW. The DUSTOFF aircraft was driven off with several hits. The estimate of enemy strength was raised to a reinforced platoon. Following the DUSTOFF incident, the volume of fire declined, although occasional sniper fire and AW fire continued to be triggered by movement of friendly troops.

**\*Following the initial DUSTOFF attempt, 52<sup>nd</sup> Avn Bn gunships (Buccaneer 6) made repeated passes firing both machineguns and rockets into the wood lines running north and south. Particularly heavy fire was delivered against a machine gun which was firing across the flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Plt from the SW and could not be reached by friendly small arms fire. The gunships, however, did not suppress enemy fire to the degree required. Friendly positions were marked with smoke and two A1E aircraft strafed and dropped napalm on the machinegun position. Still, the machinegun continued in action. Another flight (F4 jet aircraft) appeared on the scene and shortly thereafter neutralized the enemy position with 500 pound bombs. The A1E's meanwhile were effectively suppressing enemy fire to the north.**

**\*Immediately following the air strike, the 1<sup>st</sup> Plt maneuvered a squad to the southwestern portion of the LZ and made contact with two NVA. Both fled into the woods to the west. A large number of packs and equipment plus, one 12.7mm anti-aircraft weapon were found. The latter was returned to the company CP. The squad continued a clockwise sweep of the entire LZ. A second anti-aircraft gun was found virtually destroyed by the airstrike. Discovery of guns #3, #4 and #5 followed in quick succession as the sweep was completed.\* (Annual Historical Supplement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1966)**

**\*I was a Squad Leader in 3<sup>rd</sup> Plt, B Co. Our platoon was landed after on the 2<sup>nd</sup> try because of the fire coming out of the LZ. We tried to land twice, the 1<sup>st</sup> Plt and Co CP were already in. The LZ was covered with water in some areas. The 50 cal's were in position inside the perimeter. When our troops initially landed they were not manned, the NVA was in the tree line (according to SLA Marshall, in "Battles in the Monsoon", to get out of the rain,) according to Bisantz, they had moved to defend from another direction because the prep fires hit another LZ a short distance from ALFA. Upon landing we secured our sector and began taking fire from inside the perimeter. It turned out the fire was coming from inside huge ant hills the NVA had hollowed out and using as bunkers. After trying grenades, M72 LAWS and failing to knock out the ant hills, SSG Carl Johnson organized a team of two rifles and a shotgun and went from anthill to anthill knocking them out. That resulted in a number POWs and NVA kills. Around 4-5 PM, I was looking around our sector with one of my soldiers, SP4 Otero, trying to find stuff to build our defenses when we came across an enemy AA machinegun on a tripod, we thought it would be a good idea to move it to our position. As we were trying to move it, we came under sniper fire, we got behind a log and began to return fire moving along the log. I got up to fire and got hit in the chest. SGT Larsen came to see what happened and got hit in the head later as they were trying to maneuver to get the sniper. LT Glynne was killed and SGT Stine wounded. I was medevaced about 1800 first day, may have been on the last bird able get in and out. Later it seems like we could have had Company formations at the 85<sup>th</sup> Evac hospital in Qui Nhon.\* (SGM (Ret) Charles Beauchamp, 3:B/2/35)**

**\*I think 10A was probably "the" fire fight for me. My memory of the beginning of this is being gathered on a loading air strip waiting for choppers and being briefed by LTC Feir. This was a first for me. Before this any action was incidental and not very organized. We flew into the LZ and the action started almost instantly. Contact was not non-stop but regular. I remember thinking what would happen if help could not get to us before dark. I can't remember when the choppers were shot down in the LZ, what day I mean.**

**\*Whenever there was a pause in the fight we were sent out on a sweep to check out what was out there, and almost each time someone was wounded or worse by snipers tied up in the top of trees.\* (Philippe Saunier, 4:B/2/35)**

**\*In Hawaii in December '65 I was reassigned from B 1/14<sup>th</sup> to B 2/35<sup>th</sup> (as best as I can remember) for deployment to the central highlands of Viet Nam. I was a Spec 4 in**

Headquarters Platoon and was a Forward Observer (FO) for the 81mm mortars assigned to 1<sup>st</sup> platoon (again, as best as I can remember ). During the first Paul Revere Operation we were on daily patrols setting up camp in a different location every night for what seemed like two weeks. On the morning of May 28 we were choppered into an open field with only half of the company. The Hueys were to return with the rest of the company. We started to receive ground fire before setting down. This was about 9:00 AM. We were under such intense fire that the rest of the company weren't able to get in until about 3 PM. I don't remember many names but some I do are Rosalie, a rifleman, Sgt. Rodear (?), and another Miller also FO's. At about 10:30 Rosalie was wounded after taking out a machine gun nest. Another man and myself took Rosalie to the area where the Capt. and a medic were for aid. The company was pretty spread out by this time. We were pinned down and continued receiving small arms fire. About that time I was shot in the arm and a minute or two later a grenade exploded and hit me in the leg. I started to scream "I'm hit, I'm hit." I believe I started to go into shock. The Capt, looking over at me, yelled, "Shut up Miller, you're not that bad." That shook me up and I was OK after that. For the next couple of hours or so the medic made the rounds from our position to other wounded in other areas. Around noon the Huey's returned and tried to bring in more of the company but were turned back by enemy fire. As I recall Dustoff also tried to land but couldn't. The Capt. ordered everyone to work their way back to our location to try to fortify our position. Around 3 PM the rest of the company arrived, and I was Medevaced out. I later heard that we took heavy casualties but turned back a regiment of NVA regulars. I spent the next 3 months in Japan and then returned to the states for assignment to the 5th Infantry. (Mech.) in Colorado Springs for the remainder of my enlistment.\* (Russell Miller, Hqs:B/2/35)

On the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>, as Executive Officer, 2/35<sup>th</sup>, I took a convoy of four vehicles from OASIS to the Bn Rear. The purpose was twofold - the first being to pick up several supply items needed at Bn Fwd, and second, to round up 2/35<sup>th</sup> soldiers, who, for whatever reason, had returned to the Bn Rear and had not found transportation back to their units in the field. Upon arrival in Pleiku, I was informed by a member of the staff that Jim Maisano had conducted a combat assault that morning, and his unit was in heavy contact at an LZ designated as 10 ALFA. With the supplies and about forty soldiers in hand, the convoy immediately returned to OASIS

28 MAY 1966: 1255 HOURS

\*The strip was under six inches of water. In the gun pits around the field the flood was more than a foot deep. And the guns were there, five of them, five 12.7's set to clean the skies of just such birds as these. Bravo had flown into the perfect deadfall - perfect, except for the absence of people. The crews had quit their guns to get out of the wet, Bravo's people hopped to the guns and went into the perimeter around the air strip. That night the company was hit hard by a battalion of North Vietnamese, the same battalion that had been caught flat-footed by the arrival of Bravo in impossible weather and was now making a desperate bid to recover its guns. The fight raged through the night of 29 May and with the aid of the other battalion of the 35<sup>th</sup> flown from Oasis ended as a smash victory for TF Walker. It was not easy; the influx of 35<sup>th</sup> casualties taxed the capacity of the base hospital at Qui Nhon.\* (S.L.A. Marshall, Battles in the Monsoon, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1967)

The force applying pressure against the LZ broke contact and withdrew into the heavy forest to the north. Artillery and tactical air support were placed on hold, and Capt Maisano called for the remaining lifts of his unit to join him. Within an hour, Bravo Co had completed its insertion, and the perimeter was secured and expanded. Bravo reported to Bn Fwd that the area was relatively quiet, that two NVA prisoners had been taken, and that five 12.7mm anti-aircraft machineguns had been captured. One POW could speak a little English, but he would

say nothing as to the size or designation of the NVA force that Bravo had stirred up. The prisoner acknowledged he was a member of the company assigned to defend the LZ and that his Company Commander had killed himself when he failed to recapture his guns. Unit casualties up to that point were light and none of the wounded required immediate evacuation. After an unsuccessful attempt to determine just what size unit his 1<sup>st</sup> Plt had dropped in on, Capt Maisano notified LTC Feir that following a resupply for his 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Plts, he would be ready to move as directed.

Bravo Co started the day with each man carrying a full basic load of ammunition and enough food and water to last for three days. Ten Claymore anti-personnel mines were distributed throughout each squad. By the time the remainder of the company reached the LZ, the two Platoons in contact were running short of ammunition and had to be resupplied before any further offensive action could be mounted. Bravo was instructed to wait for supply ships and to send out casualties, POW's and the 12.7mm's. The unit was then to continue on its original mission: search the immediate area for continued presence of the enemy, and if there were indications the NVA had headed back for the Cambodian border, determine if there had been any activity along the trail that led back to the east toward the Bn base at 11 ALFA. Enemy activity at the moment was confined to sporadic fire from the north and northwest, apparently from individuals who remained in concealed positions following the earlier fire fights, but this was not sufficient enough to be considered an immediate threat to the consolidation of the unit.

**28 MAY 1966: 1430 HOURS**

\*The remainder of Company B was lifted into the LZ. With the exception of some automatic weapons fire at the aircraft, this lift was carried out without major incident. On the ground, the 1<sup>st</sup> Plt put down a base of fire to the north. Enemy fire ceased as the aircraft departed. The perimeter was then reorganized and captured enemy equipment and gear were consolidated at the company CP.

\*Company B then began a sweep to the north to clear the area and obtain a body count. The initial count totaled ten. Sweep elements then moved out some 150 meters and returned; however, upon return, sniper fire again came from a bunker position at the north end of the LZ. Because the sweep elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Plts were mixed, a consolidated squad attacked the bunker with grenades. Two NVA were KIA and two were captured. Both POW's were returned to the Brigade CP. Because of this action, another sweep was generated. This sweep likewise generated sniper fire from the NW. Snipers accounted for two friendly WIA. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Plt maneuvered against the snipers, later determined to number two, and suffered one KIA and seven WIA, including the Plt Leader who later in the day died of wounds. The snipers, both of whom were excellent marksmen, were firing one semi-automatic and one automatic weapon from positions concealed behind trees. Both were killed by M-79 and M-60 MG fire.\* (Annual Historical Supplement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1966)

\*The mortars came in about noon of the first day, after B company came to the LZ. Lt Mike Glynne was already being medevaced with a fatal chest wound when we came in. We set up in a "relatively" dry rise in the LZ with essentially no cover.\* (Ray Pollard, Wpns Plt Ldr: B/2/35)

Shortly after arriving in-country, 2nd Lt Michael Glynne, West Point Class of 1965, wrote a letter to President Lyndon Johnson expressing his support for the presence of American forces in Southeast Asia and explaining how, after being in country and seeing the people and their need, he felt that efforts to bolster the South Vietnamese Government were justified and that our nation was on the right path in its endeavors. In early May, Lt Glynne received a letter

from the President thanking him and saying that his support was greatly appreciated and that several of his comments had been related at one of the White House press conferences. Lieutenant Glynn was mortally wounded by a sniper that afternoon during the fire fight.

**28 May 1966: 1400 HOURS**

Following completion of the resupply and evacuation of casualties, weapons and prisoners, the Platoons were sent out in a "cloverleaf" to sweep the area to the north, south and west. As the Platoon moving to the north advanced into the heavy ground cover out from the LZ, enemy activity began again with sporadic firing from single individuals and small groups disposed along a small east to west stream, some 150 meters from the Bravo base. The volume of fire continued to build, and the flanks extended as more enemy joined the fire fight. The Platoons were recalled, and pressure built against the northern sector of the perimeter. The attacks gained momentum, and Bravo Co was subsequently pinned to the LZ. All motion either out from the LZ or back toward the east was stopped. For the next hour or so, the pressure ebbed and flowed around the perimeter, slowing to almost nil in one sector, only to suddenly break out with renewed strength against another.

\*On 28 May, B Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry under Capt James R. Maisano was directed to make an airmobile assault into LZ 10A and patrol back eastward toward the battalion's base in AO I1. Because of the heavy morning ground fog which is common to the Central Highlands at that time of year, the landing did not take place until nearly 1100hrs. Through error, the artillery preparation planned in support of the landing was fired on the wrong landing zone. This may have been the most fortunate mistake of the war as far as Bravo Company was concerned. It is believed that the majority of NVA forces around LZ 10A, immediately upon the start of the artillery preparation at the wrong LZ, deployed in that direction to engage the American forces who would land there following the artillery. At any rate, the NVA defending 10 ALFA were not prepared to receive B Company and, with the aid of tactical air strikes, were quickly routed, although at the cost of one platoon leader killed and about ten men wounded. General Walker, immediately realizing the significance of the captured anti-aircraft weapons, ordered the shift of 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry into AO 10.\* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)

**28 MAY 1966: 1600 HOURS**

The action at 10 ALFA was being monitored at both Bn and Bde Fwd's. From the casualty reports that had come in, the capture of the 12.5mm's and the obvious conclusion that they belonged to a unit much larger than an isolated company of NVA and presaged the presence of a sizable force, it was readily apparent that Bravo was into a situation that could not be resolved unless additional help was sent in. Even if the relief force closed on the LZ before dark, if the NVA felt their losses were worth the effort, the troops defending 10 ALFA could be in for a long and difficult night. An extraction under fire was not an option. The decision was made at that Company B would hold in place and that reinforcements and resupply would be airlifted to the LZ. In that other 2/35<sup>th</sup> units were not immediately available for the relief mission, Gen Walker tagged the 1/35<sup>th</sup> for a rifle company, and Alfa Co, Capt Tony Bisantz Commanding, was ordered to move immediately to a pickup point and to await their transportation.

## TASK FORCE TYSON

28 MAY 1966: 1615 HOURS

Immediately upon returning to Oasis, I was told to report to Gen Walker in the Operations Center at Bde Hqs. I was briefed on the situation at 10 ALFA and was told that LTC Feir had requested that I command the relief force. Once on the ground at the LZ, I was to take command of both units and their attachments and serve as the TASK FORCE (TF) Commander. My mission was to conduct the defense of the LZ, and as soon as the situation allowed, to resume offensive operations. The elements of the TF were Companies B, 2/35<sup>th</sup>, and A, 1/35<sup>th</sup>, two 107mm (4.2) mortar squads and in total, numbered eleven officers and 258 men. All infantrymen of Alfa Co were issued double basic loads of ammunition, and additional ammunition was loaded on to be distributed to Bravo. The flights to pick up Capt Bisantz's troops were inbound, and just enough time was available to pick up a PRC-25 radio, borrow an M-16 and an extra magazine from SFC Clarence Crawford, Admin Sgt, 2/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, fill my canteen, and get to the helicopter pad.

\*Major Stanley Tyson took command the first afternoon and really held the units together. Also you might want to note that the rest of the 2/35<sup>th</sup> that was at LZ 11A and providing artillery fire for 10A came under attack two nights in a row but to a much lesser extent than at 10A. I was the BN S-2 during the fight and then took over B Co in June so any knowledge was second hand. I do know that there were a great number of individual heroes. In particular I remember stories about two of the platoon sergeants, SFC Johnson and MSGT Crookham, who eliminated the machine gun positions mentioned in the account. There was an SP4 from Detroit whose name I can not remember who spent the entire night by himself in a foxhole and in the morning he was alive with more than 10 dead NVA around his position. I will also never forget listening to Stan Tyson on the radio calling the forward air controller in a cool, calm voice after an AIE had just napalmed his position with, I quote, "Hoss, we don't need any more of that here". The sad part of the story is that we lost some good people.\* (Capt Jim McQuillen, HHC2/35)

1700 HOURS: 28 MAY 1966

\*The seriously wounded were lifted out of the LZ by the Brigade CO's helicopter. Prior to this, two DUSTOFF ships had been driven off by enemy fire. One of these had received several hits. Additional wounded subsequently were lifted out without incident by two 52<sup>nd</sup> Avn Bn gunships. The enemy was believed to have withdrawn. Resupply was requested. Information was then received that Company A, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry would be lifted into the LZ as a reinforcing element and would be placed under OPCON of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry. The 2/35<sup>th</sup> Executive Officer (Major Wallace S. Tyson) was lifted into the LZ to command the two company task force and to accomplish the mission of holding the LZ the night of 28 May 1966. Company A, 1/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, commanded by Capt Anthony Bisantz, was lifted in at 1700 hours.\* (Annual Historical Supplement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1966)

Flying as a hitchhiker in one of the supporting gun ships, I arrived at the LZ with the first lift of Alfa Co, 1/35<sup>th</sup>. Fortunately, the landing coincided with a break in the action, and the entire unit got in without incident. The pilot told me he didn't plan on staying long enough to land, and the Huey made a quick pass following the last troop carrier. The ship flared, I jumped from the skids, and I saw Capt Maisano motioning from his CP at the edge of the trees on the south side of the LZ. As the gunship climbed out, the downwash of its rotors blew the poncho from the body of one of Bravo's soldiers lying among the dead and wounded at the unit collection point. At that time, Capt Maisano's casualties totaled three killed and twenty-two wounded. As

the remaining flights came in to complete the insertion, casualties were evacuated on the departing ships, including the two POWs and the five 12.7mm's.

10 ALFA was situated in a low marsh-like clearing, completely devoid of any growth aside from the low grasses particular to the swamps of Southeast Asia. The LZ measured not more than 170 meters long by 100 meters wide, with the long axis of its slightly oval shape running from northwest to southeast. Most of the area was covered with standing water from one to five inches deep, with the only dry surface being a slight rise at the southern end of the clearing. The floor of the swamp was thick heavy clay that quickly gave way to rocky ground at the tree line where the elevation rose barely above the water line. The surrounding forest growth was of tall trees with little undergrowth close in to the clearing, but that thickened as the elevation rose and the soil became more supportive. The entry onto the trail that Bravo had been tasked to sweep was clearly visible as it left the clearing and disappeared quickly into the green.

\*Alfa Co, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry was the battalion reserve/reaction force at the time and was made immediately available for movement into LZ 10A, arriving about 1600hrs. By this time most of the action in the vicinity had ended, although about one kilometer to the east an armed helicopter was downed by ground fire. The crew was extracted by a sister ship and the aircraft burnt on impact, so the hastily planned rescue mission of A Co was called off. \* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)

As Alfa Co, 1/35<sup>th</sup> arrived, they were directed into their portion of the perimeter, and as they took up positions just inside the tree line, Bravo Co compressed. Each of the rifle companies occupied about half of the perimeter, with Alfa on northwestern end of the oval and Bravo on the southeast. The heavy mortars were mounted on the rising ground in the southern portion of the open area. After making contact with Bn Fwd and giving a quick update on the situation, and knowing that darkness would come early in the jungle, my first priority was to walk the perimeter to ensure that the troops were in the best defensive positions available and that they were taking full advantage of any material at hand to strengthen their line. I talked with individual soldiers and saw that the composition of the ground did not lend itself to digging in. Much would depend on using fallen logs and piles of loose stone as fortifications. The standing trees gave an added measure of protection in that they precluded the NVA from placing machineguns well back from the perimeter and bringing it under fire. Instead, the only effective fire could be brought to bare by individuals who had worked their way close enough to the defense to fire as soldier against soldier. Capt's Maisano and Bisantz had tied their flanks together, and Bravo's Claymore mines and trip flares were shared with Alpha and placed into position. Both units had moved their 81mm mortars out to join with the 107's in the only area that would allow the overhead clearance necessary for the mortars. Each mortar had fifty rounds of high explosive (HE) and a combined total of twenty-five flares. Empty ammunition boxes filled with rock and mud served as a makeshift parapet around the tubes. Because of their exposure, casualties within the mortar sections were considerably higher than with their counterparts along the perimeter.



Under better conditions, the TF could have covered a much larger area; however, considering the heavy forest and dense undergrowth, it was necessary to compress the perimeter to ensure that a cohesive all-round defense could be established. With the exception of one platoon, all positions were just inside the treeline and above the water level of the LZ. Even so, even the shallowest prone shelter quickly filled with water. Bravo's 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt had to bend back across an open portion of the southeast end of the position, and though partially exposed, their line was able to make use of a small ridge of ground that was mostly above water. Since only a few of the men had anything to dig with, positions were constructed with logs, stones and anything else that was available.

The TF Command Post was set up jointly with that of Bravo Company. Communication with either of the line companies was no problem. However, in order to talk to Bn Fwd the radio had to be moved out from under the trees and out into the open area. Several calls were made without incidence, especially during the hours of darkness, but on one attempt to transmit the following day, a sniper, who had obviously noticed the procedure, fired, missed, and cut off the antenna where its base joined the radio. Daylight communications with Bn Fwd dropped off sharply after that.

\*The few remaining hours of daylight were spent in organizing the defense of the LZ. A Company was placed under operational control of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Major Wallace Tyson, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>'s Executive Officer came into the LZ to assume command of the two companies and with him brought a heavy mortar section from each battalion and the remainder of Bravo Co, 2/35<sup>th</sup>. Captain Maisano had left his Weapons Platoon behind because of his original mission. As dusk fell the 28<sup>th</sup>, TF TYSON was organized as follows:

\*TF TYSON was commanded by Major Wallace S. Tyson. He had one Radio Telephone Operator and an Artillery Forward Observer (FO) working directly for him. Both were taken from Bravo Co, 2/35<sup>th</sup>. The FO also coordinated fires of the Composite Heavy Mortar Platoon, commanded by 1LT Clovis O. LaFond, Heavy Mortar Platoon Leader, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry. The Platoon was comprised of two 4.2 mortars, one from each battalion.

\*Company A, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Captain Bisantz, with three rifle platoons and one weapons platoon with two 81mm. mortars. "Foxhole" strength was about 150 men.

\*Company B, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Captain Maisano, with three rifle platoons and one weapons platoon with two 81mm. Mortars. The company's foxhole strength was down from 135 to about 110 men after the day's dead and wounded had been evacuated.

\*The position was organized with Bravo Co defending the southern half of the LZ, Alfa Co – the northern half, and all of the mortars were located on the only piece of dry, reasonably firm ground in the LZ - a small circular area in the middle of Bravo's sector. Each company retained control of its own organic mortars, and Major Tyson controlled the 4.2 inch mortars.

\*Due to the high water table throughout the area and the knee deep water in and around most of the LZ, it was virtually impossible for the troops to dig in. Any hole immediately filled with water. Instead they used the available daylight to construct crude breastworks of fallen logs, rocks, ammunition boxes filled with earth, and whatever else they could find. They also spent the time emplacing M18A1 (Claymore) anti-personnel mines, trip flares, and clearing fields of fire for their weapons. The defensive line followed generally along the edge of the LZ and was located 15 to 20 feet into the surrounding forest.

**\*Just prior to dusk, artillery and mortar defensive concentrations were adjusted around the perimeter. The concentrations on the east side of the perimeter were fired by A Battery, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 9<sup>th</sup> Artillery (105mm Howitzer) which was located at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry base in AO 11. As they were firing at almost maximum range (about 12000 meters) to reach our perimeter, the concentrations on the western side were fired by 175mm guns located at DUC CO (about 18000 meters to the south). Due to the thick vegetation and range dispersion factors, all the artillery had to be adjusted by sound rather than burst observation, and as a result, the concentrations were probably no closer than 250 meters to the perimeter.**

**\*Major Tyson completed checking the perimeter at dark, giving each company commander orders to maintain a 50% alert status until 0150hrs and a 100% alert status from 0150hrs until dawn. The moon rose early the 28<sup>th</sup> and stayed bright until about 2300hrs, when the clouds obscured it.\* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)**

**\*I arrived in-country on 3 May 1966 and took over command of the 3rd Platoon from 1LT Pat Lenz. Pat had been wounded and was now Company A's XO. The "Third Herd" was an incredible group of men. The NCOs were seasoned and solid, and the men all experienced. Great squad leaders who led great soldiers. God, they were good!**

**\*So, on the 26th day of my life as a platoon leader, Company A got a call to make a late afternoon reinforcement of Company B 2/35 they said had dropped into an unsuspecting NVA regimental headquarters around LZ 10-ALFA.**

**\*As our slicks came into the LZ late on the afternoon of 28 May 1966, we could see several abandoned 12.7 mm AA guns around the LZ. Our platoon was assigned to the NE third of the LZ and dark came. There was lots of commo wire around - a sure sign to us that we were in the middle of a large enemy force. We put out an LP roughly 50-75 meters to our center front, manned by SGT Noble Hyde and a couple of guys. I think all of us expected to be hit that night, and everyone got as prepared as they could.\* (Larry Conner, Plt Ldr, 3:A/1/35)**

**\*We came into 10 ALFA on Huey's in the late afternoon. Probably around 4:00 p.m. on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1966. We came in low and fast. I could see the soldiers from the B, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup> standing alone in their positions. I've never forgotten the look on a particular soldier's face when my chopper flew over him. I could tell he was scared . . . really scared. He was alone, facing out towards the woods. At the time I didn't think too much about why these guys were in one-man positions. We didn't know they had been hit pretty hard.**

**\*We had heard it was hot, but we didn't know the situation yet. Our chopper landed and we deployed to the far side of the LZ . . . away from the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>. My platoon, 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon, was setting up positions when Major Tyson, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup> XO came by to inspect the positions. It was getting dark and it was overcast. Major Tyson came from my left and disappeared into the forest and the darkness. He was moving down the line to our right. It turned into the darkest night I ever experienced in Viet Nam. That old saying about not being able to see your hand in front of your face . . . well, at 10 ALFA it was true.\* (Richard Hunter, 3:A/1/35)**

**28 MAY 1966: 1100 - 1900 HOURS**

### **ENEMY SITUATION**

**When the artillery preparation started to fall around the clearing 3000 meters from the site selected for the Headquarters element of the 66<sup>th</sup> NVA, Lt Col Chau assumed an assault was in progress and that American troops would soon be landing at that location. Because most of**

his strength was moving along the trail to the east, he started to deploy other troops available to block American movement northward from that LZ. When the actual landing occurred only 1000 meters from his Headquarters, he was caught off balance, and found it next to impossible to recall and redirect his troops back through the forest once they had been committed to the farther location. As such, the force available to reduce the American presence was not sufficient to do the job, and the necessary strength was not able to reassemble until after the remainder of Bravo was safely on the ground. The 66th NVA was caught on the "horns of a dilemma". As long as the American unit sat astride its route back into Cambodia, it no longer had the freedom to continue movement to the east and possibly be boxed in by more such units being inserted on its flanks and across its route of march. Further, it could not withdraw its forces back across the border without anticipating considerable difficulty as long as the Americans were in a blocking position. A new opportunity for success was in the offering in that the Americans had presented the 66<sup>th</sup> with a more lucrative target than the Special Forces camp - that being Bravo Co and any reinforcements that were sure to be sent in to assist the surrounded unit. With that in mind, the majority of the NVA units that were moving against Plei Djereng were recalled. One company sized element was left behind and was sent to exert pressure against the 2/35<sup>th</sup> Fwd base at 11 ALFA. Long before the first units returned and were able to mount any sort of sustained effort against the defense at 10 ALFA, the remainder of the TF was in position, and the early advantage enjoyed by the 66<sup>th</sup> NVA had been lost.

#### **28 MAY 1966: 1900 - 2400 HOURS**

The weather cooperated, and the TF enjoyed one of the rare twenty-four to thirty-six breaks in the monsoon season. As darkness fell, Companies sent out four-man Listening Posts (LP's) some 75 to 100 meters to their front for early warning against expected enemy probes that were sure to come. By 1930, the mortars and artillery were adjusted with concentrations registered just outside bursting radius of the infantry line. With the exception of sporadic sniper fire and an occasional isolated burst of activity as the NVA probed around the perimeter, the early portion of the night passed without significant problems. Artillery support was called for on a regular basis just to discourage any close-in buildup of NVA. During the first half of the night, the defenders, other than the mortarmen, were fortunate enough to have a full moon that filtered down through the double canopy and gave broken visibility out to thirty to forty meters. For the next several hours, the men in the circle tightened their grip on the LZ, and waited for the enemy to make his next move. The long silence was broken by an occasional shot by one of the infantrymen reacting to a sound coming from out in the jungle. Situation reports were negative, and the troops went on a "one in four" alert.

#### **29 MAY 1966: 0001 - 0132 HOURS**

Shortly after midnight, several of the LP's in positions forward of the northern portion of the perimeter reported hearing movement to their front. The majority of the activity was forward of sectors manned by Alfa's and Bravo's 3<sup>rd</sup> Plts. The alert status was increased to fifty percent; however, it was doubtful that any of the US troops were taking advantage of an opportunity to get any sleep at that time. As LP reports of the activity picked up, the TF went on 100%. The units were instructed to be prepared for a renewed attack that would probably come shortly after the moon passed below a ridge of high hills southeast of our position. At 0115, a trip flare was ignited forward of Alfa's 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt, followed almost immediately by another trip going off to Bravo's front. As sounds of movement parallel to the LZ continued, the men in the LP's along the northern sector were instructed to return to the perimeter. The sounds of men moving through the heavy undergrowth could be clearly heard by the men along the foxhole line. Bn Fwd had been kept aware of the status of the TF through hourly Sit Rep's, and when

Lt Brothers called for artillery flares, the Battery responded with an immediate fire mission. It was quickly discovered that the flares served to the NVA's advantage because our backs were to the open area and were silhouetted against the light. The flares were shut down, and a flare ship that was offered for assistance was refused. The fire mission was changed to HE, and for a brief period, the movement ceased. The most prominent peak to our southeast was designated as "Chu Ba" on the map, and at one point, the full moon looked to be balanced upon its tip like a ball on a seal's nose. At 0132, just as the moon started to slide from sight, a voice called out from the darkness and demanded: "Americans, you have two hours to surrender or die." Almost at once, a second voice responded from along the Alfa line with, "Charlie, you have two hours to kiss my ass!" Any growing apprehension along the line was quickly relieved by the laughter that broke out across the perimeter. For obvious reasons, the 66<sup>th</sup> NVA concluded that the TF had refused the two hours they had offered.

**29 MAY 1966: 0110 HOURS**

\*The Task Force was attacked along a 400 meter front confined to the north side of the LZ. The main attack appeared to be in a NW to S direction with a secondary attack driving NE to SW. The attack, which appeared to come in waves, lasted until 0300 hours and was followed thereafter by sporadic fire until 0430 hours. Organic 81mm mortars fired almost all of their ammunition (200 rounds), some as close as twenty-five meters to friendly positions. This mortar fire was extremely effective and is thought to have prevented a probable breakthrough. Friendly Task Force casualties were one KIA and nine WIA.\* (Annual Historical Supplement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1966)

\*The LP located about 50 meters in front of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon of Alfa Co reported hearing noises of movement to their front. Everyone in the TF was alerted and mortars were fired into the area. A few minutes later they reported seeing movement to their right front, estimating it to be a company sized unit. Following instructions, each of the four men on the LP opened full automatic fire with their M-16 rifles and dropped back to the perimeter. Almost immediately the NVA initiated assault fire on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon's position.

\*The 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon's listening post had caused the NVA to prematurely trigger their attack while they were still 70 to 80 meters from the perimeter. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon's listening post was directly in the path of the enemy and was immediately pinned down. The Fire Team leader on the LP gave orders to withdraw to the perimeter. Meanwhile, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon had demonstrated excellent fire discipline, holding their fire as the ineffective NVA fire swept over their heads. A characteristic of the fight that night and all the next day was that the NVA heavy machine guns, which they normally use with devastating effectiveness, often fired high – sometimes seven or eight feet above the ground. The American forces capitalized on this the next day, moving frequently under the enemy's "grazing" fire at a low crouch.

\*Three of the four men on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon's LP returned safely to the perimeter, followed closely by the enemy assault formation which continued forward and came into view of the men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon. On order they opened fire and quickly broke up the enemy assault. After the initial firing slacked off, Lt. Conner, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon leader who was getting his baptism of fire, accompanied by the Fire Team leader from the LP, crawled forward of the perimeter in an attempt to find the missing man. They found him, seriously wounded, and dragged him back inside the perimeter. Their safe return seemed to signal another enemy assault, this one better organized than the last. The enemy leaders could be heard, haranguing their soldiers, forcing them to attack. This assault was preceded by about a 20 round mortar barrage which impacted behind the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, at the edge of the LZ, causing no casualties. This time the enemy advanced to within hand grenade range, and after several

minutes of intense small arms firing and exchanging of hand grenades, the NVA were again forced to withdraw.\* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)

\*Around 0100, SGT Hyde called me from the LP and whispered that they could hear lots of movement to their immediate front. I told him to make his way back to our line quietly, then the NVA opened up. All but one of my men made it back to our perimeter. I remember running out with someone (SGT Hyde?), we found our wounded, missing guy and helped him back to our platoon. Somehow, we all made it. Right then, at least a company-sized force attacked our platoon front. We had decent cover, kept low, and fired non-stop artillery and mortars up and down our front.\* (Larry Conner, Plt Ldr, 3:A/1/35)

\*During all this, Alfa Co's mortars had been delivering steady fire into the area in front of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon. The Heavy Mortar Platoon had been firing at a greater range, attempting to knock out the NVA mortars. Battery A, 2-9 Arty had started firing battery volley fire as soon as the attack started, adjusting back and forth in the area in front of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon. They were to fire over 650 rounds in support of TF TYSON that night – an awful lot of work for five artillery pieces. The artillery support is even more impressive when one considers that the battery position came under small arms and mortar attack at the same time the attack was launched on 10 ALFA. Several of the cannoneers were wounded manning their guns in defense of a unit 12 kilometers away.\* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)



Guns of the 2/9th Arty provide support fire for the men at LZ 10 Alfa. Photo courtesy Stan Tyson. Note the elevation of the 105s - Reaching out to 10 Alfa

\*I was in a position with "Kit" Frazier and "Junior" Bonner. That night, at 1:00 p.m. we changed guard. It was my turn. I sat down and leaned against a tree figuring the tree would break my silhouette. A few minutes into my guard shift I heard some rustling in weeds. I turned my head and I heard the steps move out fast. I informed Sgt Frazier and he said to keep a sharp eye out. A few minutes passed, then it seemed like Hell broke loose and came running towards 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon.

\*We had sent an LP out a few yards into the woods. I believe the LP consisted of Sgt Noble Hyde, Richard R. Roundtree and I think a soldier named McCauley. It was dark so I was never really sure where they were. Somewhere to the front and off to my right. We were under heavy

attack, and the LP was breaking brush trying to get back to the perimeter. They kept yelling, "3<sup>rd</sup> Herd! 3<sup>rd</sup> Herd!" so we would know it was them coming in. The NVA were right behind them shooting at them, and us. They were caught between the NVA and our perimeter. Some of us were holding fire until they got inside the perimeter. Some were not. They all made it back . . . sort of. Richard R. Roundtree was Company A's first KIA at 10-ALFA. He was wounded and lived until about 6:00 am. Our medic, "Doc" Ehrenzweig, was giving him mouth to mouth and trying to stop the bleeding.\* (Richard Hunter, 3:A/1/35)

29 MAY 1966: 0135 - 0330 HOURS

Heavy enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire broke out directed primarily against the positions of the two 3<sup>rd</sup> Plts. At that moment, little activity was noted forward of any of the other positions. As the incoming small arms fire reached its peak, a group of forty or so NVA came yelling and charging out of the darkness toward our line. Lt Brothers had alerted the artillery, and when the attack started, so did our supporting fires. The first of 1500 artillery rounds that would be fired in support throughout the fight straddled the charging enemy force and destroyed any advantage their numbers might have achieved had they reached the perimeter. The initial attack broke out directly across the perimeter from the TF CP, and as we waited for the events to sort themselves out, the CP was alerted by a heavy crashing coming through the undergrowth heading directly for us. The tension was broken by a voice loudly announcing that he was an, "LP, comin' in! LP, comin' in!". He not only "came in", he passed through the line, and his momentum carried him well into the open center of the perimeter before he slowed down. The TF mortars added their weight to the defense as fire teams responded with equal measure, and after about thirty minutes, the NVA broke off the action and withdrew back into the darkness and the security of the forest.

The respite was short lived, and within a few minutes, the attack was renewed. The attacking force followed a similar pattern throughout the rest of the night. As each attack was beaten back, the NVA would break contact, and the firing would die down. Several times during the breaks in the action, the sounds of men cheering in the distance could be heard, and their cheers would be answered by those of the enemy who were regrouping closer to the perimeter. As the farther groups closed, their cheers would merge with those to our front, a single voice would order them forward, and another assault would be launched against the line.

\*This went on for a while, then they withdrew for a while, then you could hear whistles blowing and them shouting, and they'd rush us again. Several times they got as close as 10-15 meters from us, but we drove them back every time. We fired hundreds of artillery rounds right in front of us, and thousands of M-16 rounds. They got close enough to throw grenades in on us, but we did the same and ours worked better.

\*I remember crawling up and down our line with Russ Crawford (the absolute, hands-down, best damn RTO in the Central Highlands), and we came across a rifleman who had lost his helmet in the dark. I gave him mine to wear without thinking a whit about it. Sometime that night, I recall sitting (surely not?) next to one of our M-60s, watching the NVA come up the slope toward us through a clunky Starlight scope. I put that heavy glove on that came with the 60's spare barrel and walked the muzzle back and forth into the green shapes coming up the slope toward us.

\*After a couple of hours of this, maybe 0400 or so, they stopped attacking and it became quiet until dawn. I think one of our guys got hit in the elbow and died from shock later before dawn.\* (Larry Conner, Plt Ldr, 3:A/1/35)

As the night progressed, the scope of the attack broadened to include the defensive sectors of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon, Alfa, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon, Bravo. By this time, constant artillery support was being requested, and both the 107mm and 81mm mortars reported they were starting to run low on HE rounds. Several times units were reminded that as an NVA effort broke and ceased firing, the TF had to do the same in order to insure that the ammunition that was left would carry until daylight and last until the possibility of resupply.

29 MAY 1966: 0330 HOURS

Alfa reported one of the squads on its 3<sup>rd</sup> Plt line had run out of ammunition, and without coordinating with anyone, had withdrawn into the perimeter. Capt Bisantz indicated it was possible that several NVA had passed through the gap and were inside the defensive circle. The word was passed that everyone was immediately to get into a prone position, and the 81's were told to hang a flare directly overhead. Instructions were given to shoot anyone on his feet when the "lights" came on. The parachute flare popped, and by the blue-white light that exposed the scene below, it was determined that the position had not been penetrated. However, several NVA had succeeded in reaching the positions where the squad had been and were eliminated by fire teams closing from opposite sides of the breach. The errant squad was rounded up and resupplied, was returned to its position, and the continuity of the perimeter was restored.

\*About 0330 hrs the enemy attacked again, and was again driven off. By this time mortar ammunition was running low and the mortars had to slow down their rate of fire. Friendly casualties were miraculously low. Only about four had been wounded, and one of these was the man from the LP. The enemy again reorganized, and about 0400 hrs launched his final and almost successful attack of the night. After the firefight had raged for several minutes, again at a hand grenade throwing range, Lt. Conner informed the company that he had received word from his right flank that the NVA had penetrated the perimeter at the company's coordinating point with Bravo Co. Leading a Fire Team, he moved along the perimeter to that point and linked up with a patrol coming the other way from Bravo Co. The mortars fired two illuminating rounds to light up the perimeter and make sure no enemy troops had infiltrated the perimeter. Lt. Conner's group killed several NVA right at the gap in the lines. The NVA evidently hadn't known where they were; at any rate they had failed to exploit their advantage. The gap had been created by squad leaders in both companies repositioning their men without coordinating.\* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)

\*After the LP had returned to our perimeter the platoon returned fire as intensely as we were receiving it. Each squad had to send someone back to the CP to get more ammo. The attack continued in waves for a few hours. Mortars were breaking in the trees overhead and all around us. Our mortars were giving it back to them. At one point the NVA broke through the line and were between our positions. Muzzle flashes were coming from all over the place. One of our machinegun positions had to withdraw to a new positions. The attack intensified. Lt. Larry Connor, Platoon Leader for 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, called in the mortars, or artillery . . . I was never sure which . . . right down on us. People were yelling to get down because the H.E. was going to come down on top of us. It pretty much did. I could feel myself being lifted off the ground . . . being bounced every time a shell hit close to us. The threat was as great from the shells that were hitting the trees above us as it was from hitting the ground around us. Eventually, the shelling stopped and the NVA withdrew. All turned quite around 4 or 5 am. We were all wide-awake now. (Richard Hunter, 3:A/1/35)

29 MAY 1966: 0415 HOURS

The NVA broke contact and withdrew to the north of the LZ. At this time, it was estimated the TF had been in contact with an element of about battalion strength. The artillery continued to work along the threatened portion of the line, and as the action fell away, was shifted to harassing fires to the north and northwest. The 105's had been served without interruption despite an abortive ground attack that was launched out of the darkness against Bn Fwd at 11 ALFA. The infantrymen of Capt Michael Tryon's Charlie Company defending the base had little difficulty dealing with the attacking force.

The problem of ammunition resupply along the line became more acute as the night progressed. The M-79mm Grenade Launcher seemed to be the weapon of choice because of its area effect. The units were cautioned to stretch out their supply of M-79 rounds, because once those on hand were gone, there were no more. Ammunition was redistributed from casualties who had been removed to unit collection points and from the uncommitted portion of the line to those who needed it most. Bn Fwd was notified that if the attacks were renewed and continued to carry the weight of those experienced thus far, by daylight the ammunition situation would be serious and that an early resupply was critical. Surprisingly enough, TF casualties remained light throughout the night, two KIA and nine WIA, probably because most of the troops were prone and the NVA were forced to fire at muzzle flashes rather than at individual soldiers. However, for that same reason, most of the wounds received during the darkness were head and shoulder hits. When it became apparent the NVA were probably going to either withdraw completely or at least wait until daylight to resume their action, the TF was returned to a fifty percent alert, and LPs were reestablished forward of the perimeter.

\*By 0430hrs, all firing except for the artillery had dwindled to sporadic exchanges of a few rounds. 81mm mortar high explosive ammunition was dangerously low, Alfa Co. having only 24 rounds left, and Bravo Co. - 12 rounds. This was carefully hoarded in preparation for the enemy's next attack. The attack never came. Instead the early morning fog formed; this, coupled with the tactical situation, decided against bringing in the medical evacuation and resupply helicopters until after first light. The remainder of the night passed quietly. The 3d Platoon of Alfa Co., who had almost exclusively borne the brunt of the night's fighting, had one killed and four wounded. Bravo Co. had two men seriously wounded and two slightly wounded.\* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)

\*During the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Task Force's recent heavy contact with North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units, two infantry companies needed additional firepower. As a result, A Battery of the "Mighty Ninth" was brought into action.

\*During one hectic afternoon and night, they expended more than 500 rounds. Because of the heavy enemy fire coming in on the infantry companies, the battery fired for 24 hours without a break. All the while, small arms and mortar fire were falling on the battery. Most of the men didn't sleep for some 48 hours.

\*The action took place on Operation Paul Revere currently underway southwest of Pleiku. First Lieutenant Richard Higgins, the Battery Executive Officer, had this praise for his men: "It really made you proud to see the men in this battery because they were shooting their howitzers to save those other men (infantrymen) at the same time mortar rounds were landing in this area."\* (Bronco Bugle, Vol. No. 6, Pleiku, Vietnam June 5, 1966)

**29 MAY 1966: 0530 HOURS**

Just before daylight, Medevacs were requested pick up several of our more seriously wounded men. Bn Fwd indicated that a single ship was inbound and that the pilot had

volunteered because the LZ was considered too "hot" for other ships to be ordered in. His ship could take out five of the wounded, and unit commanders had to select which men would go. This was extremely difficult for them, because in this case they were deciding who might live and who might not if the situation did not improve. We could hear the bird approaching from the east long before we were able to see its running lights. As the "Dust Off" passed over Chu Ba, the pilot called for a flare to locate the clearing in the darkness. The ship came in at tree top level, drew green tracer fire from several NVA automatic weapons en route, and dropped down just as the flare sputtered out. The wounded were placed on board, and later the word was relayed that all had survived. However, one of men not selected died before the next Medevac could get into the LZ. That aircraft came in at 0715, and, much to our surprise, was able to lift out with seven of our wounded on board.

\*Daylight came. It was a relief because we knew they wouldn't attack in the daylight. Most of us were ok. Whispers came down the line that Roundtree had died. Dust Off came in right after he died. I remember everybody standing up and looking around at each other with this look of anxiety on all our faces. It was the first time that I'd clearly seen the positions on my right and left because of the fact that we had set up the positions so late in the afternoon. I remember seeing Pace Caldwell on my right . . . Dick Snyder and Bob White on my left. (Richard Hunter, 3:A/1/35)

#### 29 MAY 1966: 0610 HOURS

As soon as there was sufficient daylight, the companies were ordered to send out their platoons, one at a time and search the area immediately to their fronts. They were to bring in any wounded or weapons that were discovered, clear any snipers that might be in their sectors and get a body count. Because of the uncertainty of the size or disposition of the enemy force, the units were restricted from sweeping beyond 100 meters from the perimeter. As each platoon started its sweep, the platoons on the perimeter moved left and right to fill in the gap until its return. As Alfa's 3<sup>rd</sup> Plt, Lt Larry Conner, was making its sweep, it reached the designated distance as it approached a small stream in front of the company position. Across the stream were a number of NVA bodies, with weapons and packs still in evidence, that had been caught by one of the artillery fire missions, and the Lt moved to check them out. As they crossed the stream, the NVA renewed their attack, and the unit was hit in the front and flank by an NVA force and was pinned down. Capt Bisantz asked for permission to try to extract them, and moved another Plt of his unit forward. Capt. Maisano was directed to spread his company to cover the gaps in the LZ, and fire missions were called to try to build an artillery box around the trapped unit. Capt. Bisantz lead the relief and was the last of his unit to return to the perimeter. He did so and was described by his one of his people as covering the withdrawal, firing an M-16 with one hand and an AK-47 (NVA automatic weapon) with the other. The relief was successful, but at a cost of six killed and thirteen wounded, equivalent to more than sixty percent of the Plt's strength.

\*As dawn broke, the fog started to lift in the area; however, the Medevac helicopter at Brigade Base remained grounded by fog at that location. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Plt was directed to move forward on line to sweep the battlefield of the previous night. This they did, finding numerous dead NVA soldiers, weapons and equipment. After Lt. Conner had moved forward about 100 meters, he asked for assistance in conducting the sweep. Lt. Everette Light, commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Plt on the west side of the perimeter, was directed to bring half of his platoon across the LZ to assist the 3<sup>rd</sup> Plt. The two units linked up and continued to sweep eastward.

\*Shortly after they started forward again, Lt. Connor reported finding a stack of 20 enemy bodies alongside an intermittent stream. At this time the Medevac ship arrived, and the

wounded were loaded aboard. Just as the loading was completed, firing started east of the perimeter in Bravo Co's sector. Lt. Connor was ordered to immediately pull back to the perimeter with Lt. Light. The order was acknowledged, and they started to move back. The enemy fire against Bravo Co. increased but was not yet of major proportion. Suddenly an intense firefight broke out in the area in front of Alpha Co., and radio contact with Lt. Connor was lost.\* (Capt. Bisantz, A/1/35)

\*My remembrance of the first night of 10 ALFA was the bugles, the whistles, the claymores, the "sound of war": a sound never to be forgotten.

\*The squad I was in apparently took some of the brunt of the probing by the NVA. We fought from around midnight until 5 am. At that time our squad was asked to do recon in front of our lines to see what was left behind. It was here, not twenty feet from where I fought, that I found my first NVA sleeping under a poncho. I think I had three clips, I was now down to two. A Sgt. and I moved around a rather large tree and found two NVA sleeping. The Sgt. and I each used about a clip and now I am down to one. A little further we had a sniper in a tree, high up, being conservative, I used just five rounds and made them count. By this time we were ordered to return to LZ. As we were returning, we were about 300 yards from the LZ, a large group of Vietnamese soldiers got between us and the LZ. They were as confused by our location as we were. We thought they were South Vietnamese, but they were not. We engaged them in a fire fight for what seemed like hours. My ammo is now really low and I'm out of grenades.

\*As the fighting wound down, I knew I had to seek medical help fast or I would bleed to death. I literally rolled around our defensive positions until I made contact with the LZ and the platoon aid man, a man called "Alphabet". He did what he could and we waited for dust off, only to see choppers shot down. Around noon, medevac did land and as we were leaving, flying very low, I knew we were going to get shot down. We didn't thanks to the expert pilots. He flew me on to Battalion aid station, then onto the 85<sup>th</sup> Medevac for a stay, then onto Clark AFB in the Philippines, then Great Lakes Naval in Chicago. By the grace of GOD, I finished my tour at Ft. Lee, VA. and was discharged 22 Jan 68. (Jim McTaggart, A/1/35)



**\*Right after dawn we were ordered to pick up our line and sweep our front, collecting weapons and counting bodies. We stood up and cautiously moved down a slight, wooded slope, all in line. The slope in front of us was absolutely strewn with NVA bodies, weapons, and pieces of bodies from the artillery. We moved about 150-200 meters (not sure today) down this slope to a dry creek bed, where we found scores more bodies where our shells had caught them moving up to attack us. At the creek bed we found a barely alive NVA soldier who had been horribly wounded by our artillery. I asked our medic if he would make it back to our lines, and he just shook his head no.**

**\*We turned around and began making our way back to our line. Each of us were carrying AK-47's and SKS's slung over our shoulders. As we approached where our line had been (maybe 50-75 meters away), a burst of machine gun fire tore into us from our front and on each side. At first, we thought our own guys were firing on us as we approached the perimeter. Within a few moments, however, it became clear that after we had moved down to the creek bed, the NVA crept behind us and our line. My platoon sergeant, SFC George Williams(?) was shot in the neck right in front of me, and something hit me in the head and knocked me head over heels. To this day I can remember exactly what it felt like-getting hit square in the head with a baseball bat. I landed on my back and couldn't see out of my left eye because my scalp was hanging down over it bleeding. I found out later we'd been hit with one of their heavy MGs that**

they pulled around on two wheels. A round had hit the left side of my head and creased my skull.

**\*I remember crawling over to SGT Williams and laying on top of him, trying to give him some cover. The enemy machine gun that hit us was directly in front of me, maybe 15, 20 meters, in some kind of bunker that had been empty just a short time ago. They were so close I could hear them talking while they fed another belt into the gun. I shot my 16 and Williams' bone dry at that bunker. I fired the 8 rounds from my .45, and then had nothing left. At some point I was laying there with three empty guns watching bursts walk up and down our sides, thinking that I was getting paid something like \$3.80 an hour for this as an O-1 (second lieutenant) with over four years service.\* (Larry Conner, Plt Ldr, 3:A/1/35)**

**\*We all looked around waiting for someone to give the order to "move out." Someone yelled, "Alright, move out!" Everyone started moving out on-line . . . keeping abreast and in sight of everyone else as much as we could. We walked just a few meters and there was a shot on my right. Then another. An NVA was moving across our front . . . running from right to left. He was empty handed with no gear and running fast. He fell. Then another NVA ran out, again from right to left. Another shot . . . and another. He fell right in front of the 1st squad positions, into what turned out to be a stream bed about 75 yards out. It never occurred to us that we were being baited out, away from our perimeter. We proceeded outward to the streambed where we found 30 to 40 bodies scattered about. We found an NVA still alive but seriously wounded. He was dying. Within a few minutes he was gone. Then there was sporadic firing back at the LZ. 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon got the word to turn around and head back to the LZ to support the perimeter that was under probing attack. We picked up and carried some NVA mortar rounds and tubes that we had found at the streambed. We were going to take them back to the CP for the "count." It was about 8:00 am on the 29th.**

**\*We did an about face and headed back towards the LZ. 3<sup>rd</sup> squad was in front and 1<sup>st</sup> squad bringing up the rear. "Junior" Bonner, Kit Frazier, Pace Caldwell, Dick Snyder, Bob White and myself were taking up the rear. Sporadic small arms fire broke out in front of the platoon. It sounded like AK's. One shot, then two, then a series of automatic fire. Most of us thought it was our own guys on the perimeter shooting at us. We were so close to our own perimeter and this sort of thing had happened before to other units. After all, we couldn't have been more than 100 meters from the perimeter . . . only 100 meters from safety . . . from our own people.**

**\*We couldn't have been more than 30 yards from the 3<sup>rd</sup> squad, yet we couldn't see anyone. Then grenades started exploding. Someone yelled, "They're PAVNS! They're PAVNS!" Then grenade after grenade exploded . . . some of theirs, some of ours. I could hear the AK's clearly now. I could hear M16's returning fire. I could see the smoke. 1st squad dropped the NVA mortar shells, along with the tubes, and rushed forward to help. We rushed forward to see Lt. Light, 1st Platoon Leader, lying on the ground, next to a small tree, with blood coming from his forehead. Lt. Light yelled at us to move up front . . . to help out. To this day I have no idea why the 1<sup>st</sup> platoon leader was out there, all alone, with 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon.**

**\*We moved forward, under fire. I could see members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> squad only 5 to 10 yards in front of us. We moved forward again, firing . . . rifles, shotguns, and grenade launchers. We moved into a position where we could support the rest of the platoon. We were all within 5 or 10 yards of each other, but because of the heavy underbrush, once we were in the prone position, we could only tell the other persons position by their voice, or screams, and by the sounds of the M-16.**

**\*I moved forward and to the right of Sgt Jesse Spencer. Pfc. Walter Wetzel, 2nd squad, was laying down behind a small tree about 12 inches in diameter. I moved forward until my helmet was almost touching his crotch. Sgt Spencer was right next to him with his right arm draped over Wetzel's left leg. All three of us were trying to get behind the same small tree. It was obvious by now that we were pinned down under heavy machine gun fire, with lighter automatic weapons and riflemen in support.**

**\*Pace Caldwell was a few feet to my left. I could see blood coming from his shoulder. Bob White moved to the right, in line with the rest of us. Dick Snyder moved to my left along with Kit Frazier and Junior Bonner. I lost sight of them after a few seconds. On my right was "Freeman," one of the machine gunners. He was shot thru the hand and the machine gun was damaged. He was saying something to me that I couldn't hear when another bullet hit his thigh. I thought it was an incendiary round because I could see smoke coming from his wound as he moaned in pain. Within seconds, Freeman was hit again. I looked at Bob White and saw his head jerk and hit the ground. I thought he was dead. Then he lifted his head and adjusted his helmet. Bob White was hit twice more in the helmet before it was over.**

**\*As Jesse Spencer, Walter Wetzel, and I, lay behind this small tree, I briefly looked up and saw bullets coming thru the tree, tearing it apart. A bullet came across Wetzel's butt. He started to get up from the intense pain of the wound on his butt. Spencer and I grabbed him and yelled at him to stay down. Thinking they had us zeroed in, Spencer and I crawled to the left of Wetzel looking for another, much bigger tree. I don't know where Sgt Spencer went, but I never found that bigger tree. There just didn't seem to be any trees big enough out there that morning.**

**\*Things stayed that way for what seemed like hours. Them firing at us . . . us firing at them. It was clear the 3rd platoon was at a serious disadvantage. It became an issue of just hanging on until help could arrive. Some of us were out of ammo. Some of us had one or two rounds left. I had three shotgun shells left. Some of the guys picked up AK's from dead PAVN's because they had run out of 5.56 ammunition. Both machine guns were out of commission. And just when we thought things couldn't get any worse someone yelled out, "They're standing up. They're getting ready to charge!" I remember thinking about having a shotgun and not having a bayonet mount, and how I had left my .45 back at my position before we moved out to sweep the area.\* (Richard Hunter, 3:A/1/35)**

**\*Lt. Kelsey, 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt, was ordered to bring the major part of his platoon to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Plt's sector. At this time Conner's location was not known precisely, so Kelsey was told to move east in an attempt to find him. Almost immediately Kelsey and his men engaged in a firefight with about 50 NVA who were advancing toward Bravo Co.'s position. At that moment, Lt. Light crawled to the Company Commander and told him that Lt. Conner and about 15 men were pinned down by a large enemy force. Lt. Light also had been pinned down and wounded in the head, but by crawling for about 100 meters had managed to get back to the perimeter.**

**\*Lt. Kelsey was ordered to break off engagement and move north to assist Lt. Conner. Guided by Lt. Light, Lt. Kelsey's platoon quickly overwhelmed the enemy force - killing about 20 in the process. Lt. Conner's group had been hit hard with seven men being killed initially and eight to ten others pinned down by a heavy machine gun only 20 feet away.\* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)**

**\*At some point, I could hear a heavy volume of fire coming in our my right side. It was LT Kelsey and his platoon. They flanked the NVA and broke through to us. They literally saved our lives that morning.\* (Larry Conner, Plt Ldr, 3:A/1/35)**

**\*Then, like something out of some Hollywood movie, I saw a soldier named Wolfgang Wagner, coming towards me in a crouch. It told me 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon had reached us. They swept in from our right and took out the machine gun and provided cover while helping us withdraw with our wounded. The battle raged on after 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon was brought back inside the perimeter.\* (Richard Hunter, 3:1/A/35)**

**\*Lt. Kelsey's men covered the evacuation of the dead and wounded and captured enemy material (which included a CHICO AM radio, one heavy barrel machine gun on wheels, two light machine guns and numerous AK47 Assault guns. No time was taken to search the enemy dead as the situation in Bravo Co.'s sector was rapidly deteriorating, and it was imperative to re-establish the perimeter. The enemy's main assault began just about the time Lt. Kelsey got to the perimeter. His men stopped where they were, roughly at a right angle to the perimeter and started firing at the flank of the attacking enemy. They maintained this position the rest of the day, delivering flanking, enfilade fire against the NVA. As the enemy took cover from Bravo Co.'s fire by crouching behind anthills and trees, Kelsey's men kept picking them off from their open flank.\* (Capt. Bisantz, A/1/35)**

**Lt Light survived the fire fight, but six days later while still at !0 ALFA, his platoon was in an ambush position, and he was accidently killed by one of his platoon's replacements. During the night, as Lt Light was moving within the position checking his people, the soldier, who had dozed off, awoke with a start, mistook the Lt for an NVA, and fired.**

**As the two companies resumed their positions, the NVA closed rapidly behind them and renewed their efforts against the perimeter. Over the next four hours. the NVA effort slowly expanded to the flanks so as to involve more and more of the TF. Even so, the NVA force never attempted to involve the entire perimeter at any one time. With the advantage of interior lines, even though harassed by random sniper fire, the uncommitted portion of the defense still served as a ready source for reinforcements and limited ammunition resupply for the more engaged positions within the circle. The attackers came in uncoordinated bunches - not in the human waves of the Chinese in the Korean War - but in groups of 10 to 15 up to mobs of 75 to a 100. They would charge - yelling, throwing grenades and shooting - and move straight against the perimeter without any effort to take advantage of the ground and cover. Many of the enemy were cut down by the concentrated fires of the defenders, the mortars and artillery. Others were stopped by the door gunners of helicopters that were attempting to resupply the position and the gunships that roared in every time there was a break in the artillery support.**

**\*Another perspective came from the members of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Avn Bn, who were in the Chu Pong/la Drang operations with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. They told us they had never seen fighting as intense as 10 ALFA, and that included the Cav's operations of November and December, 1965.\* (Col Ronald J. Rabin, former S-2, 3<sup>rd</sup> Bde)**

**\*It's like yesterday to me. I think of that place a dozen times a day. On our way out to make a recon of our front line, we actually didn't have a confirmed enemy killed. We just got out of the front line and we started to see NVA dead, and some playing dead. The CO, Tony Bisantz, calls me on the radio and asked what is going on out. I told him we had a body count of 29 and some playing opossum. All hell broke after we got back inside. Capt Bisantz was standing behind this tree, two radios, one in one ear, one in the other. I seen this nice position earlier in the morning, and said man, they made a fine fighting hole and deep too. Well the fire fight was going good now so I hit that position. It had a good field of fire, and in it I went. After I fired a few rounds, I smelt something that took my mind off the war. I said to myself that someone had crapped in this hole. I fired a few more rounds and said no wonder no one was in this dammed hole, who the hell could stand it! I was about to leave when I got company landed in**

there with me. A few seconds went by, and he said, "are you that scared?" "Hell no man, it isn't me!" He didn't believe me, he said he would rather to get shot than stay in there with me, the dirty b----- left me there. I figure I may as well go get shot, too, so I left, also. After the fight was over I checked on this position and found only the exposed tree roots dripping this awful sap that smelled like a 2 week old slit trench...but I'm glad we don't have them trees here in sunny California.\* (Russell Crawford, RTO, 3:A/1/35)

\*The assault on the southeast aide of the perimeter, in Bravo Co.'s sector had not been affected by the engagements of Lt.'s Conner and Kelsey, and the enemy rapidly closed to within hand grenade range. The mortars, which were located in the open about 35 meters behind the perimeter were out of action almost immediately as the fire of the NVA cut down the crews anytime they manned their guns. Unable to man their tubes, the mortar men became riflemen, some crawling forward on their stomachs to reinforce the line, others firing from their own positions.\* (Capt. Bisantz, A/1/35)

**29 MAY 1966: 0100 - 0700 HOURS**

### **ENEMY SITUATION**

As the recalled units of the 66<sup>th</sup> NVA returned to their regimental base area, they arrived after midnight in two major increments - one group around 0100 and the other shortly before 0600. From the welcoming cheers that were heard from time to time, smaller elements continued to arrive well into the morning. The NVA Commander committed his units to the action against the American position as they became available. Thus, instead of waiting and mounting an overwhelming effort, his strength was spent piecemeal, and he failed to capitalize on his advantage of superior numbers. Once committed, individual units acted independently and without the benefit of centralized direction and control.

\*The defense of LZ 10 A had begun. Why the NVA attacked that night and all through the next day is open to question. Maybe, as S. L. A. Marshall suggests, they wanted to recover their valuable machine guns (all of which were in new condition). Perhaps they thought they could overrun the small American force in the LZ, or finally, perhaps they were covering the withdrawal of a larger force. Whatever their reason, the NVA pressed their attack with a fanaticism that awed, but never overcame, the defenders. \* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)

**29 MAY 1966: 0830 HOURS**

Sixty percent of the perimeter became actively engaged in the defense, and because of constant heavy contact along the line, and the danger of ground-to-air fire, the resupply ships were diverted to 11 ALFA pending a break in the action. After an hour of continuous effort, the NVA broke off and retired into the forest. As was the previous experience, there would be breaks in the fighting that might last from ten to up to thirty minutes. To take advantage of any opportunity the lulls might present, the resupply ships and Medevac's were placed in orbit nearby, and at 0945, with the first break in the action, three ships flying at tree top level and "hellbent for breakfast" came into the LZ. They off-loaded 107mm and 88mm mortar ammunition, along with small arms and rounds for the M-79 Grenade Launchers. Alerted that the ships were inbound, wounded were moved from the collection points closer to the touch down areas. TF wounded filled those ships to capacity. A second effort was made to resupply at 1015, but the aircraft were driven off by heavy ground to air fire. Rather than abandon the mission completely, the helicopters made one more pass and the door gunners "kicked out" their loads at 20 feet and about 110 knots. That became the final resupply for the morning. No more aircraft were able to land at 10 ALFA until late in the afternoon.

When aircraft would come up on the Cmd Net and report they were inbound, Lt Brothers would lift or shift supporting fires coming from 11 ALFA and Duc Co to keep from hitting our own people. During those respites, the TF picked up the firepower of the gunships that were escorting the supply aircraft, in addition to the searching fires from the outboard door gunners, and used them to make strafing runs parallel to our positions. Pilots reported engaging enemy troops as close as twenty meters from the perimeter. They would pass on any information concerning what they observed, roll out, and once they had cleared the area, the artillery and mortars would commence their close support missions once again.

\*The next thing I recall was being helped back to the LZ. The NVA kept attacking and we kept firing back. I found another M-16 and fired it so much the barrel burned out. When things seemed to have died down a bit, one or two Huey slicks came in and someone put me on one to be lifted out of there. Just as they did, they attacked again and I hopped off, thinking I wasn't hurt that bad. All that morning (it seems today) they kept attacking and we kept beating them back. We had lots of air support. We had 500 pound bombs, rockets, 20mm cannon, napalm, 40mm grenade launchers, everything - all "danger close" to us. We kept telling them to bring in the next run closer, 20 meters closer. I remember laying there watching a pair of A-1E Skyraiders make several runs, Huey gunships (one got hit right over us and crashed I think), and a couple of F4 Phantoms. I remember the F4s because they looked so big, and because they came in nose high, flaps down and air brakes out to slow down enough to lay their bombs in close to us. Like the arty and our Huey pilots, our air force guys were just incredible that day. I'll never forget them for it.\* (Larry Conner, Plt Ldr, 3:A/1/35)

The mortars were experiencing difficulty getting their rounds in close enough to the line to be effective, because the minimum range of the weapons placed most of the rounds out into the forest and in a "lost" condition. To counter this, the crews built supports under the bipod legs of the mortars, and with minimum charges, were firing their rounds almost straight up so that they would impact just beyond the bursting radius of the shells.

**29 MAY 1966: 0930 HOURS**

The only positions that had not become engaged in the expanding fire fight were those of Alfa's 1<sup>st</sup> and Bravo's 2<sup>nd</sup> Plts, and both were directly across from the portion of the perimeter that experienced the heaviest NVA pressure. The TF Cmd Post was at the junction of these units. The action against the defense continued with varying degrees of intensity - slowing to a halt against one sector and swelling to a peak against another only a dozen or so meters away. However, at no time was the entire position involved, thus allowing both men and ammunition to be moved to bolster more critical points.

The NVA continued to bring pressure against the line, but the effort seemed to lack centralized direction and consisted more of squad or platoon sized groups working independently and not part of any centralized plan of attack. Other than for a brief moment that was quickly neutralized a few hours before daylight, no coordinated enemy force had reached the perimeter up to that point. At times, others were seen trying to extract the wounded and dead that lay forward of the defensive position. To that end, the standing trees served to screen the NVA working parties in their retrieval effort.

General Walker had been overhead several times since just before daylight, and he had been keeping abreast of the situation by monitoring transmissions between the TF and Bn Fwd. On occasion, he came up on the TF net and requested an update; but basically, he left the fighting to those on the ground. He used his influence to insure that the troops continued to get all the support that was available in that part of Vietnam, and on one occasion, because of increased

sniper activity against the exposed position of the radio during transmissions to Bn Fwd, the General served as an airborne relay.

**29 MAY 1966: 1130 HOURS**

The action at 10 ALFA was the hot point for the moment in the entire Two Corps Tactical Zone, and as the day wore on, more and more aircraft appeared overhead and asked if they could provide assistance. Some were asked to direct their attention to the regrouping areas to the north of the LZ, while others were asked to concentrate on the areas from which the cheers of newly arriving NVA could be heard. When the situation allowed, gunships were invited to make supporting runs along the flanks of the perimeter, and take action against any targets of opportunity that were presented.

On one occasion, as a Huey gunship started its run, the pilot was advised of a machinegun that appeared to be in a tree at the southeast end of the LZ, and he was advised to break right as he completed his pass over that sector. His first pass was from east to west, firing his outboard (right) door guns as he flew the line, and upon completion, he came around and made a return pass from west to east. The ship rolled out to the left and was taken under fire as it exited the LZ. The helicopter disappeared from view and suddenly reappeared coming in from the north, low over the trees. A huge jet of smoke and flame was coming from the fuel tanks on the left side of the aircraft, and it was struggling to stay airborne long enough to reach the security of the LZ. The Huey bounced to a landing, and both pilots and door gunners unloaded and cleared the aircraft almost before the water they had sprayed into the air on impact had a chance to settle. The ship continued to burn for several minutes with machinegun and rocket rounds "cooking off" and causing some damage and concern at the mortar position and in the section of the perimeter closest to the wreck. The status of the crew was relayed to their friends overhead, and for the time being, they became "instant" infantrymen in Alfa's 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt.



**\*In my opinion, SSG Johnson, B company, was a real hero on 10A. He carried a shotgun, and you could hear him rallying his troops through the night between shotgun blasts. I think he was awarded a Silver Star, his third in three wars. The mortar position was a hairy one to be in. I took about 25 guys into the LZ and came out with about 12. My Plt Sgt, SFC Tilly, was badly wounded but recovered in Hawaii.**

**\*We got a break in that the NVA attacked from the East and were barely within artillery range. If they had attacked seriously from the West, we would have probably been overrun. When they plotted the artillery coverage prior to the lift in, they apparently failed to account for the elevation to clear hills between the Bn firebase and the LZ. They could only reach the back portions of NVA formations, but with the mortars providing close support on the perimeter, it was enough.\***

**\*The most spectacular sight I saw in two tours happened when a gunship got hit coming into the LZ, and the pilots managed to bring it down in flames with the gunners on the skids. All escaped, but I don't know how. Those pilots were marvelous and didn't leave the bird until just as it hit. It burned to ashes in the LZ, but, unfortunately, its rockets were facing my platoon when it lit off, wounding some of my guys. (Ray Pollard, Wpns Plt Ldr: B/B/2/35)**

**\*Fighting would become so intense the mortar platoons would have to grab M-16's, and fire into the woods, defending their own positions. I believe 6 helicopters were shot down by**

enemy ground fire. I remember, as we were defending the LZ and laying down fire, looking back over my shoulder to see one of the door gunners jump from about 20 feet up because his chopper had been hit and was in full flames. That particular chopper was carrying a supply of ammunition and exploded like a fireworks display. It wasn't a very big LZ and seeing those choppers scattered in the LZ made it look even smaller. Cloud cover gave way and A1E's were finally able to give us air support. I saw an F105 flying up and down the base of the mountain strafing the NVA positions. (Richard Hunter, 3:A/1/35)

General Walker joined LTC Feir at 11 ALFA to consider the best course of action concerning the fight and the troops at 10 ALFA. He was faced with the same decision that had created the TF on the 28<sup>th</sup>. That being whether to extract the ground force or to reinforce it with more troops and attempt to regain the initiative. Unless the NVA were forced back from the LZ, any attempt to extract would be difficult at best, and the trail units would be placed in an almost impossible situation. Otherwise, the troops would have to abandon the LZ, and using the artillery and gunships as escorts, attempt to break out to the east. Neither option was acceptable! His decision was to reinforce with the remainder of the 1/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, under the command of the Brigade Executive Officer, Lt Col Robert Kingston. The TF was advised of the decision and was told that units of the 1/35<sup>th</sup> had been ordered to move to extraction points. At best, it would be after 1530hrs before the relief force could be picked up from its current location and airlifted to the LZ. The thrust of the message was to "dig in and hang on" until the relief arrived.

As the morning progressed, the situation had not improved by any appreciable amount; but, it did not appear to be worsening. Of considerable concern was that the NVA seemed to have an endless supply of men to send against the TF, and as friendly casualties occurred with resulting gaps in the line, there was no way of replacing them other than by thinning other areas to serve the demand. I was not alone in my anxiety over this, because on one call from Alfa with a Situation Report, the RTO, Sgt George H. Mikal, gave the update and then asked if he could ask a question. "Major, are we really going to get out of here?" I told him that no American unit that I knew of had surrendered in Vietnam, we were not about to be the first, that Gen Walker had the relief force cranking up, and that we would be still here to greet them when they came in. There was long silence, and he said, "Thanks, I just wanted to know."

**29 MAY 1966: 1145 HOURS**

An NVA unit numbering around forty broke from the treeline directly in front of Bravo's 2<sup>nd</sup> Plt. That unit was positioned across the open southeastern end of the LZ and was back from the treeline some twenty-five or thirty meters. It appeared that the NVA expected to close with Bravo at the treeline, and failing to meet the expected resistance, their momentum carried them out into the open. They were immediately taken under fire and finding themselves exposed, became confused and began milling around. A mortar round fired by Bravo's 81mm's landed at their leading edge, and the front ranks of the NVA turned and ran back into the others. Some of them made it back into the woods, others broke left or right. Those that ran to their right moved parallel to the line, and then for some distance, stayed within easy visual range of the men in position. The majority of this group became casualties in short order. Of the ones that moved to their left, two automatic weapons teams were able to establish themselves in the trees about 100 meters out. Their fire downed at least one helicopter before they were eliminated. That Huey lost most of its hydraulic fluid, but made it into the LZ without further damage and without injury to the crew. As were their predecessors, they were added to the troops on the line.

**\*By 1000hrs, the enemy had launched four full scale attacks against the perimeter, each time getting to within hand grenade range before being repulsed. As happened the previous night, each attack was preceded by loud shouting and screaming. At one time the NVA set up an 82mm mortar in direct view of Alfa Co's CP group, who were actually on the perimeter. Two men were assigned responsibility for the weapon and spent the next two hours killing each NVA who attempted to go near the mortar. By this time friendly casualties had begun to mount and small arms ammunition was running low. The north and west side of the perimeter, already low in numbers, sent all but a bare minimum of their ammunition across the LZ to Alfa Co. headquarters from where it was distributed down the line. An extra machine gun from Alfa's 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon was also brought across to strengthen the defense. A resupply helicopter had been standing by awaiting a lull in the fighting which never came, until finally, when informed that the situation was critical, the pilot volunteered to go in with the resupply. Accompanied by two gunships to give suppressive fire, the resupply was made and a few of the more seriously wounded were evacuated. However, the resupply was expensive. One of the gunships was hit by ground fire and had to circle back and crash land in the LZ. The crew escaped the burning helicopter seconds before it blew up. While all this was going on, the enemy launched another assault. This too was beaten back as the fresh ammunition supply helped to increase the friendly rate of fire.\* (Capt. Bisantz, A/1/35)**

**\*Sometime later (around 1200?) I was kneeling next to a tree firing another M16 and something slammed into my left side, knocking me down. By this time, my head was numb, but this one hurt like a son of a bitch-it felt like a white hot knife in my side. (I learned later it was an AK round that first passed through three empty M16 magazines in my ammo pouch-they probably slowed the round down enough to keep it from killing me. That did it for me that day. I remember being carried into another Huey and laid down on the floor. This time I stayed. It banked so steeply coming out of the LZ I remember being afraid I was going to slide out the open door on my back, helpless to move.\* (Larry Conner, Plt Ldr, 3:A/1/35)**

**\*I remember a Bravo troop down in his hole on the perimeter about ten yards from where I was when one of those A1E's made a tree top pass down the long axis of our line. The target was the woodline to the right of the opening to the trail to 11 ALPHA, and the A1E started firing about 200 meters out. The rounds passed through the foliage immediately overhead, and chunks of bark and bits and pieces of limbs showered down. The soldier was laughing and held up a branch about the size of a broom handle that had only recently been attached to a larger limb not very far up a tree above his position. "Hey Major", he yelled, "bring him back around again so I can give this back to him" (or words to that effect). There was no doubt in my mind that the LZ would hold until the rest of the 1/35<sup>th</sup> got there.\* (Stan Tyson, TF Cmdr)**

#### **29 MAY 1966: 1200 HOURS**

**\*Upon return of the sweep (approximately 0830 hours), sniper fire again became frequent, in fact, B 2/35 Infantry suffered its greatest number of casualties from sniper attacks. Much of their fire was directed at the mortar positions, although it was felt that the primary reason for the enemy's return was to fire on incoming aircraft. These snipers also used automatic weapons. From 0830 to 1200 hours, the fire was so intense that personnel on the northern and eastern portions of the LZ effectively were pinned down. Armed helicopters were called to suppress the fire (causing 81mm fire on sniper positions to cease). Again because of close proximity of friendly positions plus the heavy foliage density, the gunships were ineffective. An airborne FAC was contacted. He spotted enemy automatic weapon positions at the east end of the LZ. Friendly lines were marked with smoke and two A1E's made two successful runs. The third run consisted of an accidental napalm attack on the CP of B 2/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Results of this unfortunate incident were six WIA, all of whom later had to be evacuated. Two**

successful napalm runs followed, after which the FAC aircraft again hosed down the periphery of the LZ with heavy bombing and cannonading. (Annual Historical Supplement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1966)

The action concentrating against the TF continued to occupy the center ring of the only "show in town". Unidentified aircraft came up on the radio, inquired how the situation was going, and asked if they could be of assistance.

Just after noon, a Forward Air Controller (FAC) checked into the net and asked if we could use two A1E Skyraider's that were out looking for "targets of opportunity". He indicated the fixed wing aircraft were carrying rockets and napalm. Lt Brothers had the artillery shut down, and the machineguns that had been set up back in the trees to our southeast were designated as the target. Men at opposite ends of the LZ threw smoke grenades to indicate a line of flight, and a compass heading of 140 degrees from the center of the LZ with an estimated distance to where the guns were located were passed to the FAC. The planes made two rocket runs and received return fire each time. The FAC called for the napalm, and as the first A1E made its pass, the aluminum tanks hit well beyond the target. The trail aircraft became disoriented, made a 90 degree error in its flight path, and came in over the LZ on a north to south run. The TF CP group was alerted to the impending danger when one of the nearby troops cried out, "God Almighty, look out!"

The A-1E, at tree top height, released its tanks as it passed over the far side of the perimeter. The tanks impacted directly on the TF CP. The right tank hit exactly five feet in front of the position, and the blast, metal and flame went over and spread out beyond it. The left tank fell about ten meters farther in and hit a large tree, with its napalm passing over most of the men on the ground beneath it and on into the trees. Of the eleven men around the CP, nine were injured. Lieutenant Brothers received third degree burns on his back, and 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Harry Miller, Bravo, who at the moment of impact, was working with a soldier who had just been wounded, had only enough reaction time to raise his hands to cover his face. In spite of receiving severe burns on his hands and face, his eyes were not injured, and within several weeks, he returned to duty with the company. None of the wounds from the fire or exploding tanks were fatal, but because of them, six men were eventually evacuated from country. The two who were not burned had avoided injury, one by dashing out into the open so that the tanks passed over and hit behind him, and the other, by diving into a water-filled foxhole. The PRC-25 that had been serving as the TF net control station was destroyed, and the Artillery radio was pressed into immediate service to notify the FAC of the error and to call off any subsequent runs. The pilot of the errant A-1E could be heard over the FAC's radio saying, "I will not drop unless requested, I will not drop unless requested." It was obvious he had become aware of the error about the same time as those on the ground. The target in question was still active, and the FAC was requested to bring the aircraft around again, to make a dry run to ensure they were back on target, and then to engage with whatever ordinance they had left. The NVA machineguns ceased to be a problem at that time.

\*I spent the better part of the night at the TF/Bravo Co CP near a small mound of mud that had been scraped from a prone shelter. There was no advantage to moving around with just about every sound drawing fire from either inside or outside the perimeter, so I used the mound as a prop for my PRC-25 and stayed put. Later that morning, I had returned to the vicinity of the mound, all of eight inches high, and was working with a FAC to coordinate successive runs by two A-1E aircraft. The first pass was on line, but beyond the target I had designated, and I had the FAC bring them around for a second run. As I was trying to determine the results of the first pass, I heard a warning shout. I turned in time to see the lead A-1E appear directly across the LZ, 90 degrees off the target line, and release its twin tanks of napalm just as it passed

over the wood line. They looked like two huge silver cigars slowly tumbling towards the Command Group. I dropped behind my favorite pile of mud, and the tanks impacted and exploded just a few feet in front of us. Because the left tank hit as close as it did, that eight inches of mud was enough to deflect much of the flame and blast up and over our position. The heat and roar were horrendous. The radio was destroyed, my boots, fatigue pants and the camouflage cover on my steel pot were literally smoking, and I had a realistic preview of what Hell just might be like.\* (Stan Tyson, TF Cmdr)

\*B Company 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt was badly wounded in the mistaken napalm drop on the mortar and company headquarters positions. I was between the two when the drop happened but was fortunate enough to see it coming and dived into a water filled fox hole. 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. Co Commander (Capt Maisano) and several others got it right in the face.\* (Ray Pollard, Wpns Plt Ldr: B/2/35)

\*The enemy attack soon spilled over into Alfa Co.'s sector and practically the whole eastside of the perimeter was under attack. As soon as the initial firing had started, the artillery had again been called and again started its battery volley fire, moving north and south in front of the perimeter in 50 and 100 yd. increments. A team of armed helicopters came on station about 0800 hrs and added their support to the defenders, coordinating their firing passes with the artillery. Also at this time, a Forward Air Controller arrived at the LZ in an O1E and began circling, awaiting the arrival of tactical air support aircraft. Two A1E's, carrying rockets, napalm and 20mm cannon, arrived about 0900hrs. The FAC guided then through the low flying clouds on a "dry" pass over the LZ. They climbed out, circled, and immediately came back on a strafing run which was very effective causing an immediate slowdown in the rate of enemy fire. The FAC informed us that they would drop napalm on their next pass. A few minutes passed, and then one of the Skyraiders broke out of the clouds and headed for the LZ from the exact opposite direction from which he had come before, and released two napalm tanks directly over the mortar position. These tanks impacted directly into the Task Force Command Post (CP), putting it temporarily out of action. Of approximately 15 men in and around the CP, none were killed and only two were seriously injured, Bravo Co's 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. and Senior Medic. Six others were slightly burned. The knee deep water in the LZ had served to muffle the detonation of the napalm and also offered protection to the men in the CP group. Several had merely submerged in their water filled slit trenches as the napalm struck; others, though hit by the burning fuel, quickly rolled in the water extinguishing the flames and suffered only minor burns. The FAC was informed of the accident and was able to divert the second aircraft before it dropped its napalm. An investigation into the cause of the accident later determined it to be a combination of factors encompassing marginal visibility and pilot error.\* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)

\*I do remember the ARVN planes accidentally dropping Napalm on the command post. The medic there was a good friend of mine, but for the life of me I can't remember his name. I remember seeing those guys strip off their clothes which were not burnt, and seeing the flesh red but not even blistered like you would have thought.\* (Philippe Saunier, 4:B/2/35)

**29 MAY 1966: 1300 HOURS**

A Bravo company medic came to the CP area and told Capt Maisano that Pfc Donald Evans was dead. The soldier, with the Company 81mm mortars, had been hit in the legs - a bullet passing through one and almost removing the kneecap from the other. Instead of allowing himself to be removed to the relative safety of the company collection point, he chose to stay with the mortars and keep his tubes in action. When an assistant gunner was killed, he reorganized the gun crew and talked the loader and ammunition bearers through the laying

and firing procedures. Pfc Evans stayed with the guns until, after receiving at least one more wound, he died from loss of blood and shock.

\*I was not on the perimeter with the platoon, instead I was with the mortar squad set a little back from the east end of the line. When the choppers stopped landing and just flew over real low to drop off food and ammo, a couple of us would run out to gather what we could and distribute this to the line. I remember being scared but felt kind of a safety in numbers attitude.

\*I remember working with a medic on a wounded guy. I don't remember knowing him before this but I still remember exactly what he looked like. When I saw his KIA listing I couldn't believe he was only 18 years old. The action was so intense at that time we were pinned down by the fire power coming in and Medevac couldn't come in for the wounded. He just bled to death and there was nothing we could do. I think this went on for at least two nights and three days, but seemed like forever. Then on the third day they brought in Artillery and what seemed like hundreds of men. I remember thinking, boy if this would be how we would always be with all this support, it would be great.\* (Philippe Saunier, 4:B/2/35)

\*On the Brigade's present Operation "Paul Revere," southwest of Pleiku, the medical company (Company B, 25<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion) was able to show its efficiency in treating injured personnel of the brigade. On Saturday, elements of the Task Force met heavy contact with what is now known to have been a North Vietnamese regiment. Naturally, there were some friendly casualties.

"Every wounded man who reached our hospital alive, reached the higher echelon alive, thanks to the finest doctors I have worked with," said Doctor (Captain William Gardner, the Brigade Surgeon. All patients suffering head or eye injuries were immediately evacuated to Pleiku or Qui Nhon. Other patients requiring major surgery are evacuated to either Pleiku or An Khe, then sent off to Qui Nhon to recuperate. A seriously wounded man can be on an operating table in Pleiku within a half hour after he reaches us," stated Doctor (Captain) Edward Denison, the B Company Commander.

"They have lost two choppers during this operation while attempting to extract wounded soldiers from the battle areas," Doctor Gardner emphasized. "They also had a medic shot through both legs." The "Dustoff" unit supporting the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Task Force is the Pleiku Platoon of the 498<sup>th</sup> Helicopter Air Ambulance Company.\* (Bronco Bugle, Vol. 1, No. 6, Pleiku, Vietnam, June 5, 1966)

\*The next thing I recall was coming to on a stretcher inside a MASH tent near Pleiku, laying on my back. I saw LT Pat Lenz, Company A's XO over me, and I began crying, asking him how many of my men had been hurt. I don't think he knew then, and I passed out.\*(Larry Conner, Plt Ldr, 3:A/1/35)

Throughout the second day, the NVA mortars were employed twice. On the first occasion, they fired nine rounds during the morning attack. The first round was heard to impact hit well back in the forest, and since the TF had no fire mission in progress at that moment, it was assumed that something had blown up out there. A second explosion occurred about ten minutes later, closer, but still "lost". A third impacted about ten minutes after the second, on line and within sight of the LZ. It was determined that an observer was probably in a tree somewhere in the vicinity and as each round was fired, he would send the correction back to the tube position by runner - thus the time lapse between rounds. Capt Masan was told that the next round would hit pretty close to his 1<sup>st</sup> Plt positions and for him to move his people to

the left and right of the anticipated impact point. The troops moved, the round came in as expected, and did no damage. There was one final adjustment out into the center of the LZ, the tube fired four rounds "for effect", and after that, the mortar ceased firing

## REINFORCEMENT

29 MAY 1966: 1400 HOURS

Bn Fwd passed the word from Gen Walker that LTC Kingston and the relief force had completed marshaling and would be arriving at the LZ around 1500. At the time the information reached the TF, the NVA effort was once again increasing, and as had been the case throughout the attack, was concentrating against the 3<sup>rd</sup> Plts of Alfa and Bravo. The danger of ground to air fire against the incoming flights was acute, and suppression of that fire was critical to the success of the relief. Bn Fwd was requested to report when the first in bound lift was five minutes out. At that time, the majority of the troops on the ground would be moved from the portion of the line least committed to the area of heaviest contact. Maximum suppressive fires would be laid down in order to prevent the enemy from directing his fire against the ships as they were on short final and landing. It was requested that once the soldiers exited the aircraft, they move to the northern portion of the perimeter and take up positions there, because by that time the defenders would be down to their last rounds of ammunition. Once the TF was committed to the suppressive course of action, the first two lifts had to come in, regardless of fire, in order to keep the TF situation from becoming disastrous. Ammunition was redistributed and wounded were replaced by filling in with men from the opposite side of the perimeter as much as practical. The two Company Commanders were briefed, and when the first lift was four minutes out, men were moved across the perimeter and joined the Plts in contact. The troop lifts, escorted by gunships providing covering fire from their rocket pods and off side door gunners, came in under fire, but without loss. LTC Robert Kingston and Major Fred Delisle, Battalion S-3, Opns Officer, arrived with the second lift, and the command of the TF was turned over at that time.

## HELICOPTERS OF 52D AVIATION BATTALION



**\*C 1/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry arrived by helicopter. The companies on the ground assisted by moving to the northern edge of the LZ and laying down a base of fire to the N and NE. B 2/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry and A 1/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry then secured the northern portion of the LZ and C 1/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry secured the southern portion. This reinforcement caused the snipers to withdraw.\* (Annual Historical Supplement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 1966)**

**\*As the battle progressed, more choppers arrived carrying reinforcements, which included 1<sup>st</sup>/35<sup>th</sup> Battalion Recon Platoon and Company "C", of the 1<sup>st</sup>/35<sup>th</sup>, plus more artillery and supplies. It was now about 3 or 4 p.m. on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 1966. All but intermittent sniper fire had stopped. The LZ had 3 rifle companies, plus a reinforced Recon Platoon: however, "A" Company 1<sup>st</sup>/35<sup>th</sup> and B"B company 2<sup>nd</sup>/35<sup>th</sup>, together, didn't quite make up a full rifle company.\* (Richard Hunter, 3:A/1/35)**

**29 MAY 1966: 1600 HOURS**

### **ENEMY SITUATION**

Any hope of success in overrunning and destroying the American defense was preempted when the remainder of the 1/35th joined the battle. Considering the losses he had already sustained, the only course of action still open to the NVA was to block with a delaying force while the remainder of his regiment retreated back into sanctuaries west of the Cambodian border.

**29 MAY 1966: 1600 HOURS**

\*In the interim, resupply was effected. Sweeps began again. The goal was to push the perimeter out 150 meters in order to provide more adequate LZ security. Again snipers were encountered, with B 2/35th taking the remainder of its casualties. During the perimeter expansion and the resupply activity, enemy 82mm mortar fire was received in and around the LZ. Light casualties resulted (WIA only); however, one of the resupply ships was damaged. Organic mortars returned fire 360 degrees around the LZ with constant shooting and traversing. This proved successful quieting enemy mortar fire.

With the additional strength on the ground, the LZ was expanded outward. The NVA reacted to the reinforcement with renewed efforts for another thirty or so minutes, but within an hour and a half, all that was being received was occasional sniper fire. The situation went quiet for the next hour or so, and the TF consolidated its enlarged holdings and policed the battlefield. At 1700, there was a heavy mortar attack in which about 50 rounds impacted within the LZ. One of the initial rounds landed directly in front of a supply ship that was just lifting off, and the pilot reacted by banking sharply to his right. In so doing, he caught his main rotor in a tree and crashed on the LZ. Aside from minor injuries, all aboard survived and were extracted on a later aircraft. Damage from the mortars was minimal in that most of the troops were no longer on the treeline, but were fifty to 100 meters farther out into the forest on the new perimeter. The remainder of the night passed with an occasional exchange of fire, but mainly without incident. The following morning, units of the 2/35<sup>th</sup> were detached and were flown back to the Brigade base at Oasis.

\*By 1100 hrs, it appeared the enemy had given up trying to overrun the perimeter. He had not withdrawn from the battlefield however, as any careless movement along the line attracted enemy fire. The decision was made to commence reinforcement with the rest of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, which had been standing by at the airstrip at DUO CO. The first lift arrived about noon bringing in the Battalion CO, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Kingston, the S-3, Major Frederick C. Delisle, and C Company commanded by Captain Alvino Cortez. As each lift of aircraft made its approach into the LZ, the entire east side of the perimeter opened up with full automatic fire, paying particular attention to the trees from which the helicopter crewman had reported receiving fire. This tactic was evidently successful as no further aircraft were downed by small arms fire.\* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)

\*Approaching my nineteenth birthday, I found myself carrying a radio for a Forward Observer for the 4.2 inch Mortar platoon. His name was Kreil and he was from Wisconsin or Minnesota or some other upper Midwest state. We were both attached to Charlie Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry which was conducting "search and destroy" missions somewhere in, or near, the Ia Drang Valley. We had been happily finding very little in the way of enemy activity in the area in which we were operating for the previous week or so and were content to patrol and search under these conditions interminably. Of course, this was not to be the case.

**\*During a patrol on the May 28, the headquarters element was called together and told to be ready for immediate extraction by helicopter. At the same time, we were told that Bravo Company was heavily engaged with an enemy force. The transport Huey's arrived soon thereafter, and we scrambled onto them, knowing that we were going into a fight somewhere. We flew into Duc Co, a Special Forces CIDG camp somewhere west of Pleiku and near the Cambodian border. On the ground was an assembly of helicopters such I had not yet seen during my tour of duty in country. I didn't count them but there must have been almost a hundred "choppers" sitting in a huge field adjacent to the SF camp. Some had their rotors spinning, some did not. There were transports, gunships and light observation helicopters (loaches).**

**\*Charlie Company was formed up into "sticks" or seven man groups and assigned to waiting helicopters. The one on which I was placed was not on, and it felt peculiar to be sitting in a Huey, in full battle dress, which was not even turned on. While we waited I tuned my AN/PRC25 backpack radio onto Bravo Company's command frequency. There was much anxious chatter and the sounds of small arms and explosions could be heard in the background. I let anyone who wanted to listen do so in turn and then tuned the radio to Alfa Company's frequency, only to discover that Alfa had already joined the fight. Again, there was a charge of anxiety in the transmissions and the sound of many weapons in the background. We began to wonder aloud why we were just sitting there in that field. We wanted to go in and help our Battalion. Eventually, the knots of pilots surrounding the field broke up and, at a trot, they made their way to the ships. We watched our pilots strap in and prepare for flight with a little anxiety of our own.**

**\*Once airborne, I was awed by the sight of so many helicopters filling the sky all around me. They flew in formations of from three to six ships, and the formations were in every direction I looked. Far below us Huey Gun ships (hogs) weaved just above the triple canopied jungle. In every ship I could see groups of soldiers in full combat gear, their weapons at the ready and their legs dangling from the cargo holds in anticipation of a quick exit. In the distance I saw plumes of thick gray and black smoke rising from the earth. I knew that was our destination, Landing Zone 10 ALFA. We were ten minutes out.**

**\*As we approached the battle, I could see the orange flashes of explosions occurring in the forest surrounding the LZ. It seemed mostly on the south and west perimeters. We watched as several A1E Skyraider propeller driven attack planes swooped low over the wood line and dropped tumbling canisters of napalm, which boiled explosively through the forest. Someone nudged me and pointed. Far below and to our left a Huey Hog was making a run on an enemy position. But something was wrong. Enemy ground fire had evidently caught right side rocket pods on fire and the crew chief, a very tiny figure from our viewpoint, was leaning out of the burning chopper with an even tinier fire extinguisher trying to put out the rapidly growing blaze. We watched in horror as the alloyed metals in the skin of the chopper itself became engulfed in flame. It was almost comical to watch that hapless crew chief and his valiant but futile effort to extinguish that blazing inferno with his completely ineffectual little fire extinguisher. The blazing helicopter continued to lose altitude and flared for a landing in 10 ALFA. We watched as three crew members raced from the brightly burning ship. One hesitated and returned to the ship. Apparently one of the pilot's doors was jammed. The heroic crew member was able to free the jam and soon we saw all four crew members scrambling for safety.**

**\*We were on final approach, just meters above the barren treetops on the east end of the LZ. Hearts in our throats; we could feel the occasional "tug" of a bullet hitting the aircraft. The explosions on the ground were audible as well as the staccato rhythm of various automatic**

weapons. We edged closer to the doors to make a hasty exit when, all of a sudden, the pilots poured on the coal streaking across the LZ at sixty feet and climbing. The concern was the violently burning gunship in the LZ. Her fuel tanks had not yet exploded, and no one wanted to risk more choppers on the ground in close proximity. We circled and approached twice more, each time feeling "hits" on our birds. The third time we came in hot and low, the helicopters hovering three feet off the ground for the few seconds that it took to disgorge the passengers, then dropped their noses and took off like bats out of hell.

\*I found myself lying in muck about twenty meters from the burning chopper. The M-60 machine guns abandoned by the burning chopper's door gunners were so hot that rounds were being "cooked" off, and I could see tracers hitting the ground and bouncing over my head. I had to wait a few moments for all the helicopters to clear the LZ before I could retreat from the burning one. Once the choppers were clear, I began to make my way across the LZ toward the sound of the fighting. The LZ was a virtual swamp. I hunkered low because there was much small arms fire from the east and occasionally a spray of water erupted where a bullet hit. It was very tough going, my boots were sucked in by the mud over my ankles, and it required quite an effort to pull each step free. Ahead of me was a hole from which two guys were looking out, and I scrambled into the position with them. I was immediately immersed in muddy water to my waist. I didn't recognize either guy. They must have been from either Bravo or Alfa Company. I thought they might have been part of the downed chopper crew, but they had rifles and were wearing steel pots, not flight helmets. I still don't know what they were doing in that hole in the middle of the LZ.

\*I knew I had to rejoin Charlie Company, so I left the hole and half ran, half crawled to the tree line beyond which all the heavy fighting was taking place. I saw a stack of crates and hunkered behind them to catch my breath and prepare to enter the fighting. I glanced over my shoulder at the burning helicopter. Inexplicably, it still had not blown, even though it was thoroughly embroiled in flames. I turned my head and the stenciling on the side of the crates caught my attention. Grenades! I knew I couldn't stay here, so I moved into the tree line looking for someone familiar. I wasn't twenty feet from the grenade cache when the downed helicopter finally blew. It exploded in a tremendous ball of fire that rose hundreds of feet in the air. Someone came running by yelling that Charlie Company was to assemble on the opposite side of the LZ. Soon droves of infantry began making their way across the open LZ, slogging through the mud as quickly as they could. Sniper bullets whined through the air as we went. Near the opposite wood line the new battalion commander was directing traffic, inserting units where he wanted them inside the tree line. I thought it remarkable that he would expose himself to enemy sniper fire in such a manner. We went into the tree line and found abandoned enemy fortifications, which we occupied facing outward against a possible attack. We were shifted right and left a few times to ensure maximum perimeter coverage. During this time an occasional sniper bullet would come snapping through the tree branches reminding us that the area was extremely dangerous.

\*On the other side of the LZ, perhaps three hundred meters distant, the battle still raged. Artillery and aircraft continued to bombard suspected enemy positions and through the sound of explosions we could hear great volumes of automatic weapons fire, both U.S. and North Vietnamese. It seemed only a matter of time before we were involved on this side of the LZ. It was getting toward dusk, and we had to hurriedly prepare our positions to withstand any assaults that might be made by the enemy during the coming darkness. The rifle squads worked out their intricate networks of fields of fire and communications were established among the line of positions.\* (Michael Kellermeyer, HHC/1/35)

**\*The build-up continued rapidly with little enemy opposition until about 1400hrs. when the LZ was hit with a mortar attack. Four helicopters were unloading at the time and immediately took off. One of the helicopters flew directly over one of the exploding mortar rounds and settled directly back into the LZ. The other three escaped. Before the last enemy round had detonated, the mortars in the LZ began firing counter battery fire. A radio telephone operator on the east aide of the perimeter had heard the enemy mortar fire and quickly adjusted Alfa Co.'s mortars into the area. Following this incident the remaining resupply was done on the fly with individual aircraft touching down for only a few seconds at a time.**

**\*At 1300hrs. Bravo Co, 1<sup>st</sup> Bn, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry commanded by Captain Timothy J Crotty had been lifted into LZ 10B, about 2.5 kilometers northwest of LZ 10A. Their landing was unopposed, and the company patrolled southeast, joining the battalion in LZ 10A. about 1600hrs. As they moved into their sector of the perimeter, the enemy launched his last and most damaging mortar attack. This attack of approximately 18 to 20 rounds was not directed against the LZ, but against the perimeter, which, due to the increased forces in the LZ, was now located about 50 meters into the wood line from the edge of the LZ. The mortars impacted directly on the battered 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon of Alfa Co. causing some 15 casualties, six of which were serious enough to warrant immediate evacuation.\* (Capt Bisantz, A/1/35)**

**\*When darkness fell, the sounds of the battle across the LZ died down except for the occasional staccato bark of an enemy AK-47 or the heavier ripping sound of a friendly M-60 machine gun's reply. We heard voices calling out ,but at that distance we couldn't tell what was being yelled or who was doing the yelling. The entire night was a series of ghostly shadows cast by overhead flares and bursts of automatic weapons fire where NVA troops were probing the perimeter. No enemy activity took place on our side of the LZ that I can remember.**



**\*When dawn broke the battle seemed to be over. On the far side of the LZ Alfa and Bravo companies were running sweeps outside the perimeter to ascertain enemy intentions and casualties. My FO and I were assigned to a five man squad that was going to patrol out to the opposite side of the LZ. We thought seven guys was a bit few in light of the obvious numerical strength of the NVA on the previous day but orders were orders so off we trudged, cautious and alert. About two hundred meters north of the LZ the forest gave way to an large field of elephant grass about as high as our eyes. We began moving through the field to enter more forest on the other side. About fifty meters into the grass we encountered a huge swath of trampled grass. It measured about ten meters wide and wound away around the woods that surrounded 10 ALFA. The grass had been trampled by a large number of NVA troops moving through the area in great haste. The grass had been only recently trampled, perhaps during the night, but we couldn't tell if it was a retreat from the battle or reinforcements arriving. We continued our designated patrol route without further incident until we had nearly arrived back at the LZ. As we entered the woods that surrounded the north side of 10 ALFA, we paused in a thicket in order to communicate with the perimeter that we were about to return through our lines. One of the rifleman spotted movement to our left and we hunkered down into the thicket to observe. Walking toward our concealed position was a solitary NVA soldier, AK-47 at the ready. Although he was exhibiting stealth in his movements, his concentration was obviously**

on the activities taking place several hundred meters away within the LZ. (Helicopters were coming and going). We watched to see if he was the scout for a larger force, but saw no other movement in the forest. He crept to within five meters of our position when several riflemen in the squad opened fire, killing him instantly. We hastily called in our location and situation lest the perimeter force get trigger happy and begin reconning by fire. No fire came our way, and we made our way back into 10 ALFA.\* (Michael Kellermeyer, HHC,1/35)

\*After things had calmed down we proceeded to tend our wounded and gather up our KIA's. As we walked around, I remember seeing 3<sup>rd</sup>Plt Sgt Williams, lying there on his back, waiting for his turn to be Medevaced. He asked for a drink of water. I couldn't get my canteen out fast enough. I felt as though I couldn't do enough for him. I left my canteen with him as I walked away towards the perimeter. Plt Leader, Lt. Connor was lying next to him with a wound to his head and abdomen. He was talking to someone . . . his RTO I think. Maybe it was our Medic. There were others that I've since forgotten.

\*What was left of 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon was assigned to do the "body count" because we had no NCO's and/or leadership. Out of a 42-man platoon that arrived at 10 ALFA on the evening of May 28<sup>th</sup>, we were left with 11 men on the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup>, and our ranking soldier was an E-4. We had no M-60's, no grenade launchers, no radio, and some of us were still holding onto AK's. Because of our weakened strength, and the total lack of platoon leadership, 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon didn't have to be on the perimeter the night of the 29<sup>th</sup>. The next day the replacements arrived along with new weapons. Eleven days later, we walked away from 10 ALFA.\* (Richard Hunter, 3:A/1/35)

\*After the fighting ceased, tales were told and re-told - some grew in the telling. Five that I recall were:

A company of the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry walked into the LZ prior to the battle and saw nothing. They were then extracted by helicopter prior to B Co., 2/35<sup>th</sup>'s arrival.

Only one chopper was able to initially land B company troops within the LZ, the remainder being driven off by at least five enemy anti-aircraft guns.

The seven soldiers of B Company stranded on the ground valiantly knocked out enough of the anti-aircraft positions to allow further insertions of troops.

The errant napalm bomb dropped by the A1E Skyraider killed or wounded over 40 B Company troops, mostly the headquarters element.

When Alfa company arrived to reinforce a beleaguered Bravo company, the enemy was getting an upper hand until Alfa's Company Commander, Captain "Mad" Anthony Bisantz stood in front of his troops, cigar clenched in his mouth and blazing M-16s in either hand, rallied and inspired his men to counter attack effectively. In a recent exchange with Captain Bisantz, he pooh-poohed the incident and gave credit to his NCOs and "fine' troops. I don't care what he says, I like to think of him standing defiantly in the face of the enemy, guns blazing from the hips, cigar stub clenched tightly in his teeth.

The sweeps along the south perimeter of 10 ALFA conducted on May 29<sup>th</sup> produced an enemy body count nearing 600.\* (Michael Kellermeyer, HHC. 1/35)

\*I was the Recon Platoon Sergeant for HHC/1-35. Recon was choppered in the morning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> day. Right after we got into the LZ, the NVA fired a RPG at a "Dustoff" that was coming in

to pick up wounded. It crashed right in the middle of the LZ killing everyone on board. One of my machine gunners began firing at a NVA running back into the treeline with a RPG launcher in his hand. He cut the NVA to ribbons with the M-60. Recon then got ready to make a perimeter sweep and eliminate the snipers. Two squads from A 1/35 went with us. After leaving the perimeter, we sent 2 squads forward and 1 squad on each flank to prevent a surprise ambush. As we moved thru the trees, the point man came under fire from a sniper. He wasn't hit but the sniper only missed by an inch. I immediately brought my sniper up and we tried to locate the sniper. My Lt. was using the spotter scope and finally located him in a tall tree about 50 meters in front of us. Our sniper was using a .308 Winchester bolt action sniper rifle, and he began firing where the Lt. had pointed to. We heard a muffled scream and the NVA sniper suddenly dropped down out of the tree and began trying to run. His upper torso was covered in blood, and he kept falling while he was trying to run. One squad took him under fire and he went down and tried to get up on his knees. Someone fired an M-79 at him and it landed right in front of him. End of sniper.

\*We began moving again and about 15 minutes later I got a call on the radio from the squad on the right flank. They had seen movement and heard NVA talking to their front. I told them to sit tight until we could get there as there was only 4 or 5 them out there. When we got to their location the squad leader said they had heard sounds like the NVA were setting up mortars. Myself and one squad moved forward and located the NVA by a big bunch of boulders. There was about 25 or 30 of them, and they were setting up 2 heavy mortars and bringing mortar ammo down a small trail from the East. I called for the Lt. to come up to my position. When he got there we both agreed that we should call for helicopter gunships before we engaged them. Recon was famous for calling for gunships to avoid casualties.

\*Battalion headquarters told us to hold tight, they would get some gunships to us. After about 10 minutes we could hear the choppers coming, and Bn called me and asked if we could pop smoke where we wanted the gunships to unload. I told them we were not close enough to throw a smoke grenade that far. As you know, every platoon has a clown and Recon was no exception. My clown was a machine gunner in the 2nd squad. He said: "Sarge, ain't no problem getting close enough to throw the smoke grenade. I'll go throw it." Before I could say no, he grabbed a smoke grenade off my web gear and headed off at a low crawl towards the NVA position. I couldn't yell at him because the NVA would hear me. We all just laid there and prayed for him. All of a sudden the NVA began shouting and hollering and here comes the clown running 90 miles an hour towards us. He got back to us, and the Lt. got on the radio and told the chopper pilots to unload on the smoke. Did they ever unload on them. 2.8 inch rockets were coming in like rain on the NVA. Door gunners were firing from all 4 choppers, and bullets were landing everywhere where the NVA were.

\*We kept hearing secondary explosions after the choppers fired the rockets, and we knew that was the mortar rounds going off. After the choppers left we moved in and assaulted the position. There were only about 7 or 8 NVA that weren't killed or wounded in the chopper assault. They didn't put up much a fight, and we eliminated them in about 10 minutes. After it was over we made a search of the area and found over 200 rounds of mortar ammunition stacked very neatly in a little clearing in the trees about 50 meters from the mortar positions. There were about 20 NVA killed and numerous blood trails. We followed several of the blood trails but never found the ones who left them.

\*When we returned to the LZ the NVA had stopped their assault and Battalion said they had turned tail and ran. We took a demolition man back out to where the mortar ammo was and he rigged it with C-4. When it went off the whole sky lit up, and everyone started cheering in the

LZ. Bn said that was the heavy mortars the NVA had been moving to different locations around the perimeter the day before and giving our guys hell.

\*Recon wasn't in the LZ the first day of the assault on the LZ but we were glad we were there the 2<sup>nd</sup> day to help those brave guys from 2/35 and A/1/35. They really gave an account of themselves. I later heard the body count was over 400 NVA killed and estimated 200 wounded by the troops and combined air strikes. Gave "Charlie" some second thoughts about messing with the "Cacti".

\*They used the battle of 10 ALFA as a training aid at the Ranger School in Ft. Benning to show Ranger candidates how a small force of infantrymen can defend a small landing zone against a much superior enemy force with minimum casualties. I went back to Ft. Benning in '68 as an instructor at the Ranger School and helped set up the mock landing zone for training troops.\* (Recon Platoon Sgt Charles "Chuck" Norris, HHC,1/35)

\*Thus ended the Battle of 10 ALFA which "drew the strategic gaze increasingly toward the possibilities of the troubled zone short of the Cambodian border." (S.L.A. Marshall, Battles in the Monsoon).

#### FINAL FOOTNOTE

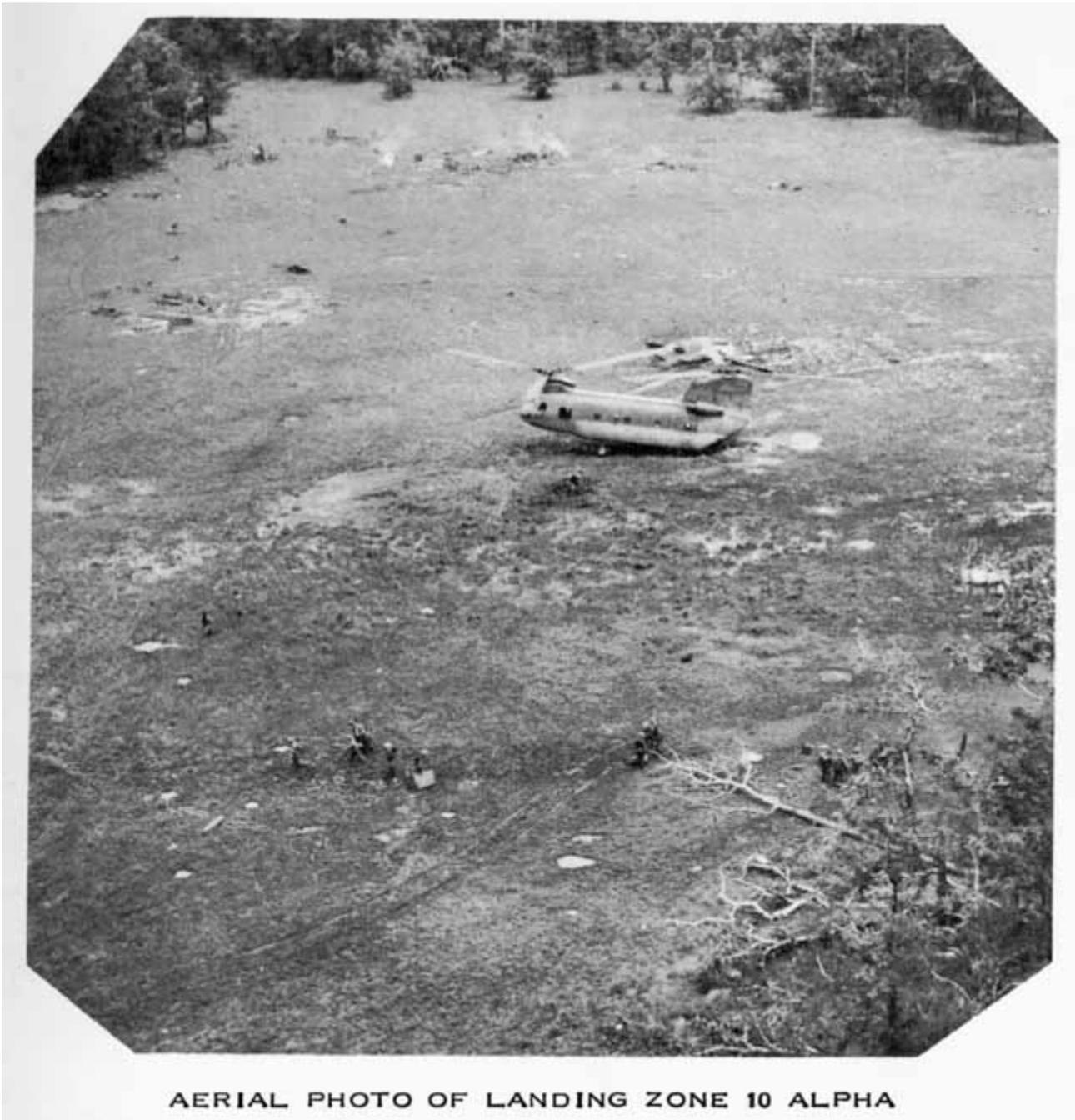
\*I came to later at the hospital in Qui Nhon just before surgery. It was cold; I was shivering; and the next thing I knew, it was over. But, it had really just started for those of us who survived. Today, almost 36 years later, I feel like I died and was born at that clearing at the base of the Chu Pong Massif, southwest of Pleiku.\* (Larry Conner, Plt Ldr, 3:A/1/35)

\*A lot of good men died at 10 ALFA ..on both sides.\* (Richard Hunter, 3:A/1/35)

#### SUMMARY

Casualties for the Task Force amounted to sixteen killed and eighty-eight wounded, almost thirty-nine percent of its total strength. For the 66<sup>th</sup> NVA Regiment, 241 bodies were found in the forest around the original perimeter, and information was received that on 02 Jun, an NVA unit had passed through a Montagnard border village with walking wounded and carrying over 100 litter cases. The most glaring tactical errors made by the PAVN Commander was that he committed his forces piece-meal and did not wait until his returning units were of sufficient numbers to concentrate and break the defensive perimeter. Further, by not involving the full defensive circle, he did not challenge the movement of men and ammunition within the position used to shore up threatened portions of the line. Headquarters, IFFV did not show the 66<sup>th</sup> NVA on the list of enemy units "in country" again until after the first of 1967.

\*The NVA tactics, both at night and during the day, remained consistent in their inflexibility. Each assault came over the same ground and from the same direction as the previous one. This cost him dearly during the daylight phase of the attack as the defenders were able to "draw down" on the west side of the perimeter to reinforce the east side. This was a calculated risk on the part of the TF commander which met with success. A single limited attack from the west would have put a severe strain on the defensive line and probably required a major reshuffling of forces within the perimeter.



AERIAL PHOTO OF LANDING ZONE 10 ALPHA

**\*The firing battery in support of TF TYSON was located to the east almost 12 kilometers away which is the approximate maximum range of the 105 howitzer. As the enemy was attacking from the east the defensive perimeter was directly on the gun target line along which the greatest dispersion of fire could be expected. This discouraged the adjustment of fire close to the perimeter until the situation became so critical as to warrant the acceptance of friendly casualties from our own supporting fire. In this particular instance no casualties resulted although the artillery was adjusted to within 100 meters of the defensive line.\* (Capt.**

#### **NEWS ACCOUNT - 30 MAY 1966:**

**The "Nashville Tennessean" reported Monday, May 30, 1966, dateline Saigon (AP):**

***"US infantrymen engaged a North Vietnamese force in bloody combat yesterday in the Central Highlands near the Cambodian border, a US spokesman reported. The action, in which 78***

**North Vietnamese regulars were reported killed in a day's fighting, was taking place west of Pleiku, 240 miles northeast of Saigon. It was in this same general area that 10,000 North Vietnamese regulars have been reported by authoritative sources in Saigon to be posted for an attack from Cambodia's Chu Phong Mountains.**

**The Americans involved were troops from the US Army's 25th Division. Their casualties in the fighting since noon Saturday were described by Saigon briefing officers as moderate. The clash topped the day's war news, which for weeks now has been secondary to South Vietnam's political crisis.**

**Informants in Saigon said Saturday the North Vietnamese troops were sitting on the Cambodian side of the border waiting to spring into South Vietnam's Central Highlands during the rainy season. Cambodia, a neutral, has denied it is allowing North Vietnamese troops or the Viet Cong guerrillas to use its territory and did so again today.**

**The report of the informants in Saigon, however, seemed to agree with remarks to newsmen in Washington Friday by Maj Gen Stanley R. Larson, that up to six North Vietnamese regiments were massed in Cambodia. His remarks drew a quick denial from the US Defense Department. It said there were unconfirmed reports of North Vietnamese being in Cambodia but no actual evidence of it. The Saigon informants said their information on the North Vietnamese was based on intelligence reports available to military commanders in South Vietnam. Larson, who is now on leave in Washington, is the commander of US forces in the Central Highlands area. After the Pentagon contradicted his statement in Washington, Larson told newsmen: "I stand corrected."**

**The informants here said the troops in the Cambodian mountains were from North Vietnam's 325th Division which engaged the US 1st Air Cavalry Division last November in the Ia Drang Valley in the Highlands. The new fighting in the Central Highlands was said to be near one of the exit points for the Ho Chi Minh Trail which winds down through Laos and, some say, Cambodia."**



**General Westmoreland inspects one of the Anti-aircraft MG's captured at 10 alfa**



*Gen. Westmoreland congratulates some of the men from Bravo Co 2/35th*

### **PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION**

**\*At Chu Pong Mastif, SW of Pleiku, two rifle companies fought an NVA regiment for an LZ over a two-day period. US losses were 16 KIA, 90 WIA, 6 Huey's destroyed/damaged. NVA losses were 250+ KIA, 8 POW's.**

**\*For their sustained valor, Company A was awarded the coveted Presidential Unit Citation and the Valorous Unit Award. The 1/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry. Bn. was awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry for this engagement. The "Battle of 10 ALFA" was later used at the Army's Infantry School at Ft. Benning as part of their training curriculum.\* (Larry Conner, Plt Ldr, 3:A/1/35)**

**Department of the Army General Order No. 51, dated 27 September 1966, awarded the Presidential Unit Citation to both infantry companies that were in the Task Force "for extraordinary heroism" and "for distinguishing [themselves] by outstanding performance of duty against a numerically superior and heavily armed North Vietnamese Army force in Pleiku Province, Republic of Vietnam, on 28 - 29 May 1966."**