



WELCOME TO "A WALK WITH THE 35TH"



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12 March 1967

March 12 was to be a day like all the previous days. The battalion's companies were scattered around its firebase and were scheduled to conduct search and destroy operations in their assigned AOs. (Area of Operations) Company A was to move into the area of a B-52 strike that had been conducted a few days earlier to assess its results.

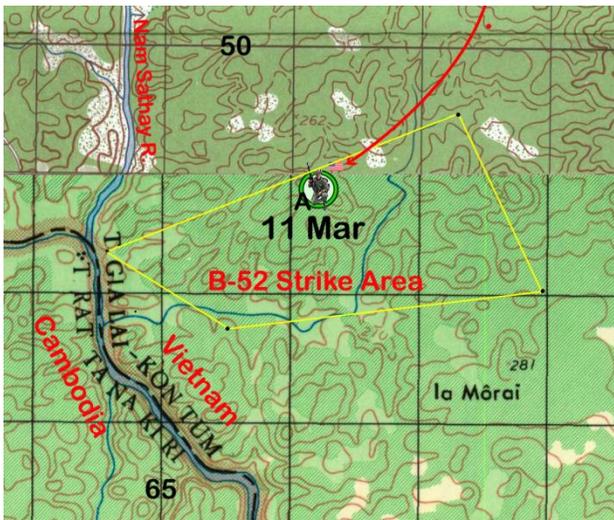


B-52 Stratofortress and aftermath

The following is a compilation of the day's events. Information has been taken from the official after-action report and a number of personal accounts of the men who were there. Rick Rykowski, Company C commander wrote a report outlining Co C's maneuver. MSG Dave Butters, the Battalion Operations Sargent kept his thoughts in his personal journal. And by chance, Robert Pearman, a reporter for the Kansas City Star was at the firebase and interviewed many of the men who had been in the midst of the firefight that ensued. One thing is true in war; the view from each foxhole is different. In times like these a soldier's perception is limited to the few meters that surround him. The view from a few meters in either direction is very different.

Company A, led by Cpt. Barcena, departed its night location YA663489 at 0705 hours 12 March 67 and began sweeping SW on three axis, 1st Platoon on the right, 3rd Platoon in the center, and 2nd Platoon with headquarters section on the left.

(Pearman) Sgt. Joe Towner, Seaside Calif., was pushing the 1st platoon of Alpha Company through the thick jungle growth about a mile from the Nam Sathay River, which at this point separates Cambodia from Vietnam.



Night location of Company A 11 March

(AAR) At approximately 0850 hours 12 March the 1st Platoon observed two NVA without weapons or equipment running down a trail that roughly paralleled A Company's axis of advance. These enemies were killed. Four other enemies were observed and killed and the lead elements deployed into a maximum security formation.

At 0900 hours, the lead elements of the 1st Platoon were engaged by SA and AW fire from well concealed bunkers approximately twenty meters to its front. The 1st Platoon began taking heavy casualties (658486).

(Pearman) *Up ahead on the trail, Filiberto Miranda, the point man saw an enemy soldier, dressed in the uniform of the North Vietnamese army. He called back the word to Sergeant Towner who sent a squad forward. They killed the enemy soldier, but the point man, moving forward to check the body was shot and dropped.*

Boyd Garner, the platoon medic, was a conscientious objector and even refused to carry a weapon. His duty, he thought, was to aid the wounded, not to kill people.

Like many soldiers he had decorated his helmet cover: "Would you believe I'm a medic?" "Don't follow me I'm lost too," it said in the back. "I don't make house calls." "Vietnam No. 10."

When the point man went down Garner rushed forward to help him. A machine gun bullet split the brim of his helmet, struck him between the eyes and killed him.

0915 hours, the first platoon reported three WIAs and requested gunships for support, LTC Granger was over the contact area in his Command and Control (C&C) helicopter a few minutes later. From his position he dropped White Phosphorous (WP) grenades on enemy locations so that the gunships could engage. There had been fighter jets in the area but were forced to withdraw as they were low on fuel. By 0935 contact was sporadic and it was reported that the enemy was trying to withdraw to the west side of the Nam Sathay back into Cambodia. From this area the border was only about a mile from here. The first platoon was pressing the attack when at 0950 it began receiving mortar fire from the west (Cambodian) side of the river.

Counter mortar fires were called in by Pete Dykstra with Company A. C/2/9th Artillery and the mortar sections were directed to possible firing positions on both the west and the east side of the river. By 1030 hours, the first platoon was heavily engaged on all fronts. The decision was made to withdraw about 100 meters and form into a defensive perimeter. This would also allow jet fighters to come in and engage the enemy. By 1030, the estimate that they were faced with a small force was changed to a force larger than a company.



Don Johnson Recon 2/35th photo

Meanwhile, CPT Barcena brought indirect fire from C/2/9th Artillery to bear on the enemy around the first platoon and instructed 2LT Karopczyc to take his platoon, the 3rd Platoon, and maneuver to the right to relieve the 1st Platoon. Due to the heavy vegetation it was approximately 1000 hours before the 3rd Platoon began to close on the area near the 1st Platoon.

At 1005 hours, the lead element of the 3rd Platoon noticed that there were well concealed bunkers about thirty meters to their front. 2LT Karopczyc immediately deployed the 3rd Platoon on line, and shortly afterward, heavy AW fire was received from the bunkers to the front and one flank of the platoon.

Aware of the importance of quickly pushing through to the main enemy force in order to provide relief for a hard-pressed friendly platoon, Karopczyc dashed through the intense enemy fire into the open and hurled colored smoke grenades to designate the foe for attack by helicopter gunships. He moved among his men to embolden their advance, and he guided their attack by marking enemy locations with bursts of fire from his own weapon. His forceful leadership quickened the advance, forced the enemy to retreat, and allowed his unit to close with the main hostile force.



Early contact area

At 1045 hours, continuing the deployment of his platoon, he constantly exposed himself as he ran from man to man to give encouragement and to direct their efforts. A shot from an enemy sniper struck him above the heart but he refused aid for this serious injury, plugging the bleeding wound with his finger until it could be properly dressed.

As the enemy strength mounted, Lt Karopczyc ordered his men to organize a defensive position in and around some abandoned bunkers where he conducted a defense against the increasingly strong enemy attacks. *It was the first time PFC Wendell Meade, another medic, had been under fire. He, too, was a conscientious objector and carried no weapon. He crawled to the Lieutenant's side to try*

to help him. As the darkness gathered over the jungle, Meade, wounded himself now, was trying to help other men.

After several hours, a North Vietnamese soldier hurled a hand grenade to within a few feet of 1st Lt. Karopczyc and 2 other wounded men. *With some last reserve of strength the Lieutenant covered the missile with his steel helmet. The shrapnel from under the helmet struck him in the legs. Shrapnel glanced off the medic's entrenching tool and injured him slightly.* Severely weakened by his multiple wounds, he continued to direct the actions of his men.

At 1055 hours the artillery blocking fires along the river were cut to allow for jet fighters to drop napalm. By 1130 hours the company was split into its three separate platoons. The first platoon had withdrawn and formed into a tight perimeter but was still receiving heavy fire from the NVA positions and was unable to disengage. The third platoon was isolated and under heavy ground fire. The second platoon, along with A Company's headquarters section and a small group from Battalion S-3 section's "Jump CP" group remained to the rear of the first and second platoons, receiving sporadic sniper fire. Lt Dunn, the second platoon leader recalls the actions of SP4 Baez. "I did witness some extraordinary shooting by Sp4 Baez with the M-60 machine gun. Baez had spotted a sniper taking position in a tree about 250 meters northerly of our position and requested my approval to shoot him. I said OK and Baez took him out, firing a single round with his M-60. Amazing."

The "Jump CP" group consisted of MSG Butters and his RTO. Prior to this battle, LTC Granger had instructed MSG Butters to construct what he called a "Jump CP" which was made from a kitchen field stove. Two battalion radios were installed in the top compartments. Two 12 volt jeep batteries were in the lower compartment. Jeep antennas were welded on each side. Whenever a company made contact, LTC Granger would have MSG Butters and one RTO fly out in his Command & Control Huey (Charlie Charlie) to establish ground communications between the company/platoon nets and the battalion TOC back at the fire base. As a result the "Jump CP" was an integral part of every major contact of each rifle company. In many instances this primarily communications group had to put down the radio mike, grab their rifles and fight for their survival. The kitchen stove with its two antennas often drew enemy fire like honey to a bear.

An hour and a half into the battle casualties as reported by Company A stood at six WIA and one KIA.

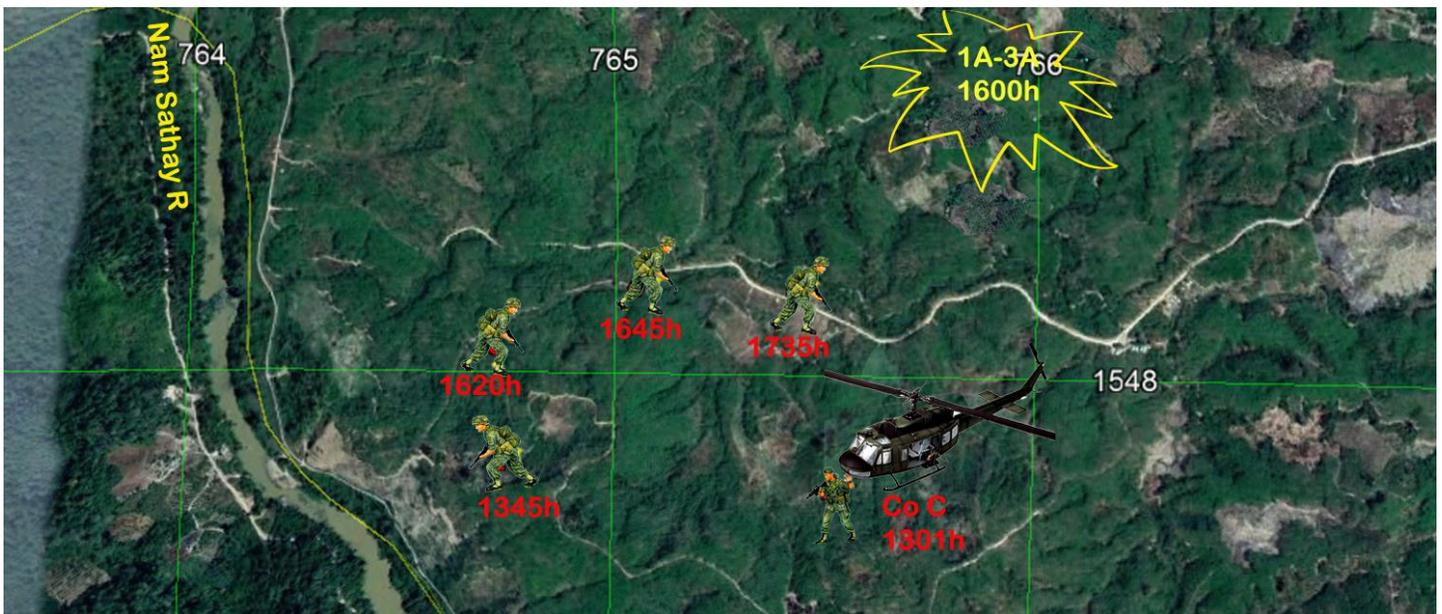
From 1200-1530, the first and third platoons of Company A were still in contact. The second platoon, located some 400 meters to the rear of the third platoon, remained relatively isolated from the main part of the battle. The second was held in-place, providing security for the makeshift LZ and the company HQ section. Elements of the battalion HQ (CO, S-3 & Arty.) also joined them that afternoon. Though they skirmished a bit with what were probably recon elements of the much larger NVA force, they remained fairly isolated from the main part of the battle. Now completely surrounded, both the 1st and 3rd platoons continued to defend their small perimeters valiantly. Everyone was low on ammunition and medical supplies but they continued to hold.

Company C Committed

(Rykowski) C Company received its mission at 1100. "Be prepared to conduct a combat assault in one hour; occupy blocking positions southwest of Company A and on order move to assist Company A."

All platoon leaders (of Company C) were summoned to the CP, and the loading plan for the combat assault was issued. The third platoon would lead the assault. They would be followed by the CP group and the second platoon. The second airlift would consist of the first platoon and headquarters (-). Due to the size of the pickup zone only three helicopters could land at one time. To avoid last minute confusion all aircraft loads were broken down into five man groups and positioned at the expected landing sites.

The battalion commander, LTC Clinton E. Granger Jr., arrived at C Company's location at 1115. He quickly briefed the company commander, Cpt Ronald B Rykowski, on the concept of operation and present situation. Company C would conduct a combat assault south of Company A and move northwest to occupy a blocking position close to the Cambodian Border. After C Company had landed, Company B would conduct a combat assault north of Company A and move southeast to link up with them. On order, Company C would leave the blocking position and move to assist the two companies.



Company C's initial mission was to block on the west, later changed to link with Company A

After the briefing a reconnaissance of the area by air was conducted to select a landing zone. Earlier in the week an air strike had cleared an area approximately 1500 meters south of Company A. This was selected as the landing zone. The Artillery Liaison Officer began to register fires for a fifteen minute preparation prior to the combat assault.

Upon completion of registration the reconnaissance element returned to the assembly area and dropped Captain Rykowski off. He issued his orders to the platoon leaders and oriented them on the landing zone.

Within five minutes the battalion commanders' Command and Control helicopter returned with a Pathfinder team. They surveyed the preplanned arrangements for the pickup, found them satisfactory and prepared to mark the site for the in-bound helicopters.



When they just can't get low enough...

injury, one with a kidney injury and two with ankle injuries.

Tall grass obstructed observation and the lead platoons employed smoke to speed reorganization. The third platoon reorganized and moved to secure the northern edge of the landing zone to provide protection for the Dust Off helicopter. As they moved into position the second airlift arrived. The remainder of the company landed without injuries.

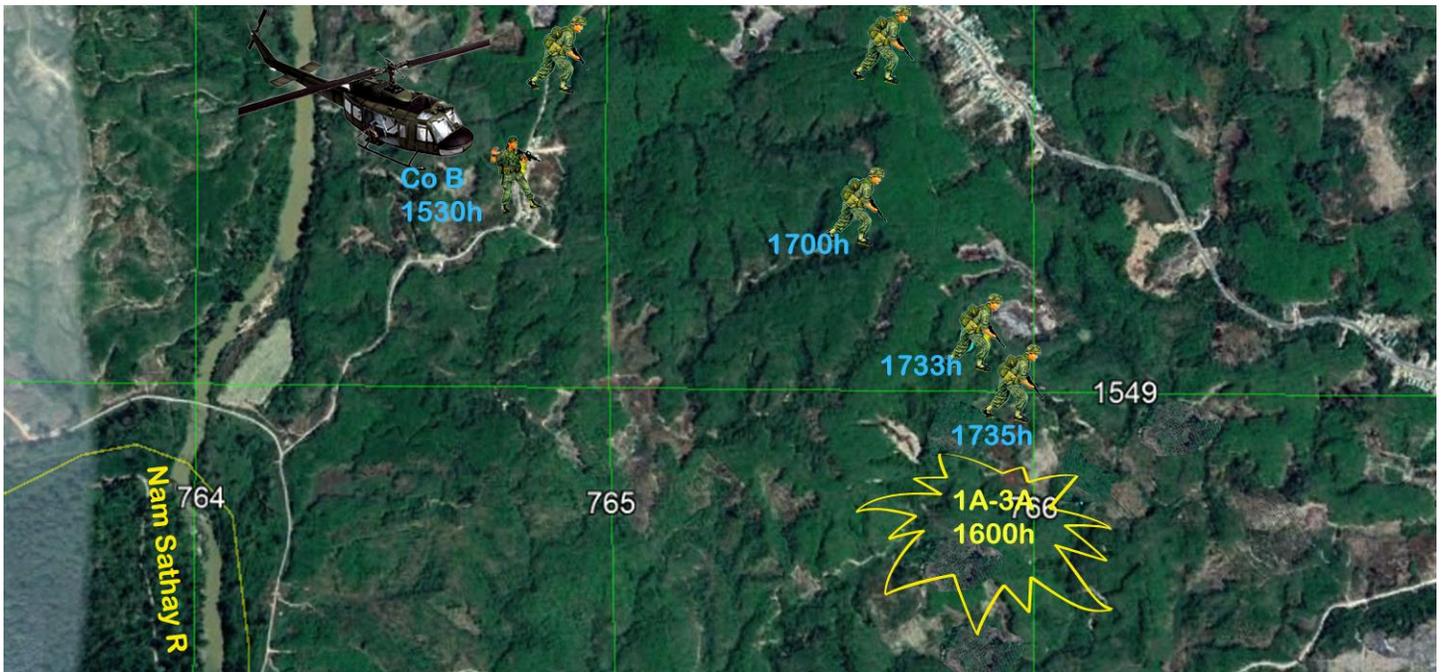
At 1301 the company moved north from the landing zone until it came to a small stream that represented its northern boundary. Here the company changed direction and began to move northwest. Because of the dense undergrowth movement was slow and necessitated moving in single file. To provide some measure of security to the north flank the company traveled close to the stream bank. This provided some observation and limited fields of fire.

At 1345 hours Company C reported its location 648478. At 1530 hours, LTC Granger then ordered the company to move to 648482 and attack to the east in an effort to link up with Company A. Daily journal spot locations over the next few hours saw the company move to 648480 at 1620 hours; to 651482 at 1645 hours; to 655482 at 1735 Hours; and then to 659484 at 1818 hours.

At 1200 the company began the airlift. The first three helicopters picked up the lead elements from the third platoon and moved to an on-station position. The artillery preparation began while the remaining aircraft's in the first lift completed loading. At 1215 the lead helicopters headed into the landing zone at YA655477.

Although the air strike, (the previous B-52 strike) cleared most of the tall trees, stumps almost eight feet high, dotted the landing zone causing the aircraft to hover while unloading. Due to the height several men were seriously injured. Dust Off was immediately requested. Four men were injured in the first lift; one head

Company B Committed



Company B CAed into the area north and west of Company A

(Brauer) 1LT Vaughn Brauer was the XO for Bravo Company when on the 8th or 9th of of Mrch Cpt. Walker went on R&R. When A Company was sent south to check out the B-52, strike Bravo Company assumed firebase security. When A Company was hit and C co had been deployed, Bravo was ordered to get ready to CA into an LZ west the contact area.

The choppers picked up the company at 1350 hours but needed to stop to refuel. During this time a call came in from battalion that the LZ location had been changed. Having no time to recon or pre-plan deployment, 1 Lt Brauer informed his platoon leaders to form up in the tree line. At 1530 hours Company B closed at the LZ location vic YA 649501 and began moving SE.

The LZ was just south of a ridge line which ran east and then curved to the south. It wasn't a high ridge and the farther it went east and south, the lower it got. East and south of the LZ was an old slash and burn area. Tree stumps were about three feet high and the brush had re-grown to about 3-4 foot tall.

We formed up and headed in the direction of A Co. We were travelling along the NW edge of the slash & burn area with a thin tree line to our left. The tree covered ridge line was farther to our left and we could see it in front of us as it curved south.

The first place I differ with the AAR concerns the sniper. We did not receive any sniper fire. We had no contact until the lead platoon received AW fire. As we were moving along the edge of the burn area, I happened to look down and saw commo wire on the ground. It was coming from the direction of the LZ and was heading directly toward the high ground in front of us. I immediately notified the 3rd Plt Leader but, before he had time to react, the point squad came under fire. Company B was traveling in columns of platoons for speed and control, with the 3rd Platoon in the lead.

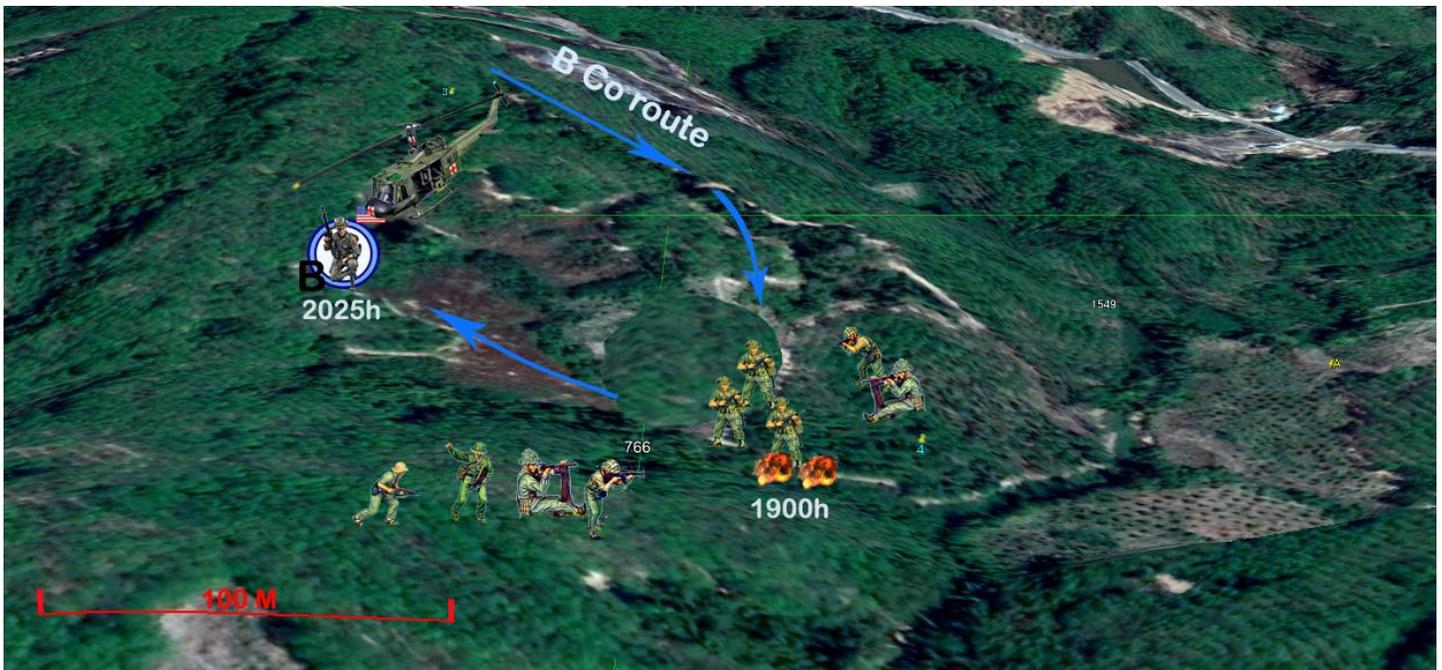
At 1800 hours the point of the lead element began to receive heavy AW fire from well concealed bunkers 25 - 30 meters to its front (661488). The 3rd Platoon took heavy casualties in the initial engagement from well directed enemy 82mm mortars and automatic weapons.

1LT Vaughn Brauer, acting CO of Company B, immediately maneuvered the 1st Platoon to the right and the 2nd Platoon to the left in an attempt to flank the NVA positions and disengage the lead elements. At 1830 hours the 1st Platoon received heavy SA and AW fire and was forced to halt; also, at 1840 hours the 2d Platoon reported that it was receiving heavy SA fire and also could not advance.

By 1905 hours, Company B reported that it was surrounded and taking casualties from indirect fire.

From 1915 hours to 1930 hours, the three platoons exchanged fire, directed indirect fire, and began to receive mortar fire. The 82mm rounds that Company B received appear to have been preplanned concentrations. The 1st Platoon received heavy casualties from the mortar rounds. 1LT Brauer, realizing that the NVA position was larger than previously estimated, requested permission, and began to disengage the company.

The 1st and 2d Platoons and the company headquarters section withdrew 100 meters and set up a perimeter. They treated their wounded, and sent back a party to help the 3rd Platoon evacuate the wounded. The 2d Squad, 2d Platoon returned to the 3d Platoon position and assisted in evacuating the wounded under intense enemy fire.



Bravo Company contact area

An LZ for wounded was set up at 659489 and the first four WIAs were extracted at 2051 hours. With the aid of the 2nd squad, eight more WIAs were brought into the extraction LZ, four of whom were extracted at 2134 hours. At 2225 hours Company B reported they still had ten WIAs and six MIAs. The helicopter medical evacuation pilot, "DUSTOFF 24", made five extractions. The dustoff choppers came in when it was pitch dark. Because of the stumps in the area the wounded had to be lifted into the choppers because that could only hover above the stumps. At 2324 hours, all wounded had been removed from the company's LZ. Company B then consolidated and continued to develop defenses for the night.

The NVA had successfully isolated Company B. The company was now tied to its dead and wounded. The casualty count at night's end stood at 22 WIA, six MIA and one KIA.

On the next morning before dawn Company B began the task of locating its previous day's MIAs. They headed straight north and got on the ridge line and followed it as it went to the SE. As they got

to the area where contact was made, a series of foxhole and bunkers were discovered running right down the spine of the ridge line. They had all been abandoned by then.

An NVA was found in a partially filled in foxhole. From his appearance and uniform, he didn't look like the rest of the bodies so he was sent back. Whether he was Chinese or not, I don't know.

By just after mid-day on the 13th, Company B had sent in all of its casualties and began moving toward Company A; closing with them at 1700 hours.

Company A

Rykowski) At 1600 hours, the third platoon of Company A, separated, pinned down and running low on ammunition sent an eight man squad to the second platoon to secure additional ammunition. This squad, together with five men from the second platoon and one from the headquarters element, started their return to the platoon at 1630. The squad of fourteen men had closed to within 150 meters of the third platoon's position when they received mortar, automatic weapons and small arms fire from an NVA force that was attempting to flank the third platoon. They were pinned down by the heavy fire. Eight men became casualties, and the squad was separated into two elements.

Of the eight casualties three were KIA. Andrew Castelda from the third platoon had volunteered to go to the second platoon's location to bring back ammo and act as a guide for the return trip. James Perrone had volunteered from the second platoon. Danny Rhoads was the RTO for Company A's CP group. For a time prior to this day's fight he had been MSG Butters' RTO, where his job was to maintain communications for the battalion. MSG Butters begged him not to go but Danny would have none of it. MSG Butters: "Danny was the man from Company A's headquarters that volunteered to load up with as much as they could carry and run the resupply to the other platoons. I pleaded with Danny not to go. His job was Company Headquarters' RTO. Danny replied, "Those are my buddies dying out there. I'm a sonofabitch if I will let them be without the stuff to fight back." The entire squad of volunteers remained pinned down until Company C finally linked up with them in the middle of the night.

Company C

Company C continued its advance from the southwest, but it was seriously hampered by fallen trees knocked down by the heavy artillery and air strikes. When Company B began to become engaged, Company C halted to see if they would be directed to B's location. Company C was less than eight hundred meters from B Company and could move to their assistance. He called the battalion and requested instructions. LTC Granger directed the company to continue towards A Company since they were still surrounded and in contact.

Due to the close proximity of the enemy, the company moved out with two platoons abreast. Proceeding cautiously, because of fading visibility and imminent contact, the company had difficulty in maintaining contact in the dense underbrush. Frequent halts were necessary to allow the platoons to cross obstacles and maintain contact. Preceding under these conditions the company covered less than five hundred meters before all light disappeared.

Cpt. Rykowski halted the company and contacted A Company. He requested that their third platoon come up on his net to assist in guiding the company to their location. Company A responded immediately and the third platoon entered Company C's net. They were directed to fire three shots on order to assist in guiding the lead elements to their location. The Company Commander then called the second and third platoon leaders forward and informed them of the method to be used in guiding on Company A's third platoon.



Captured NVA sniper rifle. Art Johnson A/2/35 photo

To increase security to the flanks Cpt. Rykowski directed the second platoon to lead out. To gain maximum security on the southern flank the company moved along the edge of a steep hill. Within four hundred meters the draw on the south flank turned sharply to the north and headed directly into the main enemy positions. The second platoon halted and relayed the information back to the commanding officer.

Moving up to the second platoon location, he directed the platoon leader, Lt Rutledge, to send a squad down the slope and look for a crossing site that would speed movement and provide a degree of security. Within fifteen minutes the squad returned and gave its report. It was almost one hundred meters to the bottom of the slope. The bottom of the draw was almost ten feet wide, with the opposite bank rising steeply. The squad had found a crossing site less than twenty meters up the draw.

Rutledge's second platoon was ordered to move down the slope, secure the crossing site, post guides and secure the opposite bank. The platoon moved out at 1915 and had accomplished its mission by 2000. The first platoon was then ordered to move up, cover the crossing of the third platoon and headquarters element and cross on order. The third platoon and headquarters element closed on the second platoon at 2045, and the first platoon was ordered to cross the draw.



Charlie Company Advance

The lead element of the first platoon closed on the company (-), but a break in the platoon caused a further delay. After fifteen minutes the missing element was located and preceded towards the company. They were assisted by the security element from the second platoon. While waiting for the lost element to rejoin the company the second and third platoons were placed in columns.

Once the first platoon had closed, Company A's third platoon was called and requested to mark their location. From the sound of their fire the platoon was located less than three hundred meters away. The company moved forward on a forty-five degree azimuth.

At 2210 Lt. Rutledge, leading the second platoon on the right flank, called back that he could see several bodies to his front. The company halted and took up defensive positions while Lt. Rutledge moved forward. Before he could cover five meters an enemy automatic weapon opened fire on Lt Rutledge's element.

"Hold Fire", yelled the Company Commander. He immediately called the third platoon of Company A and the fourteen man element to determine their location from the enemy automatic weapon.

The third platoon was located some 150 meters northwest of the enemy position. The fourteen man squad reported they were pinned down by the enemy position and were less than twenty meters to the east. Lt Rutledge called back to report that he was cut off from his platoon and was pinned down by the enemy fire.



Captured NVA Gear. Note round cylinder in the center is the magazine for an NVA machine gun, holds 100 rounds, all armor piercing and tracer rounds. Art Johnson A/2/35th photo

Lt Alvarado, the third platoon leader, was directed to take the enemy position under fire. As the lead elements of the third platoon opened fire the enemy detonated several claymore mines. The enemy opened fire along the entire front of the company. Lt Alvarado, called back and reported that he had become pinned down by the heavy fire.

Moving forward to survey the situation, the Company Commander placed the left flank of the company into position to prevent the enemy from flanking them. Upon reaching Lt. Alvarado's position, he called the first platoon and told them to close the rear of the company and tie in with the second and third platoon.

Lt. Rutledge was requested to mark his location. When the enemy heard the calling, they opened fire with machine guns. The incoming fire split the second and third platoons and effectively pinned down the second platoon. Locating the enemy position, the Commanding Officer moved to his left and secured an M-60 machine gun.

Returning to his original position he again called out to draw the enemy fire. When the automatic weapon opened fire, he moved forward firing short bursts. His third burst destroyed the enemy position. Before he could direct his fire against another enemy position, a bullet struck the M-60 rendering it useless.

Returning to the perimeter, he then directed the second platoon into position. He had them lay down a base of fire to cover Lt. Rutledge's element move back into the perimeter. Lt. Rutledge informed the Commanding Officer that several seriously wounded men were located about fifteen meters to the right of his platoon. He was directed to expand the perimeter in the direction of the wounded personnel from the fourteen man element from A Company.

Lt. Alvarado was directed to maneuver his platoon to the left. As the third platoon moved forward the NVA detonated several more claymore mines. Snipers, in the trees to their front, opened fire on the third platoon. Enemy grenades fell among them and wounded five men. Realizing that he was opposed by a larger force than earlier estimated, the Commanding Officer ordered the third platoon to fall back.

At 2300 Lt Rutledge led several volunteers out of the perimeter to assist the wounded men from A Company's composite squad. Their movement drew immediate fire. Lt Rutledge crawled forward to the more seriously wounded and administered Morphine. He then began the slow task of pulling them back into the perimeter.

The Pathfinder team accompanying C Company immediately began to cut an opening in the thick jungle for use by Dust Off. This action drew fire from the front and left flank of the company. Indirect fire was called in. It was used throughout the night to suppress the enemy sniper fire.

At 0115 the first platoon was directed to move from its present location, pass through the second platoon and link up with A Company's third platoon. Direct coordination was made between the two platoons. They agreed on a whistle signal to identify and locate one another. The first platoon passed through the second platoon at 0150 and moved toward Company A's third platoon.

As the first platoon approached the element from A Company they gave the prearranged signal. Some forty answers were received from around the surrounded platoon's positions This information was quickly relayed back to the Company Commander. Realizing that any attempt at a link up would undoubtedly result in heavy casualties, and knowing that the surrounded platoon was not receiving fire at the time, he ordered the first platoon to return.



Cpt Rykowski C Co (hat) discusses the previous night's fight with Cpt Barcena A Co

C Company's location for extraction.

The situation was relayed to the battalion CP and a request was made to hold C Company in its present location until first light, at which time a platoon would be left behind to secure the landing zone. The company minus would then move to link up with the third platoon of A Company. LTC Granger approved the request and the company dug in for the night.

At 0530, the company received several rounds of mortar fire, and the NVA broke contact.

As first light approached, C Company moved out of the perimeter and headed for the third platoon of A Company. Contact was established by 0630. Casualties were treated and evacuated to

Capt. Ron Rykowski, a former enlisted man highly decorated in Korean combat, is a gaunt, tall, hook-nosed soldier, with incongruous scholarly heavy-rimmed eyeglasses. Without his glasses he is handicapped and his glasses were lost somewhere in the combat in the jungle.

Colonel Granger says that all of his company commanders are different. Rykowski is the hell for leather leader. Now he led his company through the dark jungle toward the trapped men of A company.

On the ground surrounded by North Vietnamese, Day did not know if he would survive the night. He heard someone coming, but he didn't know who. Then a few feet away an AK-47 fired a long burst and he heard Capt. Rykowski's voice. "Shoot at me again, you S.O.B.," he said. "I want to see where you are." The AKA sounded again. The captain killed his antagonist with a burst from his own sup-machine gun. All this occurred within 20 feet.

The dead soldier's name was Nguyen Van He. He himself was a platoon leader. He kept a personal diary, a careful notebook of the men in his platoon, and family pictures. There was one of him, in dress uniform, apparently graduating from military school in North Vietnam. There was one of a little boy and one of a little girl both carried on folded paper with a gaily colored rooster. There was a picture of the Lieutenant on his bicycle and two pictures of his wife and family.

C Company buried him and seven others and began to move toward the clearing where Colonel Granger with a handful of men had established a helicopter landing zone and command post. On another enemy soldier they found Gardner's bible intact except for one torn page.

About 9 o'clock in the morning the captain came out of the tree line and into the clearing. He brought with him his company, the beleaguered platoon of company A, the enemy weapons and documents.

"Morning' Sir," he said to the colonel. "It's been a long night." "It was a long night here too," the colonel said.

Captain Rykowski recounted what had happened to Charlie Company. "We moved along with no contact through the area of the B52 strike. Then we encountered two on the ground and killed them, and two in the trees and killed those, the last three were about 500 yards to the west, then there is the one who shot at me, that makes eight. He made me mad when he shot at me. He almost didn't miss."

The captain's belt had been creased by the bullet. One by one the companies came in. The men were haggard and somber. Perhaps a little surprised to be alive. They passed from company to company, platoon to platoon, finding out who was dead, who was wounded and how.

In his pack PFC Jerry Judd, Plano, Ill, found a small camera with a bullet in it. "It must have been yesterday afternoon," he said. "I thought I felt something hit back there."

William Hernandez, Specialist 4th class, took a machine gun away from an enemy soldier and killed him with it.

Back at the fire base, James R. Truesdell, 20, Moberly, Mo., worked in the fire direction center of the battalion mortar platoon which was firing almost continuously.

Waiting on the hilltop for a helicopter to carry him back to his company was PFC William Howard, 20, of 3231 Mersington Avenue, Kansas City, who just returned from NCO School and was away when his company was first committed to the fight.



Survivors – Art Johnson A/2/35th photo from March 13. LTC Granger center left

The enemy can be divided into two separate and distinct units. Those on the north had old weapons and equipment, and the physical condition of the dead indicated that they had been on extensive campaigns prior to the engagement. The enemy encountered in the south had new weapons and equipment, new uniforms, a full basic load of small arms ammunition and grenades, and the condition of the dead indicated that they were fresh troops; e.g. the soles of the feet were not calloused.

Sift into Area

From all appearances the unit, presumed to be the North Vietnamese Le Loi division, had recently infiltrated. Four high speed trails, cut four yards wide, with vines tied tree to tree to facilitate night movement, cut through the area toward the border. There was no doubt that the division operated out of Cambodia.

In a way it's a strange and different war that the 25th Division brigade and the two brigades of the Fourth Infantry Division fight along the frontier.

This is a wild, unpopulated, mountain jungle. There are no people here, no Viet Cong guerrillas, only North Vietnamese army. Since the first of the year the division has been operating from a series of fire support bases - artillery and supply centers scraped on hilltops. Around these the infantry patrols. The men are lean and tired. Often they go days without contact, but when it erupts, the action with the North Vietnamese army is often sharp and bloody.

In the encounter described here 14 American soldiers died, 39 were wounded. It is reasonably sure they killed 63 enemy soldiers. Many more may have been killed by air strikes and artillery

Two more battalions were brought in along the river, but somehow the enemy eluded a trap. It is the dry season, the winding ribbon of the Nam Sa Thay is fordable on foot. Unseen, the enemy crossed over into Cambodia. They will return, at the time of their choosing, to resume the strange war the army wages through these jungled hills.

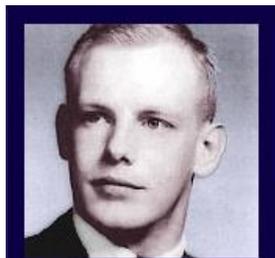
Dedicated to the selfless sacrifice of these men



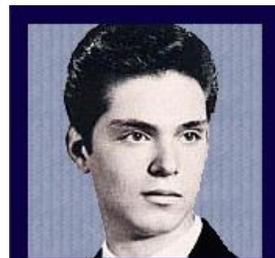
Charles Barrett



Stephen Burlingame



Andrew Castelda



Boyd Garner



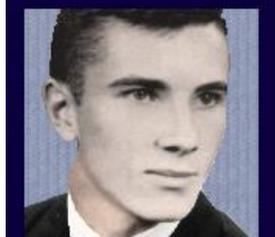
Lamar Horne



Richard Hutchinson



Stephen Karopczyc



La Marre Major



Filberto Miranda



Daniel Flores Perez



James Perrone



Danny Rhoads



Victor Ruggero



Douglas Stegall