



WELCOME TO "A WALK WITH THE 35TH"



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THE BATTLE OF TAN PHONG

27-30 May 1967

This action deserves its own designation and has been excerpted from the Operations Report and Lessons Learned for the 2nd Battalion 35th Infantry, period ending 7-31-1967. Troop B, 1/9 Cav, B Co, 2/35th, Recon 2/35th and C/3-4th Cav were all engaged in the Battle of Tan Phong.



Aerial view of Tan Phong today. LZ Liz was the 2/35th Base with direct support of Battery C/2/9th Artillery and C Troop 3/4th Cav

At 27 1200H, the battalion CP was notified by the S2, 3d Brigade Task Force, of a suspected enemy CP located in Tan Phong Hamlet, Due Pho District, Quang Ngai Province (BS735435). Since the organic forces of the battalion were committed some distance from the area of interest, the battalion commander, LTC Granger, requested and received permission to insert the Blue Team, Troop B, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, (Airmobile). The Blue Team (an infantry platoon) was inserted by combat assault east of the target into an LZ vic BS739435 at 1225H. Team Penn (C/3-4 Cav (-) and the Reconnaissance Platoon 2-35 Inf, located about ten kilometers north of LZ LIZ, was given the mission of reserve reaction force (RRF) for the Blue Team to their south.

At 1300H, vic BS738439, the Blues reported observing thirty well-armed and equipped enemy with camouflaged uniforms. The Blues engaged the enemy platoon, killed three and called for additional troop support to block what appeared to be a withdrawing enemy. Team Penn, reacting to the call, immediately moved south to block. Gunships from the weapons platoon B/1-9 Cav (Red Team) were dispatched to provide additional fire support. Artillery blocking fires were adjusted to the west of the contact to prevent enemy withdrawal in that direction. See sketch #3.

At 1340H, B/2-35 was released from OPCON B/1-9 Cav and returned to the 2-35 Inf. They were alerted to move by air to support the growing fight, At 1400H, the Blues had secured an LZ vic BS747472 (not correct) and the lift ships carrying 1B/2-35 were enroute.



By 1415H, the Blues, heavily engaged and suffering not only battle casualties but also heat injuries, had requested an emergency resupply of ammunition and water.

At 1430, a 174th Aviation Company UH-1D was loaded and over the area of contact at an LZ secured by the Blue Team. As the helicopter was making its short final it was hit by a heavy burst of enemy automatic weapons fire and subsequently crashed 200 meters south of the LZ; burning and its

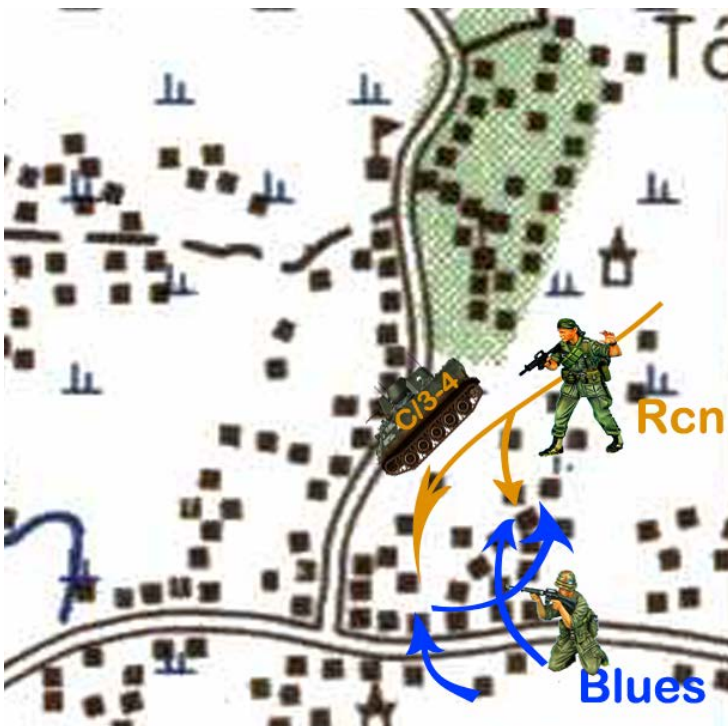
ammo is exploding. Two of the crew were seriously wounded and two less seriously. A squad from the Blues successfully extracted the wounded crew from the burning craft before it exploded. The Blues reported that they had one more WIA and 9 heat casualties and one KIA.



Chopper Down photo by Alan Bell C/1-35

At 1554H, Company B (-) was airlifted to the vicinity of the downed bird where it linked up with the remaining elements of Recon and C/3-4 Cav. This force then deployed northwest to the hamlet where the Blues were heavily engaged and surrounded.

By 1607H, Team Penn had arrived from the north and was receiving fire from the enemy. Dismounting the battalion reconnaissance platoon, the C/3-4 Cav moved about one thousand meters west and attacked from the northwest. Recon assaulted the enemy from the northeast. See Sketch #3.



Sketch #4



2/35th Inf. Troops with APCs of C Troop 3/4 Cav photo Jack by Reed

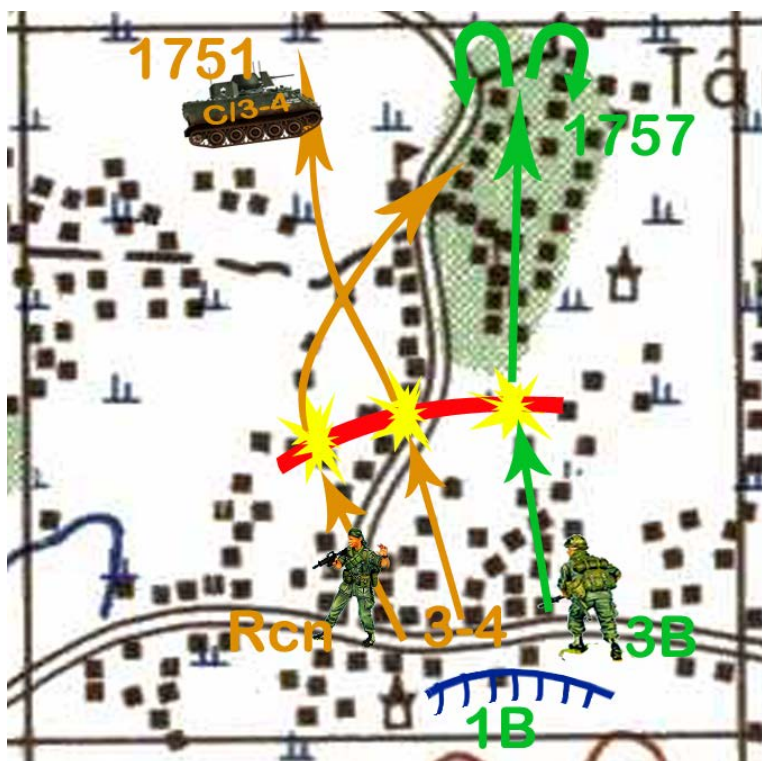
The enemy, now engaged on three sides, found itself surrounded. They still persisted in their violent attack on the Blue Team and despite accurate gunship fire were able to inflict a few more casualties. As the pressure grew more intense, the enemy slackened their rate of fire and began to evade. The Recon platoon broke through the enemy lines and linked with the Blues. See Sketch #4.

Almost simultaneously, the APC's, inflicting heavy enemy losses, broke through to the northwest. Captain Penn CO C/3-4 Cav decided to withdraw the WIA's from the contact area to a secure LZ where the wounded could be evacuated. As his element with the WIA's in the APC's moved through the perimeter, Captain Penn's tracks became surrounded. The enemy undoubtedly thought they

could stop the armor with their small arms but they paid a huge price in lives before the error was discovered. The armored cavalry succeeded in securing an LZ and at 1620H, the first DUSTOFF was completed.

Once the WIAs were extracted the Cav APCs moved back into the contact area. Helix (FAC) brought in his fighters to hit muzzle flashes from trenches to the NW of the village all along the tree line and also AW weapon fire coming from a clump of trees in the rice paddy.

At 1631H, B/2-35 (-) linked with the friendly elements (Cav team that had extracted WIAs) in the contact area (Tan Phong). After reorganization of the force, B Company (-) deployed to the north for a careful detailed search for the enemy. C/3-4 was to move onto the left. Both were to sweep online from south to north. Finding the enemy was not difficult as they continued to resist with heavy volumes of small arms and automatic weapons fire. However, the enemy began using the many spider holes and caves that infested Tan Phong in an effort to escape the closing force.



Sketch #5 - 3B on the right, C/3-4th and Blue Team in the center and Recon on left, the elements moved following closely behind the airstrike. Receiving fires from the rear Recon maneuvered behind the assault to engage those enemies passed over.

By 1645 the airstrike had finished and the elements began to assault to the north. Recon on the left, The Blues up the middle in the trench line, 3B on the far right and 1B backing up; C/3-4 is spearheading the assault. 2B was still at LZ Liz and prepared to lift by air if needed.

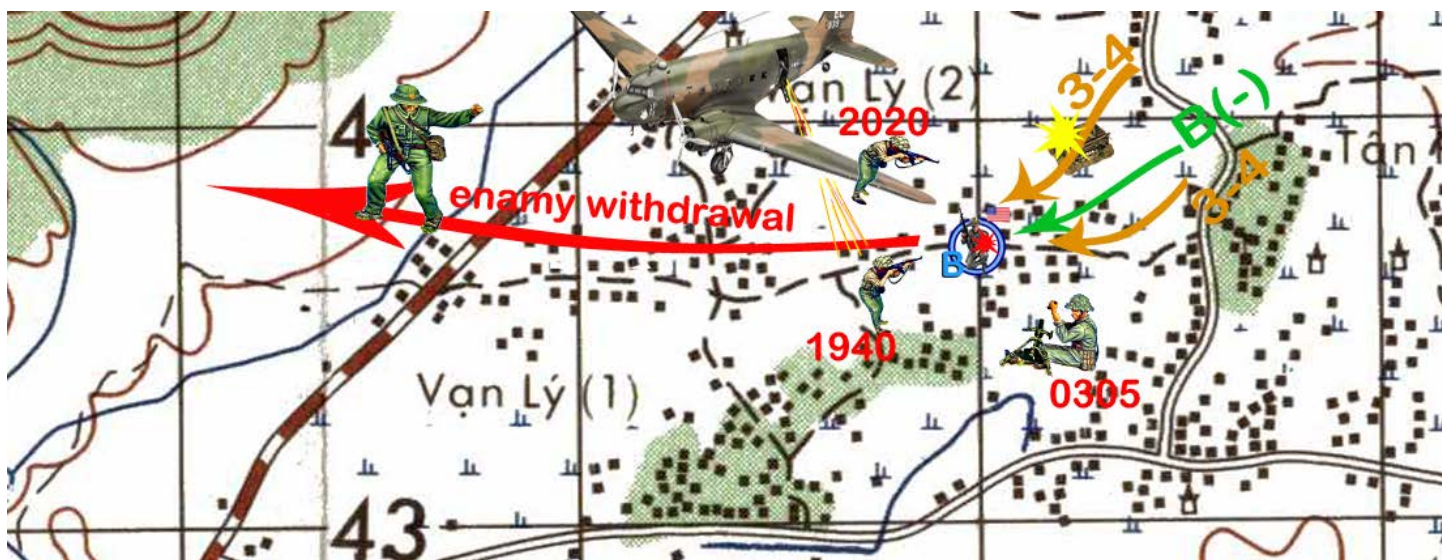
In the meantime (1657h), Recon began receiving moderate fire to the south, indicating the enemy had left a force behind. The Reconnaissance Platoon turned back through Tan Phong while B/2-35 (-) continued to the hamlet's northern fringe. By this time the large enemy force (estimated company (+) had scattered and the units were receiving only light resistance. See Sketch #5

Nearing the end of the village at 1751h, artillery was preparing the next village to the north. Co B reported secondary explosions to his front and also captured a 60mm mortar and numerous 60mm ammo.

At 1800 comms wire was found running in a trench line to the village at 732447. By 1810 the main enemy force had been broken up and Co B began moving back through the contact area with grenades and fixed bayonets to police up the area.

By 1900H, all elements closed together in a perimeter vic BS730437 to be re-supplied and to extract the Blue Team. 2B was to be lifted in to reinforce the team. At 1918H, 2B attempted a touchdown but again only one bird was able to land in the face of enemy AW fire. It was decided that it was too risky to try the exchange, Gunships, flare ships, and an armed AC-47 reported on station. See Sketch #6

At 2100H, A/2-35 was airlifted from the beach to LZ Liz where they assumed responsibility for FSB security. All elements dug in for the night.



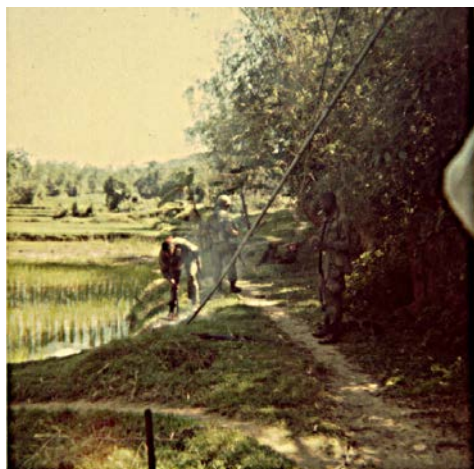
Sketch #6 at 0305h the perimeter came under mortar attack. Cpt. Penn, CO C/3-4th was killed

At 28 0315H, the force in Tan Phong came under a light enemy mortar attack. Captain Penn, CO, C/3-4 Cav, the only casualty, was mortally wounded. Counter mortar fires from LZ Liz and artillery fires by 2d Bn 9th Arty were placed effectively throughout the area. There was no further contact that night. In view of the enemy strength it was decided to commit further troops into the area in the morning.

At 28 0938H May 1967, C/1-35 (-) was placed OPCON 2-35 Inf and conducted a heliborne assault vic BS727477. Their assigned mission was to sweep south along the base of the hill mass on the western border of the coastal plain, a likely avenue of enemy withdrawal. Recon/2-35 conducted a heliborne, assault at 1055H west of C/1-35 (-) vic BS715465 and was assigned to sweep the ridge lines and draws in the hill masses to the northwest of Tan Phong. A/2-35 departed LZ Liz on a sweep to the west not only to aid B/2-35 in the search of the battlefield, but also to establish contact. C/3-4 Cav was assigned blocking positions southeast of Recon. The Blue Team was extracted and replaced by 2B at 0916H. See Sketch #7



NVA Mortar Crew



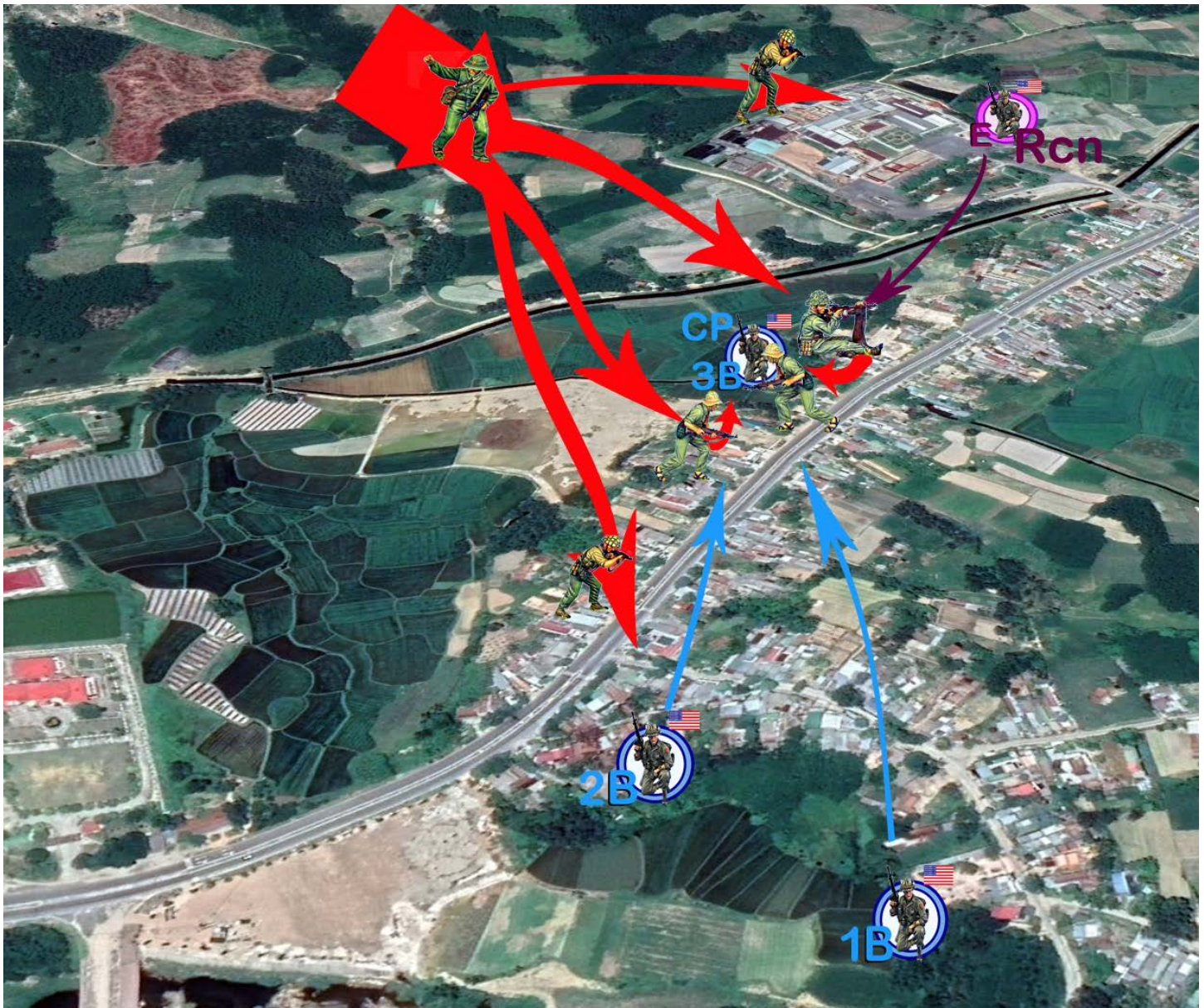
**Searching Village
photo by Herman Logan (rt) A/2-35**

The simultaneous sweeps of the Tan Phong area on the 28th produced several small contacts. However, fire support by the gunships of the 174th Aviation Company and B/1-9 Cav (airmobile) accounted for the vast majority of the enemy dead. A prisoner and a Hoi Chanh identified the enemy unit as the 60th Bn 1st VC Regiment. Undoubtedly, the majority of the battalion was in the area.

As the 2-35 Inf elements pursued the enemy, they forced him to break into the clearings and rice paddies. The rockets and "Mini" gun fire of the armed "Hueys" killed or wounded all observed enemy. The units on the ground forced the enemy into hiding to avoid the increasing onslaught. Efforts to capture prisoners failed

as the enemy repeatedly fought to their death. By the end of the day, 87 enemy lay dead on the battlefield, killed for the most part by the gunships. A/2-35 and C/3-4 Cav swept back to LZ Liz where they provided FSB security. B/2-35, C/1-35 (-), and Recon/2-35 were re-supplied and assigned the mission of saturation ambush patrols for the night. Recon/2-35 was placed OPCON B/2-35.

By 2215H, all elements were in position. B/2-35 with OPCON of Recon occupied four ambush sites at the mouth of the Song Tra Cau Valley: Recon located vic BS713424; 2B located vic BS712425; B (-) located vic BS713433; and 3B located vic BS715438. C/1-35 had three ambushes north of Highway 515 positioned along the road. See sketch #7.



Sketch #8 Enemy attack of the Third Platoon's ambush position.

At 29 0240H May 1967, the ambush of Company B (-), located vicinity BS713433, came under an intense enemy ground and mortar attack. See sketch #8. Using camouflage and stealth, at least one enemy company surrounded the ambush position undetected. The enemy initiated the attack with accurate mortar fire. Efforts to counter the mortar fire with their own 60mm mortar and the 4.2 mortar platoon from LZ Liz proved useless. The enemy was using at least two mortars which could not be located. As the mortars were raining their deadly fire, the enemy began a concentrated ground attack. Captain Ralph Walker, CO, Company B, although mortally wounded by the initial mortar attack, rallied

his men into a perimeter and requested artillery fire support. His courage and determination provided the catalyst for the initial defense of the position and undoubtedly prevented the unit from being overrun. Captain Walker died forty minutes later. When the unit moved from its linear ambush into a perimeter, it inadvertently closed around an enemy position. The two enemy were swiftly killed.



Cpt. Ralph Walker

At 0300H, Medivac was requested to come to LZ Liz where it would remain on alert until the contact area was secure. At the same time the aircraft commander of the armed AC-47 "Dragon Ship" reported that he would be in the area of contact at 0320H. Armed HU-1C's were on station with a helicopter flare ship and began firing under the guidance of the 2d platoon leader, who had assumed command. The enemy continued to fire his mortars although the volume was not as heavy. Efforts to locate these mortars proved fruitless.

It was later discovered that the enemy had used a mud hut as a firing pit. A hole two feet in diameter was cut in the roof through which he fired his rounds. This tactic prevented observation of the muzzle flash and because of the muffled noise, made it virtually impossible to determine with accuracy how far away the mortars were.

Meanwhile, the gunships concentrated their fire on ten enemy in a rice paddy. As the enemy attack intensified, the men from B Company threw white phosphorus grenades to mark the proximity of an enemy automatic weapons position. This enabled the armed helicopters from both the 174th Aviation Company and B/1-9 Cav (airmobile) to engage the enemy accurately.

At 0325H it was decided to move the rest of B Company and the Reconnaissance Platoon to reinforce the besieged platoon.

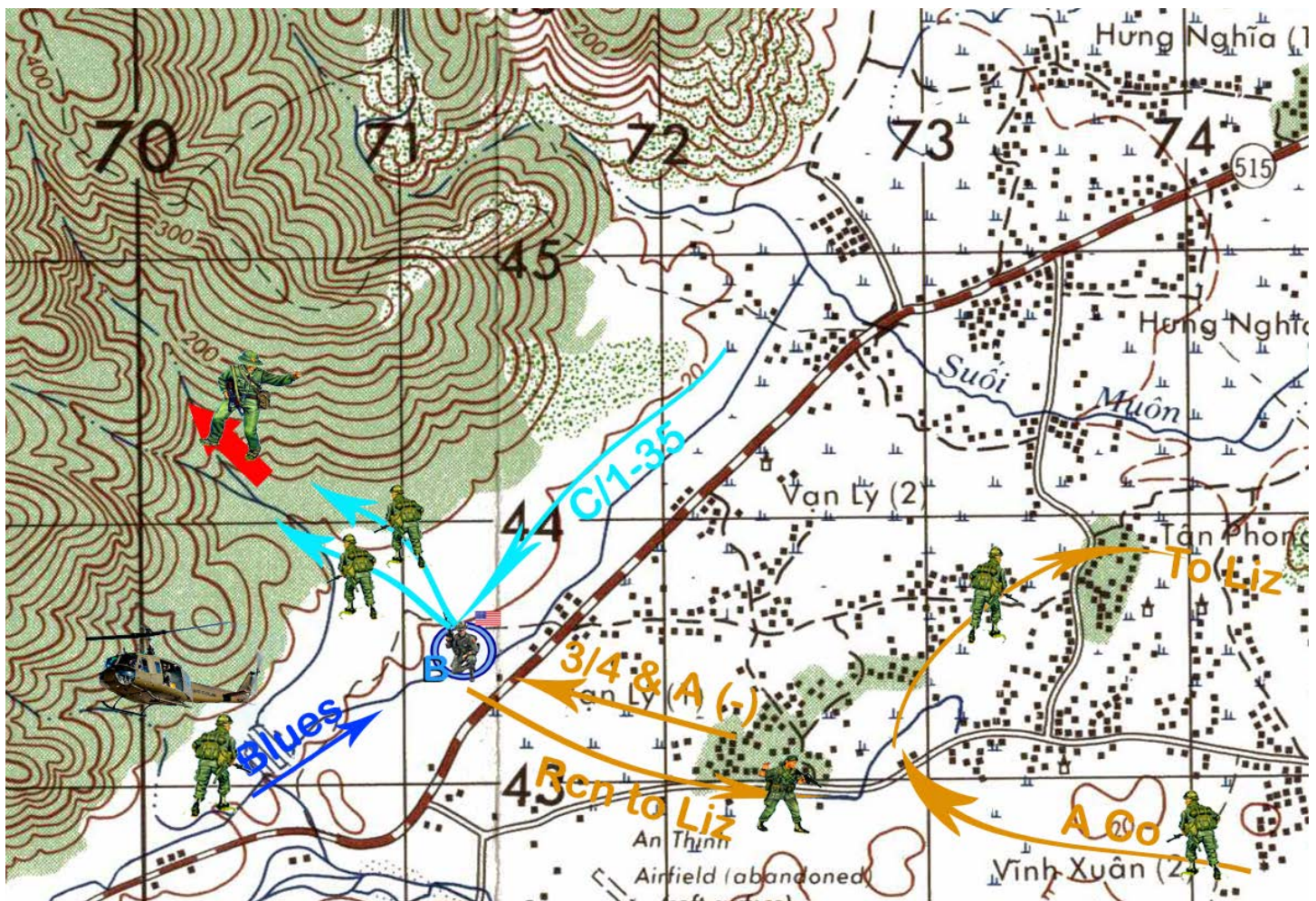
At 0346H, LTC Granger who was over the contact area in his command and control helicopter decided to commit C/2-35 (-) in a reinforcing action from the east. All elements, as they moved toward the point of contact, made light contact which resulted in several more enemy dead.

At 0405H a medevac helicopter carrying the company executive officer successfully made it into the perimeter and evacuated three wounded. On its arrival 1LT Russel Chapman assumed command. The departure of the medevac signaled a renewed enemy attack. At 0410H 1LT Chapman was wounded in the head, but courageously continued to command.

At 0411H Recon and 1B were attempting to break through the attack from the southwest and came under intense automatic weapons fire. Maneuvering against the position, the reconnaissance platoon overran it and captured the M1919A6 machine gun. This was the last strong effort made by the enemy to block the relief force.

At 0434H, the enemy tried for the last time to break through the unit's staunch perimeter. He assaulted in mass from the east under a murderous barrage of enemy mortar fire. Some of the enemy broke through the lines and into the perimeter but that was where they died. Orders were issued that no one would leave their foxholes so that if anyone was seen moving in the perimeter he would be enemy. The tactic worked.

At 0446H, the contact had lightened considerably. Medevac was again requested and the helicopter landed in the LZ amidst suppressive fire from the perimeter. By 0550 all contact had been broken by the enemy, the casualties had been evacuated and a resupply of ammunition had been effected.



Sketch #9

At 0617H, C/3-4 Cav, with one platoon of A/2-35, and A/2-35 (-) departed LZ Liz on two separate axes to the west to sweep the flanks of the contact area to reestablish contact with the enemy. At 0627H, C/1-35 closed with B/2-35. See sketch #9.



At 0854H, B/1-9 Cav was placed OPCON 2-35 Inf. The Blue Team conducted a combat assault vic BS694423 and moved east along the Song Tra Cau Valley into prepared blocking positions of C/1-35 and C/3-4 Cav at the mouth of the valley floor. A/2-35 swept south and southwest of the point of contact detaining large numbers of military age males who were hiding in a Buddhist temple. They also discovered five tons of stored rice in the same temple. The remaining elements made light contact while flushing the Viet Cong from bunkers, caves and tunnels.

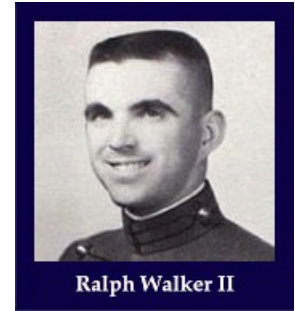
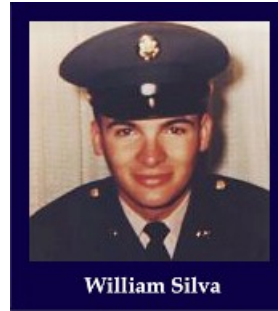
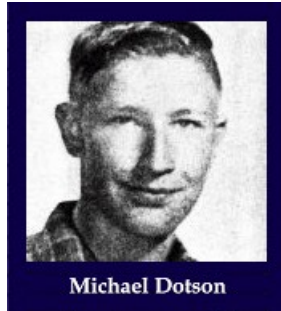
At 1030H, Company B was extracted by helicopter and taken to LZ Montezuma where they met their new CO, Captain Lindsey. At 1800H, A/2-35, C/3-4 Cav, and Recon/2-35 closed to LZ Liz, C/1-35 closed to a night location about 800 meters west-southwest of LZ Liz.

At 30 0930H May 1967, C/1-35 crossed the Song Tra Cau River, the southern AO line, and was returned to the control of the 1-35 Inf.

Results of the three day contact were as follows:

(1) Friendly casualties:

3 KIA
27 WIA
1 DOW



(2) Enemy losses, personnel:

116 KIA
8 CIA
119 Detained

(3) Enemy losses, weapons:

Crew served: 7
57 recoilless rifle I
60mm mortar w/sight 1
B-40 rocket launcher 1
RPD LMG 3
cal. 30 LMG I
Individual: 34
Carbine, M-1, .30 cal 3
Carbine, M-.2, .30 cal 2

7.62 SKS 10
AK-47 6
BAR 3
M-79, 40mm GL 3
SMG, Type unknown 3
Pistol, 9mm 1
7.62, Soviet Carbine,
Mosin Nagant 1
7.62 SMG, PPSH-41 1
7.62, M-14 1