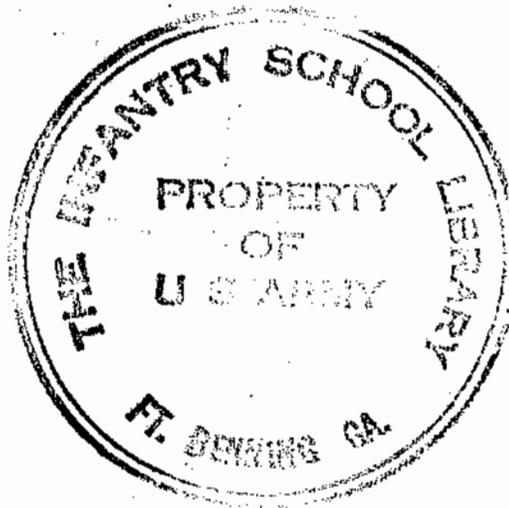


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OPERATIONS OF COMPANY A, 1st BATTALION (AIRBORNE),
327th INFANTRY IN OPERATION HAWTHORNE, KONTUM
PROVINCE, VIETNAM, 2-19 JUNE 1966. (PERSONAL
EXPERIENCE OF A COMPANY COMMANDER.)



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
TABLE OF CONTENTS	
INTRODUCTION.	1
The Existing Situation.	1
The Brigade Plan.	2
The Battalion Plan.	3
The Company Plan.	3
The Preparation	4
NARRATION	5
Movement to the Objective	5
The First Contact	6
Developing the Situation.10
The Relief of the Tiger Force13
The Relief of Company C, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry13
The Reorganization.17
Mopping Up.17
ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM.20
LESSONS LEARNED28
BIBLIOGRAPHY.30
SKETCH A.31
SKETCH B.32
SKETCH C.33
SKETCH D.34
SKETCH E.35

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INTRODUCTION

In early 1965, one of the first campaigns to be conducted by the North Vietnamese Army took place in Kontum Province. This campaign was shattered after commitment of U.S. Forces into the Province. In May of 1966, the intelligence picture began to indicate that the North Vietnamese Army was preparing for a new offensive in this area. The 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division was ordered by I FIELD FORCE VIETNAM to move to Dak To, Kontum Province and disrupt this planned offensive.

Dak To is approximately 30 kilometers from Kontum City and twenty kilometers east of the Laotian border. The government of Vietnam has a District Headquarters, two Special Forces Camps, an ARVN Regimental Headquarters, and two air strips located in the vicinity of Dak To. These installations are important because they lie along infiltration routes entering Kontum from Laos. The ultimate objective of the planned North Vietnamese Army (NVA) offensive was believed to be these installations.

The area of operations for Operation Hawthorne was approximately fifteen kilometers northeast of Dak To and twenty kilometers from the Laotian border. (See Sketch A)

THE EXISTING SITUATION

The area of operations is characterized by rugged mountainous jungle terrain. The terrain is covered by bamboo and tropical broadleaf forest. (12:37). Underneath the canopy of these forests, vegetation is thick. Some trails exist. These trails normally can not be

seen from the air, as the thick canopy restricts observation by air. Observation and fields of fire are generally poor in this terrain. (6:30). Cover and concealment is excellent. When moving cross country off the existing trails, the dense undergrowth must be considered an obstacle. (6:30) Because of the good cover and concealment, and the restricted observation of the jungle floor by air, this type terrain favors the enemy. (6:30).

Enemy forces in the area were believed to be the 24th and 88th NVA Regiments. Intelligence briefing indicated that two battalions of the 24th Regiment were North of Toumorong Outpost, and one battalion southeast of the outpost. (See Sketch A). The 88th NVA Regiment was not located, but was said to be in the general area.

During the latter days of May, elements of the 24th Regiment mortared and probed Toumorong Outpost. No effort was made to overrun the Outpost, yet constant pressure was maintained. The Outpost was manned by elements of a Vietnamese Regional Force Company. It was evident that the enemy was attempting to draw a relief force into an ambush. It was at this time that the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division was ordered to move to Dak To. The Brigade was told to conduct search and destroy operations and to assist in the evacuation of Toumorong Outpost.

THE BRIGADE PLAN

The Brigade Plan called for relief forces to converge on Toumorong from three directions. (See Sketch A). The 21st Ranger Battalion (ARVN) and the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry were to conduct heliborne assaults north of Toumorong and sweep south.

Elements of the 42d Regiment (ARVN) were to move generally along the road from Dak Pha to Toumorong and make contact with the Regional Force Company. The operation was to be controlled by the Commanding General, 1st Brigade.

THE BATTALION PLAN

The 1st Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry Plan called for the Battalion to conduct a heliborne troop lift into a secured landing zone. (Sketch A, LZ blue). The Battalion Tiger Force, a Force composed of the Reconnaissance and Anti-Tank Platoons, was to infiltrate into the area of operations and secure the landing zone on D-1. The Battalion would move south with three companies abreast. Company A and the Command Group were on the right, Company B and Company C in the center and on the left, respectively. The Heavy Mortar Platoon was to support from the vicinity of the landing zone. The Tiger Force was to secure the Heavy Mortar Platoon. The plan was to move south in a movement to contact formation. The objective was an area one and one-half kilometers northwest of the outpost from which mortar fire had been placed on Toumorong. An Air Force F4C fighter was shot down by fire from this area on 1 June.

THE COMPANY PLAN

Company A was the first company in the troop lift. The plan was for the 1st Platoon to be lifted in first, followed by the Company Headquarters, 3rd Platoon, Weapons Platoon, and 2d Platoon. The 1st Platoon was to move out immediately upon landing and recon a route to the south for a distance of three hundred meters. The Company was to move with three rifle platoons abreast, approximately two hundred meters apart. The 1st Platoon would be in

the center, 3rd on the right, and 2d on the left. The Company Headquarters would follow the 1st Platoon in the center. The Battalion Command Group would follow the Company Headquarters and the Weapons Platoon would bring up the rear. The Weapons Platoon was to be employed as a 4th Rifle Platoon. No mortars were carried. The forward platoons were told to have a point squad well to their front, and to put a fire team on their unprotected flanks. The plan was to conduct a movement to contact in this formation to the vicinity of the objective.

THE PREPARATION

After the Battalion Verbal Order was issued at 0900 hours on 2 June, Company A began its detailed planning and preparation. Visual recons of the landing zone, the objective, and the terrain in the area were made by key personnel. The Company Order was issued at 1300 hours. The Order developed in detail the concept outlined in THE COMPANY PLAN. Details of the Order worthy of mention are the communications plan, the missions given to the weapons platoon, and the specified equipment that was to be carried.

The communications plan called for each rifle platoon to carry three AN/PRC 25 radios. All three of these radios were to be on the company net. The platoon leaders and two rifle squads were to have radios on the company net. The weapons platoon was to have one radio on the company net.

The weapons platoon was given three missions. It was to act as company rescue, the company reaction force, and the security force for the headquarters.

The specified equipment included six claymore mines per platoon, twelve smoke grenades per platoon, four hundred rounds of 5.56 ball ammunition per man armed with the M-16 rifle, 2 grenades per man, three days' "C" rations per man, a steel helmet for every man, three USC-17 marking panel per platoon, twenty entrenching tools and machetes per platoon, and thirty-six rounds of ammunition per man armed with the M-79 grenade launcher.

At 1830 hours an inspection was held. The platoons were inspected to insure that the specified equipment was being carried and that every man was thoroughly briefed on his part in the operation. At 1945 hours, Company A was considered ready.

NARRATION

H hour was 1030 hours on 3 June. The heliborne operation was executed as planned. Company A and the Battalion Command Group began movement to the objective at 1230 hours.

MOVEMENT TO THE OBJECTIVE

The movement formation used by Company A during movement to the objective (described in THE COMPANY PLAN) was an application of what had become known to every officer in the 1st Brigade as the Checkerboard Concept. The concept was developed by LTC Henry Emerson, Commanding Officer of the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry.

The objective was approximately ten kilometers from the landing zone. Company A was able to move only three kilometers on the afternoon of 3 June. Movement was off of trails and cross compartment. The Battalion Commander, Major David H. Hackworth, ordered that the Battalion consolidate on the night of 3 June. (Sketch A, reference

point 1). The Tiger Force joined the Battalion and the Heavy Mortar Platoon was helilifted to Dak To. Company A stayed the night as a portion of the battalion defensive perimeter. On the morning of 4 June, the Battalion Command Group joined Company C. Company A moved out towards the objective in the same formation previously described. No contact was made during the movement. The company formed a defensive perimeter on the night of 4 June. (See Sketch A, reference point 2). On the morning of 5 June, Company A again moved out using the Checkerboard Concept. No contact was made with the enemy. The company reached the objective at 1530 on 5 June. The company found extensive fortifications on the objective. The objective had been evacuated by the enemy. It had been heavily bombarded by air strike the day the F4C had been downed. Signs of enemy casualties were on the objective. Numerous bloody bandages were found. Company A formed a perimeter defense using existing fortifications and stayed the night on the objective.

On the following morning, 6 June, the 1st Battalion, 42d Regiment (ARVN) linked up with the Regional Force Company at Toumorong. The Outpost was evacuated. The 1st Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry, was ordered to stay in the area and conduct search and destroy operations.

THE FIRST CONTACT

Company A was ordered to patrol the area north of Toumorong with the mission of finding the enemy. At this time, the operation had been underway for three days and no contact had been made. A decision was made to commit two rifle platoons to patrol the area. A Third rifle platoon was to prepare a landing zone to receive a resupply. The Weapons Platoon was to secure the objective and Company A Headquarters. At 1530 hours a call was

received from the 2d Platoon. The Platoon Leader, P Sgt Varl Fulford, reported that his platoon had made contact with three or four enemy on a trail. (Sketch A, reference point 3). P Sgt Fulford stated that the enemy fled down the trail to the north. He further stated that the enemy were dressed in the grey-green uniforms common to NVA units. P Sgt Fulford was ordered to pursue the enemy. PSgt Fulford's platoon pursued and ran into an NVA platoon in dug-in positions. At this time, the other platoons in the company were approximately one to two hours march distance away. As P Sgt Fulford's platoon was in danger of becoming over-engaged, he was ordered to withdraw to the high ground to the south. Artillery and air strikes were called for. The 3rd Platoon, commanded by SSgt Ira Perkins, was ordered to reinforce the 2nd Platoon. The 1st Platoon was receiving a resupply on the landing zone. (Sketch A, LZ white). Word had been received that the Battalion Command Group was now arriving on the landing zone. Major Hackworth called and stated the Battalion CP was going to be established at Company A Headquarters location. The Weapons Platoon secured the Battalion CP while the 1st Platoon received and transported the resupply to the Company Headquarters. PSgt Fulford called and stated that the artillery and air strikes had been on target. The artillery had been adjusted by having PSgt Fulford in direct communication with the company artillery forward observer on the company command net. The air strikes had been controlled by having the airborne forward air controller switch his FM radio to Company A command net. PSgt Fulford controlled the strikes from the ground. The 3rd Platoon had not arrived. PSgt Fulford

was told to probe the enemy position. Again, strong resistance was met. It appeared that the enemy had reinforced. The time was 1730. PSgt Fulford was told to withdraw and bring in more artillery and air. The enemy followed PSgt Fulford and took up positions fifty meters from the 2d Platoon perimeter. The enemy assaulted by fire. As the artillery and air began to get on target, the enemy crept closer to Fulford's platoon. The enemy maneuvered around to Fulford's rear. He was receiving heavy fire from both north and south of his perimeter. (See Sketch B for situation). At this time the 105 howitzer battery in direct support was asked to split the battery and have three howitzers adjust on the enemy to Fulford's south. The artillery battery did not want to do it. A 155 howitzer battery was in general support. The 105 battery FDC wanted the 155 battery to fire the mission. This was rejected because experience had proven that the time required to get the 155 fires on target would be excessive. Also, it would not have been possible to adjust the 155 fires in close enough to do any good. The 105 battery agreed to split the battery. An azimuth was given to the new target. The first target was designated AE 101. The new target was designated AE 102. As PSgt Fulford began to adjust AE 102, a volley of artillery fire fell on Fulford's platoon. The artillery had used the azimuth to AE 101 to adjust AE 102. The result was that the fires dropped on top of the 2d Platoon. Fulford and four other men were killed. Several more were wounded. The 3d Platoon was called and told to press on to the 2d Platoon as fast as possible. The 3d Platoon had to fight its way to the 2d Platoon. The 3d Platoon arrived at 1815 hours. SSgt Perkins, 3d Platoon

Leader, was placed in charge. The enemy withdrew. A medivac was executed by a CH47 helicopter. There was no landing zone. The CH 47 took forty-five minutes to evacuate the casualties by winching them out. SSgt Perkins was told to consolidate a perimeter and dig in for the night. The Company Headquarters, Weapons Platoon, 1st Platoon, and Battalion Command Group stayed the night of 6 June in the vicinity of the original objective.

DEVELOPING THE SITUATION

Company A(-) was ordered to move to the vicinity of the previous day's contact, patrol, and develop the situation. Enroute, eight fresh graves were found. (See Sketch A, reference Point 4). The graves were dug up in an effort to gain intelligence. The graves contained eight bodies of NVA soldiers who had been dead about five or six days. The eight enemy were probably killed by the air strikes on the objective on 1 June. No material of intelligence value was found on the bodies. Their uniforms identified them as NVA soldiers, however. At the location where the graves were found were two trails leading to the west where a large group of enemy had passed in two columns. The trails appeared to be about two or three days old. They led in the direction of where the contact had been made. All of the above was reported to Major Hackworth. He said, "Find them".

The 1st Platoon and Company Headquarters linked up with the 2d and 3d Platoons at 1115 hours. The Weapons Platoon remained at the objective to secure the Battalion Command Group. Patrols were conducted in the area where the contact was made the day before. Nothing was found. The enemy was not there. Two platoons were committed to

patrol farther to the west. (See Sketch C). The 1st Platoon was to follow the ridge around to the right and the 3d Platoon was to go cross-compartment to the left. The 2d Platoon, with only seventeen men left, was the reserve. The 1st Platoon went deeper to the west than was planned. At 1500 hours, the 1st Platoon made contact with four NVA soldiers on a trail. The enemy fled to the east toward the 3d Platoon. The 3d Platoon was told to block. The 1st Platoon pursued the enemy and ran right into an NVA Company. The enemy was in well prepared fortifications, ready and waiting. The platoon became over-engaged immediately. Only thirty meters separated the two forces. Artillery was called in. It could not be adjusted close enough to the 1st Platoon to do any good. Both the Platoon Leader and Platoon Sergeant had been wounded. Smoke was called in to assist the 1st Platoon in disengaging. The 3d Platoon was ordered to move down and relieve the pressure on the 1st Platoon by assaulting by fire. SSgt Perkins moved the 3d Platoon down and led the platoon in a physical assault. Perkins was killed and several men were wounded immediately. At this time, Company A had two platoons in bad trouble. (See Sketch C). It was realized that the badly mauled reserve platoon would not be able to influence this action significantly. The Battalion Commander was called and advised of the situation. An additional platoon was requested. Major Hackworth said he would get right on it.

The smoke called in for the 1st Platoon had been adjusted so that it fell in the thirty meter interval between the 1st Platoon and the enemy. The Platoon Leader, LT Scott Groves, said that he believed they could get to their wounded and withdraw. He was told to do it. The

3d Platoon needed help. The Acting Platoon Leader, SSgt Pearson was told to shift the smoke over to where it would cover his withdrawal.

Major Hackworth called and stated that the Weapons Platoon and a rifle platoon from Company A, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry were enroute by CH 47. The two platoons would be dropped in by an aluminum flexible ladder.

The 3d Platoon Leader called and said that the smoke was doing the job. He could withdraw. He was told to withdraw to the east to his previous blocking position. After reaching the blocking position, the Platoon Leader of the 3d Platoon adjusted artillery on the enemy positions. As he began to adjust the artillery, the enemy left their trenches and began to move toward the 3d Platoon. The enemy moved to within fifty meters and began assaulting by fire. The platoon leader called and stated he was going to be assaulted and requested help. The Weapons Platoon was sent to reinforce the 3d Platoon. The enemy withdrew. It was necessary for the Company Headquarters to remain at its current location. (Sketches A and B, reference point 3). The reinforcements were coming to that location. It was the only location in the area suitable for the dropping in of the platoons. The two reinforcing platoons arrived at 1800 hours. The 2d and 3d Platoons had moved to the Company Headquarters location. The 1st Platoon was told to dig in at its current location. (Sketch C, reference point 5). The CH 47 that brought in the two reinforcing platoons executed a medevac for all of the casualties. The company established a perimeter defense and stayed the night of 7 June at the location of PSgt Fulford's first contact. (Sketches A, B, and C, reference point 3).

THE RELIEF OF THE TIGER FORCE

On the morning of 8 June, the 1st Platoon moved to the south of the enemy location to the blocking position used by the 3d Platoon the previous day. The company moved to that location and linked up at 1000 hours. A massive air and artillery bombardment of the enemy positions had commenced at 0900 hours. The Company had been told to attack after completion of the bombardment.

At this time the company was organized into four rifle platoons. The Weapons Platoon, consisting of eighteen men, had been integrated into the three organic rifle platoons as replacements. The Weapons Platoon Leader, LT Ken Collins, was placed in command of the 1st Platoon which had lost its Platoon Leader and Platoon Sergeant.

As the bombardment was nearing completion, Major Hackworth called and stated that the Tiger Force was heavily engaged to the southwest. (See Sketch A, reference point 6). Company A was to abandon plans to attack and go to the location of the Tiger Force at 1730 hours. The enemy had broken contact. The Tiger Force had taken heavy casualties. Company A worked at policing the battlefield and evacuating the casualties until 0700 hours on 9 June. The casualties were evacuated by U. S. Air Force HH 43 "Huskie" Helicopters. This helicopter uses a wench to lower a basket or harness through the canopy to pick up wounded.

The Company formed a perimeter around the Tiger Force at 0400 hours on 9 June and waited for daylight.

*Not attached
to sketch*

THE RELIEF OF COMPANY C, 2d BATTALION (AIRBORNE), 502d INFANTRY

On the morning of 9 June, police of the battlefield was continued until 1100 hours. At that time Company A

was ordered to return to the area of the actions of 7 and 8 June. (Sketch Maps B and C). Company A arrived at the location where 1st Platoon dug in on the night of 7 June at 1630 hours. (Sketch C, reference point 5). The company was preparing to move into the fortified area when a call was received from Major Hackworth. Company C, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry, was in trouble. Company A may be called on to relieve that Company. Around 1715 the order was received to relieve Company C. That Company was surrounded by a battalion of NVA approximately one and one-half kilometers to the north. Company A was attached to 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry. LTC Emerson stated that the surrounded Company was in grave danger of being overrun. It was learned that Captain Carpenter had called for a napalm strike on his position. The situation had to be critical.

At 1750 hours, Company A moved out in two columns. The columns were about twenty meters apart. The 2d Platoon was in the lead on the right, followed by the Company Headquarters, and the attached platoons from Co A/2-502. The 3d Platoon was leading on the left, followed by the 1st Platoon. The Platoon Leaders were told to move to contact to the north in this formation. Detailed information on the situation was not available. The Platoon Leaders were told to move as fast as possible. Progress was slow. Movement was cross compartment. There were no trails. After moving about six hundred meters, the company moved across a ridge. On top of the ridge were extensive unoccupied trench networks and bunkers. There were fresh signs of enemy activity. The Company continued to move north down the other side of the ridge. (See Sketch A, reference point 7, and Sketch D). When Company A

On the way back down the southern ridge, the Company became separated into three groups. The rain continued. Visibility was zero. At 0500 the Company was finally consolidated. A perimeter was formed, and the Company had dug in by 0600. Weapons were cleaned immediately. An assault was expected. The continuous artillery fire probably prevented one. Any hopes of reaching Company C had long been abandoned. The enemy was known to be north, south, and east of the Company on high ground. (See Sketch E). A medevac attempt by helicopter had little chance for success. The Company had six killed and twenty-three wounded as a result of the action.

Major Hackworth sent our Company C to try and fight their way to Company A. Company C was stopped by the enemy short of the crest of the southern ridge. (See Sketch E). A patrol was sent to the west down along the creek to look for a gap. Contact was made with the enemy. The Company was surrounded. Artillery and air were called for to keep the enemy at bay. Patrols looking for a gap were sent out all day on 10 June. Finally, at 1800 hours, the enemy was found to have withdrawn from the west. Major Hackworth was called and told that the Company was moving. He said he would have the Tiger Force link up about one and one-half kilometers to the west. (See Sketch D, LZ Red). The Tigers would cut a landing zone. The Company moved out in a file. Initially, movement was good. After darkness set in, movement was very slow. It was necessary to move into the creek bed to move. Men grabbed on to the man in front of them. There was no moon. The wounded slowed movement down to approximately one hundred meters an hour. After moving about seven hundred meters, the Company came upon an enemy base. The creek

ran through the center of the camp. The file received sporadic fire from both flanks. The order was given not to return the fire - keep moving was the order. Artillery was being walked down both flanks of the file at a distance of one hundred meters or less. This fire kept the enemy pinned down and covered the noise of the movement. After nine hours of movement down the creek, link-up was made with the Tiger Force. A medevac was executed by CH 47. Company A was ordered to return to the Battalion Command Post at Dak Phø by foot. The Company arrived at 1400 hours on 11 June.

THE REORGANIZATION

Although the men of Company A had not slept for over eighty hours, the afternoon of the 11th was spent cleaning weapons and equipment. Fifty casualties had been taken during the period 3 June - 11 June. Among these were four Platoon Leaders and two Platoon Sergeants. A Platoon Sergeant (E-7) was commanding the 1st Platoon. The remaining platoons were commanded by Staff Sergeants (E-6). Forty replacements were received. Twenty-two were men who had been gathered up from Headquarters Company. Eighteen were new men. Two Platoon Leaders were received. The 3d Platoon and Weapons Platoon continued to be commanded by experienced Staff Sergeants. 12 June was spent resting and preparing for operations on 13 June.

MOPPING UP

At 0830 hours on 13 June a B-52 strike was placed in the area of Company A and Company C, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 502d Infantry contacts. Both Battalions were

helilifted into the area following the strike. Numerous weapons and bodies were found by both Battalions. The period 13 June - 15 June was spent searching the area. There was little significant activity until 17 June. On 16 June the Battalion conducted a heliborne assault southeast of Toumorong. (See Sketch A, reference point 8) The Battalion began sweeping to the southwest toward Dak To in the formation described in MOVEMENT TO THE OBJECTIVE. At 1430 hours on 17 June, a contact was made on a trail with five or six unidentified enemy. The Company was in a file with point and flank security. The 3d Platoon in the lead pursued the enemy down the trail. The point man had been armed with the M-79 grenade launcher loaded with the new buckshot round. He dropped two of the enemy with his first snap shot. The five or six enemy turned out to be a recon patrol. The patrol fled back into the enemy positions and the 3d Platoon ran into them. There was probably an enemy platoon with several automatic weapons. The enemy was firmly entrenched. Air strikes and artillery were used, but they failed to inflict damage. A flight of aerial rocket artillery helicopters was in the area. The Air Force forward air controller was asked to control the strike, as he had controlled the air strikes. He knew the Company location. The forward air controller marked the target for the ARA ships. The flight leader was told that the Company location was one hundred meters east of the smoke and not to fire east of the smoke. The first pass was good. The first two ships were relieved by two additional ships. These ships were not certain of the Company location as they had not seen the first two ships expend. The forward air controller asked the

reached the bottom of the ridge, the lead forces crossed a creek and began to move up the side of another ridge. The lead elements ran into a well dug-in enemy force. The leading two platoons both took several casualties at once. The lead platoons used fire and maneuver to try and overrun the enemy. The enemy was too strong and had too many automatic weapons. The decision was made to pull back to the top of the ridge to the south and leave one platoon with the wounded. The plan was to go around the enemy force. To sort them out would be too costly in time and men. The mission was to get to Captain Carpenter's Company. The 1st Platoon and the attached Platoon that were trailing the lead elements now became the lead elements moving back up the ridge. They made it to within fifty meters of the crest when machine guns raked the columns. The enemy had moved a force down the ridge to occupy the trench network the company had previously moved through. It was dark now. The time was approximately 2000 hours. LT Collins, 1st Platoon Leader, was told to knock out the machine guns. It began to rain. Movement up the steep, slick slope was nearly impossible. Lady Luck had frowned on Company A. The rain during June in Kontum Province normally comes in the afternoon. (11:23). The 1st Platoon and the attached Platoon tried until 0200 hours to take the top of the ridge. The enemy had mutually supporting machine guns with grazing fire. LT Collins had lost an eye early in the evening, yet he tried for hours to get to the machine guns. At 0200 hours the decision was made to move back down to the vicinity of the ~~creek~~. There was a small level piece of ^{level} ground between the two ridges.

Company to throw smoke. The Company had used the last of the smoke to control the air strikes. The forward air controller went through the process of marking the target and orienting the flight leader on the Company location. The flight leader rogered. The first pass was initially on target, but toward the end of the run the ships turned up the ridge and walked rockets into the Company position. One was killed and twenty-six were wounded.

The following day, 18 June, the Battalion began a march back to Dak To. The Battalion closed in at 1530 on 19 June. The operation was over.

Company A contributed significantly to the overall success of the operation. A high body count was not obtained due to the untimeliness of searching the battlefield. The primary contribution was the maintaining of contact with the enemy. Platoons acted independently to gain contact. The Platoon Leaders developed the situation on the ground. The furnished reports that eventually reached the Brigade Commander, allowing him to commit enveloping forces. (8:1). The primary contribution was the gaining and maintaining of contact with the enemy. Major Hackworth, the Battalion Commander, expressed his admiration for the Company's performance in a Letter of Commendation as follows:

"During the period 2 June thru 19 June the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry participated in one of the most significant battles of the Vietnamese War. The battle was characterized by the most vicious fighting I have seen in three years of combat and was culminated by the most resounding victory enjoyed by any unit in Vietnam ... Company A fought with unequalled skill,

boldness, courage and determination. Throughout the operation Company C maneuvered over difficult terrain and fought a tenacious, well train, numerically superior enemy force with distinction and skill ... Company A acted as the spearhead for the Brigade. It found the enemy, fixed him, doggedly pursued him, and did not allow him to rest or reorganize ... Company A viciously attacked and pinned down two enemy battalions on 7 June and provided accurate reports which permitted the Brigade Commander to commit an enveloping force to the enemy's rear. The courage and calmness during the twenty-four hours it was surrounded and cut off by a large enemy force was magnificent." (8:1).

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

1. The communications plan outlined in THE COMPANY PLAN called for each rifle platoon to have three AN/PRC25 radios. The Weapons Platoon had only one. The Rifle Platoons were to have two rifle squads and the platoon leader on the company net. The Weapons Platoon had only one radio because it was the reserve and normally operated closest to the Commander. It required less control. The Weapons Platoon did not operate a fire direction net as no mortars were carried. The lack of a squad radio made it necessary to give the squads an AR/PRC 25 radio, when possible. This allowed the squads to act independently from the platoon. The Platoon Leader would designate one squad as base squad. He would be with that squad. It would be the squad without a radio. It required discipline on the part of the squad leaders. This was acquired. Excess traffic was seldom conducted. The

Company net was never tied up to the extent that it hampered command and control by the Platoon Leaders or Company Commander. This plan provided the additional advantage of keeping the Company Commander informed of the situation. This communications plan proved to be very effective.

2. Movement off of trails in the jungle is slow and difficult. The chances of making a contact are greatly reduced. FM 31-30, Jungle Training and Operations, states that movement on trails should be avoided. (6:144) The enemy moves on trails. He camps on trails. His base camps lie on trails. To find the enemy can be difficult, even when trails are used. Movement across compartment off of trails will result in movement of about four or five kilometers a day. A good modus operandi is to move on trails and patrol off of both sides of these trails into the jungle wherever signs of the enemy are found. Point and flank security are a must. Trails must be used in mountainous jungle to develop the situation.

3. Every effort must be made to take prisoners early in an operation. On 6 June, it was learned that SSgt Perkins had shot a wounded NVA soldier. The NVA soldier had killed one of Perkins' men. Perkins shot him at a range of about ten steps. The NVA soldier could have been taken prisoner easily. There is a tendency for many of the U.S. troops to do this. A prisoner on 6 June would have been of great value. Troops must be indoctrinated on the importance of taking prisoners alive for intelligence purposes.

4. When an artillery battery is required to fire two missions, special attention must be given to the

observer-target azimuths. They can easily be confused. Ground commanders are taking a risk when asking the artillery to fire a mission that the artillery is leery of. Batteries should not be split, normally. Lack of confidence in the 155 battery was expressed by Commander, Company A. Attempts were not made to get the 155 fires on target. Commanders must utilize all fire support available, and they must have faith in the artillery.

Lessons Learned

5. A good modus operandi to use in the jungle is to establish a company base and radiate patrols out from the base. The patrols must stay within supporting distance of each other. On 6 June, reinforcement of the 2d Platoon by the 3d Platoon took two hours. The 2d Platoon could have been overrun had it taken longer. Two hours is an excessive amount of time to reinforce a platoon size unit.

6. All fire requests were submitted on the Company Command net. Adjustments were given on the Command net. It was possible to have squad leaders on independent missions call for artillery and air strikes using this procedure.

Lessons Learned

u. The enemy uses the lure and ambush tactic. They will send out a small group to make contact with U. S. forces. The group will flee back into a fortified position occupied by a large force. The enemy takes advantage of the habitual pursuit by U. S. Forces. Platoons became over-engaged three times by blindly pursuing the enemy down trails. NVA troops do not travel in groups of four and five. Security was not maintained during the pursuits.

8. Smoke artillery was used while disengaging two platoons in trouble on 7 June. This was done by dropping

the fires to within fifteen meters of friendly positions. The smoke used in this manner assisted considerably in the disengagement.

9. On 7 June SSgt Perkins led an abortive assault against a fortified position. He was killed and several others wounded. It is virtually impossible to form a platoon skirmish line and control an assault in thick jungle. In this type terrain, the advantage goes to the defender, the set force in fortified positions. In this type of situation, maximum use of artillery and air power must be used to soften up the enemy. Once this has been done, friendly forces should move in again to determine the amount of resistance. This tactic is contrary to the spirit of the offensive, use of fire and maneuver, and the principle of leaning into your firepower. This concept is seldom seen in print because it is contrary to principles. Other people are finding it to be true, however. LTC Boyd T. Bashore expressed the concept excellently in the February 67 issue of Army. LTC Bashore is with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade in Vietnam. He wrote: "The task of the infantry is to find the VC, using small mobile recon patrols that constantly feel and probe. Once the enemy has been found, the patrols attempt to fix the enemy ... Then the command turns the battle over to the supporting arms, the artillery and air, with their delay fuse bombs and heavy shells... When the artillery and air have finished their work the infantry feels out the position ... should the job of destruction not be finished, the infantry men hunker down and let the supporting arms have at it once more. The cycle is repeated again and again. The traditional assault is delayed until the position has been as devastated and the

enemy so cut up that the trip becomes a cake walk ... It may not reflect as grand and gloriously on the Queen of Battle, but it is the path to victory with the fewest casualties." (1:59)

Frontal assaults are costly in manpower in the jungle and should be avoided.

10. Some of the medevacs were executed by the CH 47 helicopter using the wench. The time required to evacuate one man is about five minutes. To evacuate six casualties requires the helicopter to hover for at least thirty minutes. The wench system on the CH 47 is too slow.

11. The U. S. Air Force HH 43 "Huskie" was used to evacuate the Tiger Force casualties on the night of 8 June. The time required to wench out one casualty was much less. However, this helicopter could take out only four or five casualties at a time. Little difficulty was encountered in this operation. The HH 43 is an ideal medevac helicopter for wenching out small numbers of casualties.

12. Flare ships were used to drop illumination for the HH 43 during the medevac on 8 June. Flares were also used to furnish illumination for a resupply by UH1D Huey's. After the medevac had been completed, the UH1D hovered over the company position. With the aid of the flares the crew kicked out the resupply of ammunition, "C" rations, and medical supplies. Flare ships assisted immeasurably in the execution of the medevac and resupply.

13. On the late afternoon of 9 June, Company A was moving to the aid of Company C, 2d Battalion (Airborne) 502d Infantry. Company A crossed through fresh enemy fortifications without thoroughly investigating the area. Speed was of utmost importance. After contact was made on the next ridge to the north, a force slipped behind

Company A and occupied the positions. Company A was quickly surrounded. Security was sacrificed for speed and it almost resulted in the loss of a rifle company.

14. Company A suffered seventy-seven casualties during the operation, yet finished the operation as an effective fighting force. Sergeants E-5 and E-6 proved capable, when the situation was critical. The company had experienced noncommissioned officers. When the platoon leaders and platoon sergeants became casualties, the squad leaders would take over. At one time, the platoons were commanded by one E-7 and three E-6's. This was when the company was surrounded. They performed beautifully.

15. When placing artillery and air strikes on the enemy, the enemy several times moved close to friendly positions. This hugging technique reduced the affects of friendly firepower.

16. The M-79 buckshot round was used extensively. The use of the conventional round is restricted by the vegetation. The round is likely to hit a branch and detonate. The buckshot round penetrated the jungle and inflicted casualties. It is a good round for area coverage at close range. The point men liked to carry it as an anti-ambush weapon. This proved effective.

17. The NVA forces encountered fought viciously. Maximum use was made of fortifications. In some cases, these fortifications completely neutralized the friendly advantage of artillery and air. The enemy took advantages of American weaknesses. In several cases, the aggressiveness of small units actually proved to be a disadvantage. The enemy lured them into ambushes. Enemy use of automatic weapons was excellent. On the night of

9 June, all machine guns were placed so that interlocking grazing fires were obtained. Fire discipline was good. The enemy fired their automatic weapons only when they had a target. The enemy conserved ammunition. The enemy proved to be a very formidable foe.

18. It has been said many times that there is no key terrain in the war in Vietnam. On the night of 9 June, Company A found itself in bad need of a piece of high ground. The enemy owned it all. As a result, the Company was forced to form a perimeter along a creek bed. The Company could look up and see enemy on three sides. Company commanders in mountainous jungle terrain must keep one of his platoons on a piece of high ground at all times. The Company must have a place to go when it meets a superior dug-in force. Tactically speaking, there is key terrain.

19. On 17 June, Company A was hit with friendly aerial rocket artillery. This resulted from lack of proper control measures. The flight leader, forward air controller, and ground commander must share the blame. The ground commander ran out of smoke grenades. The forward air controller did not insure that the flight leader knew exactly where the friendly and enemy units were. The flight leader should not have fired without being positive of these locations. Control is essential. USC-17 marking panels can be used to mark friendly locations; smoke grenades can do the same. Radio contact with the pilot is necessary. The forward air controller must be able to mark the target once the flight leader knows exactly where the friendly units are. A smoke grenade for the M-79 would be very useful for ground commanders. It could be used to mark targets out to about four

hundred meters. M-79 smoke rounds probably would have prevented the accident on 17 June. The best means to use to control air strikes are a combination of as many of the above control measures as possible. Multiple control measures are a must.

20. The individual soldier performed magnificently. The soldiers would not hesitate to assault. Small unit leaders had to hold them back. Many times casualties were taken needlessly because of over-aggressiveness. The individual soldier refuses to leave a wounded comrade. It does not happen. He would rather die than let it happen. Men died trying to save their friends. The individual soldier must be controlled, however. He must not frontally assault a machine gun and face certain death. There are other ways to do the job. Excessive casualties were taken by men trying to reach wounded. This subtracted from the progress of the battle. Men must first attend to the task of taking care of the enemy. The men of Company A fought for over eighty hours without sleep or rest during the period 7 June through 11 June. And they had something left at the end. They were not completely exhausted. S.L.A. Marshall summed up nicely in Look the performance of the individual soldiers in Vietnam as follows:

"I was with line troops through three major battles. They are different. They make common uncommon courage. The problem of getting men to fire at the enemy has all but disappeared. They will withstand more fire without flinching, march farther over rougher country carrying heavier loads and sustain heavier losses without crippling shock to their spirits than any U.S. field army in this century." (9:57) That description

applies to the individual soldier of Company A during Operation Hawthorne.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Use of the AN/RRC 25 radio down to squad level is practical. Operation of a Company net with the squads on the net is practical in certain situations. Commanders must tailor their communications to support their organization and mission.

2. Contact with the enemy is more likely to be gained on trails. Trails must be used in mountainous jungle terrain to gain contact and develop the situation.

3. Soldiers must be thoroughly indoctrinated on the importance of taking prisoners early in the operation. Leaders must insure that potential prisoners are not shot.

4. Artillery batteries should not be split to fire two close support missions, unless the fire direction center gives assurance that it can safely execute the fire mission.

✓ 5. Platoons patrolling in the jungle must be able to reinforce each other within an hour.

✓ 6. The enemy uses lure and ambush techniques to draw pursuing forces into an ambush. Increased security must be maintained in the pursuit.

7. Artillery smoke rounds can be adjusted to less than twenty meters from friendly exposed troops without danger. Smoke should be used to the maximum when withdrawing over engaged units.

✓ 8. Frontal assaults are costly in thick mountainous jungle. Use massive artillery fires and air strikes to neutralize the enemy. Use the infantry to mop up.

9. The CH 47 helicopter wench system operates too slow during medevacs. The U.S. Air Force HH 43 "Huskie" helicopter is more suitable for small numbers of casualties.

✓ -10. Security Must not be sacrificed for speed when operating in the jungle. The result can be annihilation, when speed is given precedence over security.

✓ 11. Units can suffer large numbers of casualties over a period of time without becoming combat ineffective. The commander's belief that this is so is necessary in order to make it true.

12. The enemy frequently attempts to "hug" friendly units during artillery and air strikes.

13. The M-79 buckshot round is more effective in jungle terrain than the conventional round. It is especially useful for point men and as an anti-ambush weapon.

14. The NVA units and the individual soldiers should not be underestimated. The enemy will take advantage of U.S. weaknesses. NVA employment of automatic weapons is excellent.

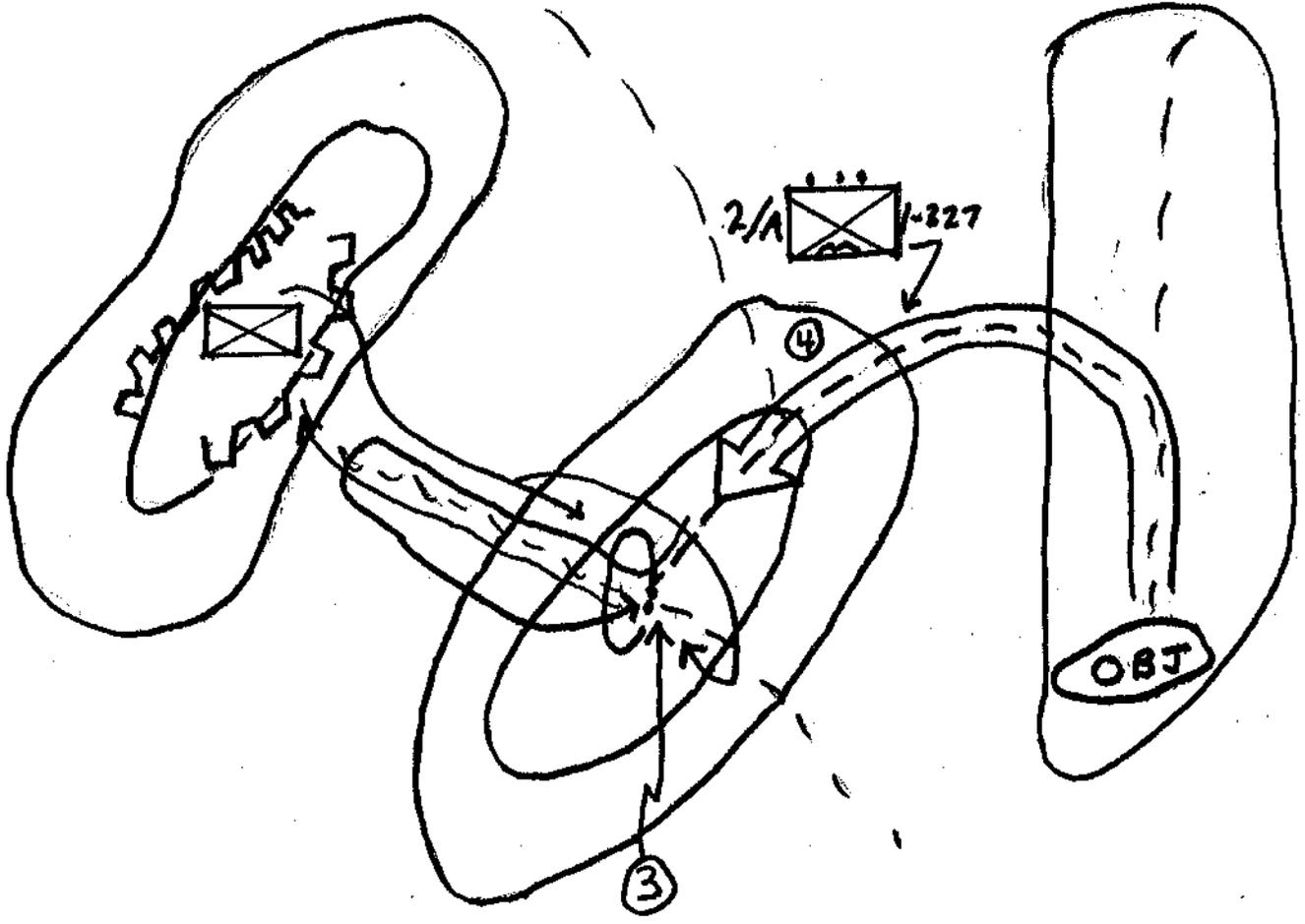
✓ 15. Tactically speaking, there is key terrain in Vietnam. Company commanders must not allow all of their platoons to move to a low area at one time. One element must maintain the high ground.

✓ 16. Multiple control measures are necessary when controlling air strikes. There is a requirement for an M-79 smoke round to assist in control of strikes.

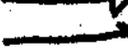
17. Properly led, the individual soldier today has no peer.

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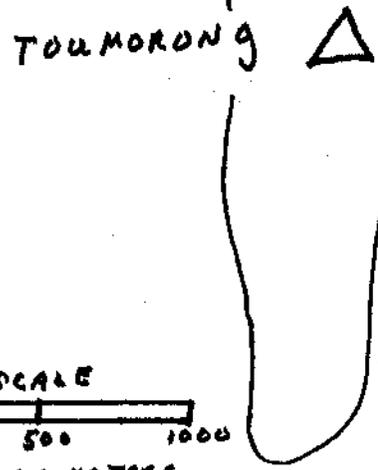
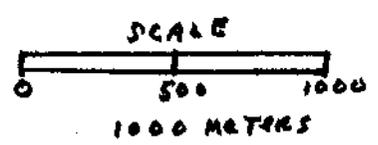
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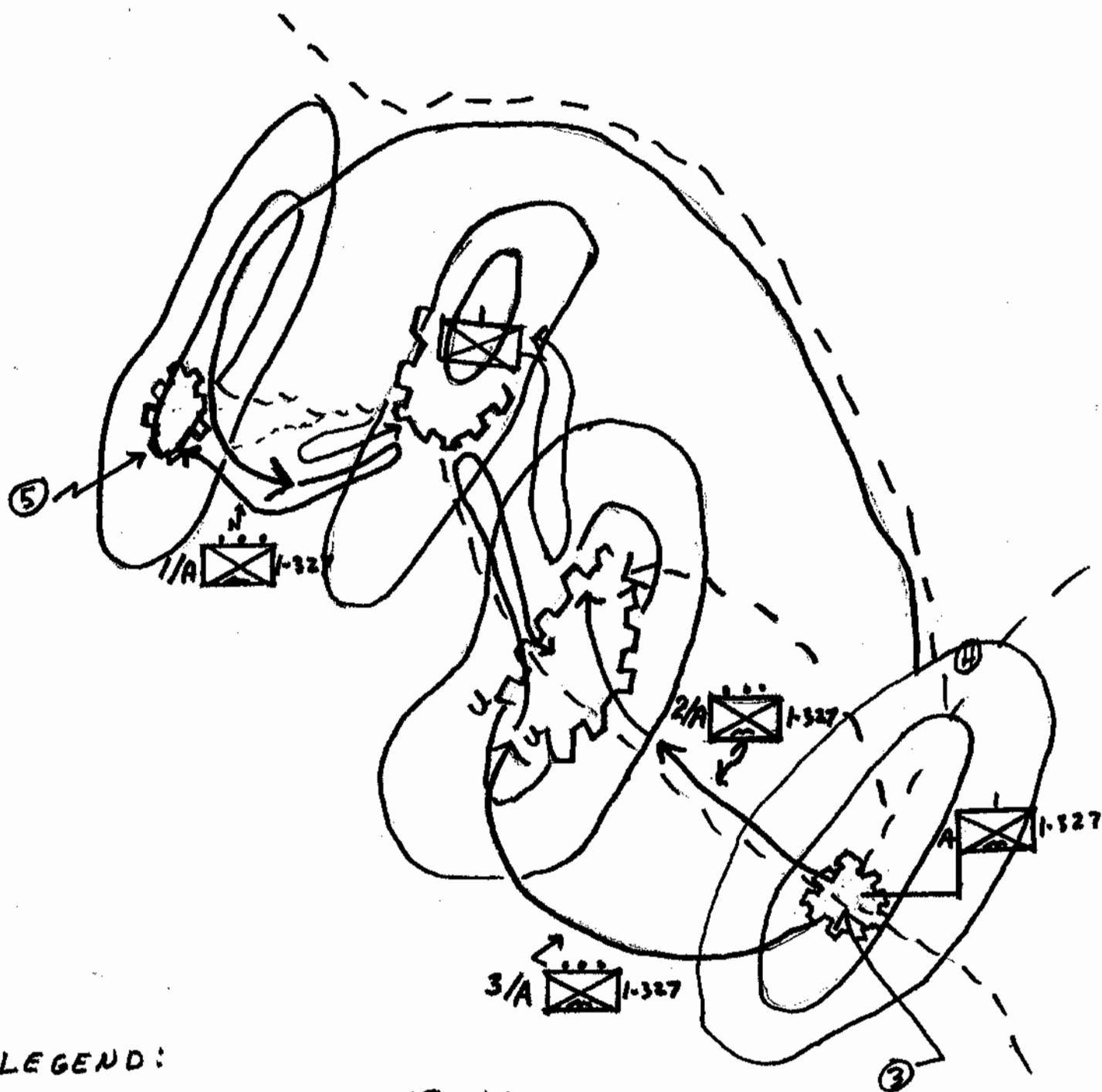
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-  TRAIL
-  ENEMY FORTIFICATIONS
-  REFERENCE POINTS
-  GOVERNMENT INSTALLATION
-  ENEMY ROUTES
-  FRIENDLY AXIS
-  FRIENDLY ROUTES

SKETCH B
FIRST CONTACT
BY 2ND PLATOON
6 JUNE



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LEGEND:

- ▣▣▣▣ ENEMY FORTIFICATIONS
- ENEMY ROUTES
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- ⊕ REFERENCE POINTS
- - - - TRAIL
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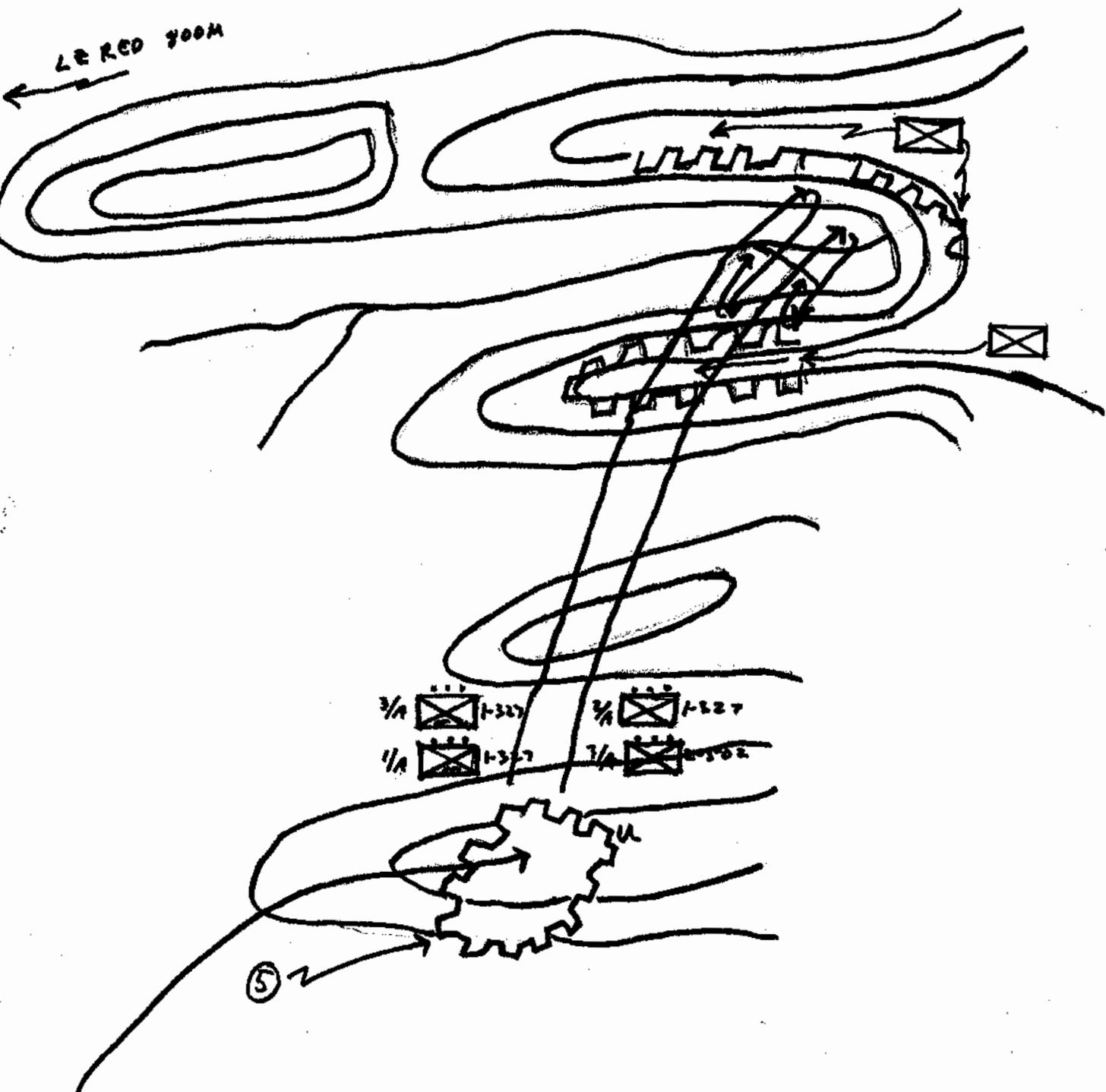
SKETCH C
 COMPANY 'A' CONTACT
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↑ CO C/2-502
700 METERS

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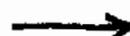


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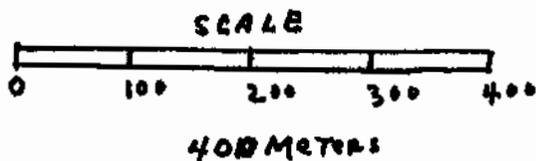
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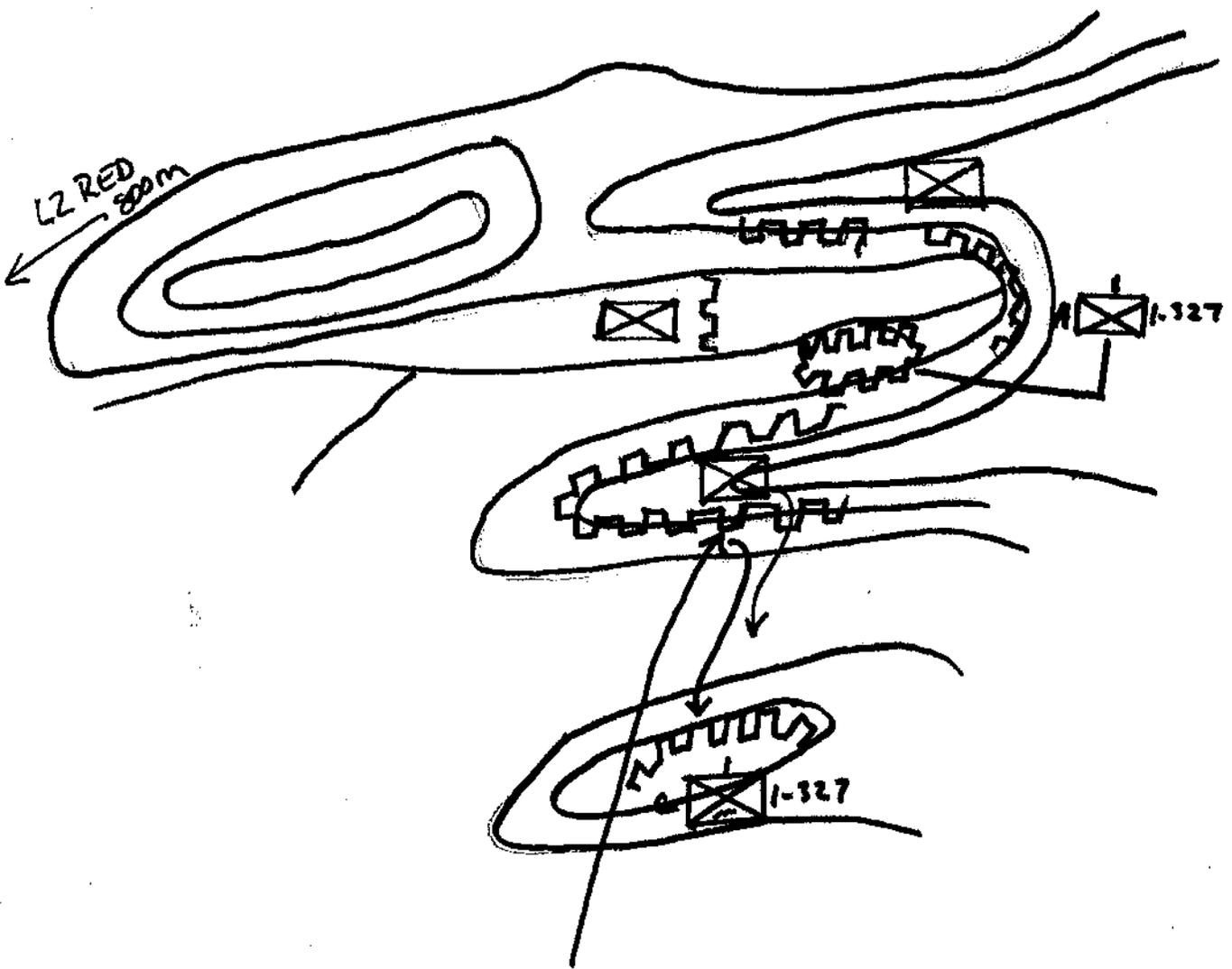
 ENEMY ROUTES

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SKETCH D
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LEGEND:

- W W W W ENEMY FORTIFICATIONS
- W W W W FRIENDLY FORTIFICATIONS
- FRIENDLY ROUTES
- ~ STREAM
- ⊠ ENEMY UNIT OF UNKNOWN SIZE

SKETCH
SITUATION ON
MORNING OF 10 JUNE

