

**Daily Diary Transcript**  
**of**  
**Lieutenant Colonel Clifford C. Neilson (Col. Ret.)**  
**Commanding Officer**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Mechanized), 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division**  
**12 May -13 November 1968**  
**Tay Ninh Province, Republic of Vietnam**  
**CTZ (Combat Tactical Zone) III**

**Preface:**

The diary entries were made nightly over a 6-month period in 1968 and were transcribed in 2003-4. Although the entries are legible, the meaning of the many abbreviations, acronyms, and short hand notations within the daily entries is likely to be puzzling to a reader many years later. Some were to me and I was the writer! This transcript faithfully reproduces the entries as written in **bold 14-point font**. Explanatory notes for abbreviations, acronyms, and short hand notations are shown inside 14-point font brackets [...] the first time used. Historical and non-diary entry specific explanatory material providing context and technical details appear after entries in **12-point font italic**.

The diary is divided into, this Preface and 7 chapters, one for each of the months May thru November 1968 in which I commanded the Battalion and a glossary. (For Internet posting, chapters will be divided into 7-day weeks.)

**Background of the Time and Geography Included in the Diary Entries:**

During this period, the land mass called, Vietnam, was divided into two parts. The communist-style **Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)** (or more familiarly North Vietnam) controlled the northern part; Ho Chi Minh led the government. Its military forces were usually referred to by the US military structure as the **North Vietnamese Army (NVA)**. The USSR and China supported the DRV both, with supplies and diplomatically.

The ostensibly, democratic, **Republic of Vietnam (RVN)** (or more familiarly South Vietnam) controlled the southern part. The US military structure usually referred to RVN military land forces as the **Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN)** and ARVN Marines. In addition to the United States, the governments of, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Philippines, and Thailand supported the RVN with troops.

Within the RVN population was a large opposition guerrilla force, the Viet Cong (VC). The VC were RVN citizens, armed, organized, and supported by the DRV who fought as guerrillas against the US and RVN regular forces. The RVN was divided into civil government entities called provinces; each province was divided further into districts. All US Military operations within RVN were under the command of the **Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV)** with headquarters in Saigon. Allied forces were under the **Operational Control**

(OPCON) of MACV. During the period of this diary, General William Westmoreland commanded MACV.

MACV superimposed on the RVN civil provincial structure four Roman-numeral military corps-like organizations called **Field Force Vietnam (FFV)**. MACV assigned US and allied combat and support units to the FFV as they arrived in country and occasionally shifted these units between FFV to meet changing circumstances. Additionally, MACV assigned US military personnel as advisors to ARVN units down to company-sized units.

All US forces within the FFV geographic area of operations, combat and advisor, were under the FFV commander. Within a FFV area, US combat units were assigned a **Tactical Area of Operational Responsibility (TAOR)** (frequently shortened to **Area of Operations (AO)**).

In 1968, III US FFV was responsible for the Provinces in which the 25th Infantry's TAOR was located. Major US Army units, operating in III FFV, May thru November 1968, in addition to the 25th Division, included the 1st Infantry Division, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and the 199th Infantry Brigade (Bde)

### **25th Infantry Division Organization and Tactical Area of Operations**

This diary covers a period when the 25th Infantry Division TAOR, encompassed the Provinces from the north edge of the Saigon, Capital Military District, along major highways northwest of the city of Cu Chi, to the Cambodian border. The Division combat forces consisted of: 3 Bde Headquarters, 6 Infantry and 3 Mechanized Infantry Battalions, an Armored Cavalry Squadron, and 4 Artillery Battalions. It also had the normal complement of, organic combat support and service units, as well as, non- Division attached and supporting units. The combat forces were under the operational control (OPCON) of one of the three Brigades. Division and 3<sup>rd</sup> Bde headquarters were at Cu Chi, 1st Bde at Tay Ninh, and 2d Bde at Dau Tieng. During May thru November 1968, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Mechanized), 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment (4<sup>th</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup>) was OPCON to each of the Brigades, but primarily to the 1st Bde.

**The following adapted from a "Tropic Lightning" News article:**

" In addition to screening secondary roads, the division maintained round-the-clock security operations on the extensive main routes of supply in the TAOR. These **Main Supply Routes (MSR)** were, **Route 1**, from Saigon to Cu Chi to Go Dau Hau; **Route 22**, from Go Dau Hau to Tay Ninh City; **Route 4**, from Tay Ninh City to Rau Co; **Routes 13, 26 and 239** from Tay Ninh City to Dau Tieng; and **Route 8A** from Cu Chi to Phu Cong. The only portion of the TAOR that the Division did not enter in force during May-November 1968, was the sparsely populated **War Zone "C"** jungle area north of the Tay Ninh, Bau Co, Dau Tieng axis. This area was subjected, however, to extensive active surveillance, by both aerial and long-range ground reconnaissance, conducted by squad and platoon size units. Extensive, Air Force, B-52 bombing missions (nicknamed ARC LIGHT) and tactical fighter strikes were made throughout War Zone C, upon enemy base camps, supply concentrations and other targets of opportunity."

During this 6 months of diary entries, the **Tay Ninh Base Camp (TNBC)** was the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion's "Home". TNBC, located about 6 miles northwest of Tay Ninh City, was a large circular shaped, military/"city-like", semi-permanent, garrison. It was surrounded by 3 Concertina wire (coiled, razor barbed, wire) fences interspersed with watch-towers and fighting bunkers. It was the "permanent" home for probably at least a thousand US Army and Air Force supply, maintenance, and support troops and the site of their living quarters and working facilities in RVN. In addition to US military personnel, there was a sizable contingency of non-native civilian contractors including **Pacific Architect & Engineer (PAE)**, which provided specialized support. At the start of each day, local Vietnamese day laborers would enter the base to perform additional support tasks. And last but not least, it was the base for the **Philippine Civil Assistance Group (PHILCAG)**.

Located within TNBC's perimeter was a large, hard surfaced airstrip capable of landing C-130 USAF aircraft; a mobile army surgical hospital (MASH); a large ammunition bunker; a Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricant (POL) "farm"; an outdoor movie theater, swimming pool, Post Exchange complex; and separate clubs for officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted men.

TNBC and the personnel assigned to it, provided logistics support to the 1<sup>st</sup> Bde, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division; 3 to 5 combat battalions (i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> /23<sup>rd</sup>) OPCON'ed to the 1<sup>st</sup> Bde, which operated generally in the Tay Ninh area; Special Forces camps along the Cambodian border; and occasionally to ARVN units.

For each combat battalion, there were barracks, mess halls, and offices. Non direct-combat battalion personnel, performing duties such as personnel and supply clerks, cooks, medics, mechanics; walking wounded; personnel going on or returning from Rest and Relaxation (R&R) furlough; and soldiers either arriving or departing RVN occupied these facilities under the "watchful eye" of the Battalion Executive Officer (XO) and each Company's XO. Also, during the infrequent times when the battalion was withdrawn from combat status to rest and refit ("stood down"), these combat elements returned to TNBC to use these base camp facilities.

Permanently assigned base camp support and combat unit personnel, when at TNBC, were responsible for its defense and took turns, manning the perimeter nightly, after their regularly daytime duties were completed. When a battalion "stood down" it provided a contingency to defend the base camp mission.

Each day, a large re-supply convoy would leave Saigon, bound for Cu Chi, TNBC, and Dau Tieng. Convoy escort responsibility was shared by the **3<sup>rd</sup> Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment (nicknamed: The Three-quarter CAV); The 4<sup>th</sup> /23<sup>rd</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Mechanized)/5<sup>th</sup> Infantry (nicknamed: The First of the Fifth Mech, Bobcats)**. These escort duties, resulted in many combat actions during May- November 1968.

**Tay Ninh City, capital of Tay Ninh Province**, was a bustling metropolis. Its primary claim to fame was being the site of the **Cao Dai Temple Complex**. The Cao Dai were an offshoot of the Catholic-Buddhist religion and vehemently, anti-NVA. This high-walled, temple complex could be likened to their own "Vatican City" and they fought bravely on numerous occasions to

prevent the NVA from seizing it.

The most prominent geographic landmark, in the province, was **Nui Ba Den Mountain** (allegedly “Black Virgin” or “Dark Lady” Mountain” in Vietnamese.) It’s western base sat about 6 miles east of TNBC. At an altitude of six thousand feet, it appeared to “thrust” out of the surrounding plain and its summit provided unparalleled observation in all directions. On the mountain’s top, was a US Army communication station, defended by a detachment of 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division soldiers. Around the base of the mountain, was a network of unimproved trails and rutted roads. On the lowest slopes, were banana plantations and a US Army-operated and defended, “Rock Quarry”. Everything else, between the top and bottom, was controlled by the NVA. Throughout May-November 1968, ownership of this middle layer was contested bitterly by elements of the 25th ID, including the 4<sup>th</sup> /23<sup>rd</sup>.

North of TNBC and close to the Cambodian border, were the remains of a **Colonial French Fort (FF)**. It was rebuilt and occupied by US forces. Stationed at the FF were US Special Forces units and a Battery 175mm cannon, capable of firing up to 25 miles. Escorting re-supply convoys to FF was a frequent task of the 4<sup>th</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup>.

About 30 miles northeast of TNBC was the village of **Dau Tieng (DT)**. It housed the Michelin rubber plantation headquarters and processing facilities. The rubber tree plantations were vast and seemed to stretch in every direction for miles. Throughout the plantation area were small hamlets for the workers and used frequently as sanctuary by the NVA. DT usually housed the headquarters of the 2d Bde, 25th Division. Virtually every day, elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> /23<sup>rd</sup>, escorted the re-supply convoy from TNBC to a check-point where escort responsibility reverted to the 1<sup>st</sup> /5<sup>th</sup> Mech. After the trucks were unloaded in DT, the convoy returned to TNBC under the protection of the 1<sup>st</sup> /5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> /23<sup>rd</sup>.

### **The Organization, Equipment, and Mission of The 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 23rd Infantry Regiment.**

**The 4th Battalion was organized under the MTOE 7-46, 7, 8G series with:**

- **Headquarters & Headquarters Company (HHC).** HHC had assigned the battalion staff, Reconnaissance Platoon, Heavy (4.2") Mortar Platoon, and Flame Thrower Platoon. Habitually attached: Artillery Liaison Officer and Engineer Platoon Leader.
  - **Three line companies (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie).** Each company had three rifle platoons and a mortar platoon. Habitually attached: artillery forward observer (FO) with the company command group and a medical person (medic) with each platoon.
  - **Service & Supply Company (Delta).** Delta Co had medical and supply personnel, mechanics, and cooks, some of whom were attached to the combat elements.
- The battalion normally conducted daily operations from two locations:
- **The combat elements - A, B, C Companies,** and the reconnaissance, mortar, and flame thrower platoons - commanded by their company and platoon leaders defended the **night**

The Battalion CO, the Intelligence Officer (S2), Operations Officer (S3) and his assistant, and the Command Sergeant Major (CSM) operated from the NDP with combat elements. Usually supporting at the NDP were detachments from: the Medical Platoon with the Surgeon manning the aid station; the Mess Platoon operating a mess hall; the Maintenance Platoon, repairing equipment; and the Supply Platoon, re-supplying food, water, ammunition, vehicles and weapons.

**The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, executed five distinct missions:**

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**12 May-** Spent day of 12th (and much of 11-13 May) w/ [with] LTC [Lieutenant Colonel] King Coffman, CO [Commander] 2/22, [2nd Battalion (Mechanized), 22nd Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division "Triple Deuce". Three 25th Division Mechanized Infantry Battalions included: 1<sup>st</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Mech, 4<sup>th</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> Mech, 2<sup>nd</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup> Mech] at FSB [fire support base] Trang Bang. Visited other FSB and District Advisor. Met Bill Allison, former Auburn [ROTC] student [of mine.] Mortar nite of 11th. Man under tank track killed. 4 mortar men wounded. Rds [rounds] landed w/in [with in] 3 feet of track. B Co. under attack 0045-0200.

*The 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Commander directed that a Battalion Commander-designee spend several days with the commander of a similar type battalion to familiarize himself with combat command and control, prior to assuming command of his own battalion.*

*A fire support base (FSB) was a semi-permanent encampment for a combat battalion. Typically, the battalion conducted combat operations in the daytime and spent the night at the FSB. Each FSB had at least an artillery battery assigned and all FSB were within artillery range of at least one, and preferably two, other FSBs. FSBs were usually named after an artillery notable of past wars. FSB Trang Bang was an exception to this naming practice. Trang Bang was a small village on the highway between Cu Chi, (location of the 25th Infantry Division Headquarters), and Tay Ninh.*

**13 May** Left Trang Bang w/ Col [actually, Lieutenant Colonel (Promotable)] Fremont B. Hodson, CO, 1st Bde. Pick up wounded VC [Viet Cong] prisoner, deposited him at Cu Chi. Saw 3 dead VC. Went on to Bobcat, 1/5 [nickname for the 1st Battalion (Mechanized). 5th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division] LTC Lodge [commanding] visited 2 hours. Returned CC [Cu Chi] 1100. Spent afternoon in Bde base camp. Received few mort [mortar]/rocket rds. 1st heavy monsoon rain. 41 MP [took 41<sup>st</sup> anti-malaria pill since coming to RVN. A once weekly ritual for all soldiers.]

*The monsoon season began in RVN in May each year and lasted for about 6 months. Almost daily, usually in the late afternoon and lasting from 1- 6 hours, dark clouds would roll in from the China Sea and torrential rains would begin. Rainfall would total 3-6 inches. No military operations were possible during the storm. After the storm ended, every ground depression was filled, itinerant streams coursed through the area, and dusty areas became almost impassable seas of mud. In about 6 hours, everything was normal.*

*The area to the south and west of Saigon, Cu Chi, and Tay Ninh was very flat and farmed as rice paddies. The paddies were formed by dikes, which kept the monsoon rain available for rice cultivation. Small villages and hamlets occupied what little elevated terrain existed. Near each village was a graveyard, also on slightly higher ground.*

## **May 14 - [(Modified) Table of Organization of Mechanized Battalion (MTOE)]**

Company	Reference	OFF	WO	EM	AGG
HQ & HQ	(MTOE 7-46G, TOE 7-46G)	17	0	177	194
Service (Delta)	(MTOE 7-47G, TOE 7-47G)	5	2	142	149

<b>Alpha</b>	<b>(MTOE 7-48G, TOE 7-48G)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Bravo</b>	<b>(MTOE 7-48G, TOE 7-48G)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Charlie</b>	<b>(MTOE 7-48G, TOE 7-48G)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>188</b>
	<b>Total Combat Strength</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>865</b>	<b>907</b>

*The TOE was the document which specified the number and rank of personnel and types and numbers of equipment each unit was authorized to have. Each type unit had a unique TOE number and in Vietnam many of these units operated under a modified TOE as did 4/23. From the figures above a fully-manned infantry battalion was authorized 40 officers, 2 warrant officers, and 865 enlisted men.*

**Rained until 1200, then cleared. Visited 2/22 in battle vic Hiway 1. Saw 2 VC. Observed 4/23 battle from air. Air strikes. Landed Duc Hoa - proceeded vic. 113 [M-113, Armored Personnel Carrier (APC)] to Mohawk [4/23 nickname & radio call sign] NCP [probably NDP]. Spent nite.**

## **15 May - Took command 0900.**

*On 15 May, 4/23 was OPCON to 1st Bde. The Division Commander, Major General Mearns conducted the change of command ceremony on a dusty field not far from Go Dau Hau, scene of repeated heavy fighting. I relieved LTC Avery S. Fullerton, an Engineer officer who had previously commanded the 65th Engineer Battalion, the 25th Division combat engineer battalion. Avery was a World War II infantry veteran, USMA Class of 1949 graduate, and a battle-tested commander. He led the 4/23 through Tet, the NVA New Year's offensive; and the follow-on mini-TET. General Mearns presented Avery with a Silver Star, they got in the General's chopper and left. I was in charge.*

*When I assumed command the battalion was short vehicles, officers, and combat soldiers, a condition in which it remained during my entire 6-month command.*

*I assemble my staff and company commanders, all battle experienced and weary, I could feel that I was now in a "try out" period and they would be the judges if I passed. Gave them a pep talk.*

*Before leaving, the Division Commander told me he was making arrangements for me to move the battalion to TNBC for a stand down [battalion freed from combat responsibility.]*

**Stand down until 1200. Moved out 1330, moved vic. Ap Tram Loc XT6503. Deployed. Min. contact. Withdrew 1800 occupied blocking position north of My Hanh church.**

[Here followed what appear to be a series of inter-related directives, cautions, and observations.]

**1st Bde Comdr Notes** [Lt. Col. (P) Hodson]

**1. H& I fire - plan based on intel.** [Harassment & Interdiction fire was unobserved artillery fire, usually at night into areas of suspected or likely enemy activity.]

**2. Kit Carson scouts - should have 5-6/Bn.** [KC Scouts were SVN nationals supposedly trained to help lead US forces to NVA/VC areas. I do not recall who trained them, how they were assigned, or if any were assigned to 4/23.]

**3. Foxhole strength - keep close check on light duty.** [Light duty was a medical term used by doctors to designate individuals that temporarily were incapable of performing their duties. For an infantryman, this usually meant being left in a base camp and off combat assignments.]

**4. Over strength in HQ Co -Force medics & other non-combat troops. Keep Bde Comdr informed.** [The meaning of this is unclear to me.]

**5. Use 11B's only when authorized - use twice wounded.** [11B was the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) designator for infantry rifleman. Probably there was concern that 11B's were being improperly siphoned off for non-direct combat assignments. Twice wounded 11B's were usually exempted from further combat duty and the suggestion was to use them instead of the combat-eligible 11B's.]

**6. Organizing for LPs [listening posts], Patrols, etc - stay within organizational frame work. Maintain tactical integrity.**

**7. Fire hazards in base camp.**

**8. Reporting - accurate, timely-use preliminary reports-don't wait.**

**9. Defensive driving.**

**10. PC drivers have license.**

**11. Lateral extensions for APC.** [An APC driver steered by pulling back or moving forward a lever on either side of his seat. These levers were called laterals. If a driver were inside when the APC hit a mine, he was usually killed or seriously wounded. By extending the laterals with pipe or bars, through the driver's hatch to the top of the APC, the driver could control the vehicle while minimizing the danger to himself. Why the Bde CO felt it necessary to include this in his instructions is beyond me.]

**12. Helicopters - when in contact, helicopters will be made available.**

**13. Staff procedure - night operations, reporting procedures.**

**14. Know your weapons & what is available -use your tools - example CS [a type on irritant tear gas], flame thrower, smoke**



**15. Combined operations done whenever possible. Coord w/ district.** [Combined meant with RVN forces - regulars, Regional Force, Police. The district was a sub-division of a province commanded by a RVN officer.]

**16. Professionalism - watch & guide.**

**17. Bunching up - Keep dispersed.**

**\*18. Accidents - double-check [to be ] used in mortar plats - stress prevention - control of weapons - as soon as action lightens up, accidents increase. Chain of Command letters, monthly safety lecture.**

**19. Discipline - Very bad in base camp. Haircuts, bathing, clean clothes.**

**20. Failure to hold ground - do not break contact. Maintain pressure.**

**21. SADEA - subversive literature.** [No idea what this means.]

**22. Wet season hygiene - dry feet, inspections.**

**23. Hyperventilation [?] - don't panic in wells**

**24. Red Rocket.** [I believe this was a nickname for an emergency message, notifying recipient of impending action.]

**25. Division msn [mission] - Interdict & destroy VC/NVA exfiltrating from Saigon.**

The following lists appears to be items the Bde CO told me to emphasize when I took command. It would be logical to believe that at my first company commanders' meeting shortly after taking command, I would have reviewed these.

**Salt tablets w/ water**

**Mortar crew proficiency**

**Mail**

**Weapon security   claymore unhook**

The Claymore was a cigar box-size, parabolic-shaped explosive block with embedded ball bearing-like shrapnel to be used above ground in front of a position. A soldier detonated it with either a detonator cap ("cap") or detonating cord ("Det cord"). For safety purposes, the detonating device had to be unhooked when the claymore was moved.

**Awards**

**Casualty reporting**

**Twice wounded**

Twice wounded soldiers were given the choice to be moved out of the direct combat zone and into less dangerous jobs. Most took the opportunity.

**Use of Arty   Keeping FO close**

The Forward Observer (FO) was an artillery officer whose job was to bring artillery fire on the enemy. He had to remain close to the commander to get directions as to where fire was to be placed and when.

**Range of Radar?**

**Scout dogs, flame throwers, laws w/AP** [ambush patrol] Occasionally scout dog

units would be attached to front line infantry to accompany troops and detect hidden enemy soldiers. There were four APC with mounted flame throwers. Light antitank weapons (LAW) were one-time use rockets useful against enemy in foxholes and bunkers.

**Three claymores set up 2 w/ det cord, 1 w/cap**

In a defensive position, each APC was required to set up 3 claymores.

**Police, prostitution, protection**

Police means to keep the area clean and sanitary; prostitution was rampant in the villages near FSB and base camps; protection meant being vigilant 24/7.

**Latrines**

**16 May - Quiet night - 12 air strikes.\* Failed to report unable to obtain clearance for arty to fire (S3 & arty told to report this to Viking)** [Radio call sign for 1st Bde CO. S3 battalion operations officer and artillery liaison officer were collocated in the operations APC];\***Failed to have radar set(s) w/ mobile units (S2 tried to keep radar set & personnel w/ Recon** [reconnaissance platoon] [S2 battalion intelligence officer collocated with S3.] **Stayed in pos north of My Hanh church until 1200 - moved through previous day's a/s [air strike] area - found 9 KIA** [Killed In Action, more accurately body count (BC.) (KIA were US; BC were NVA/VC)], **4 weapons, ammo, documents, web gear - 1500 returned to vic Duc Hoa - RON** [remained over night] **4 patrols out - Recon spotted 2 VC. Church service 1830 - 45 attended**

**17 May - Stand down - contact team arrived 1100 - visited by Gen Gleason** [Assistant Division Commander] **& Col Brownell, Discom** [Division Support Command] **Comdr. Informed we will move to Tay Ninh. Contact team provided good service. Included PX**

**Shower-Dx** [direct exchange of dirty uniforms for clean ones] **clothes - barber**

**18 May - Left NL** [night laager, an armored unit-peculiar term, for a combat formation where APC's are circled in mutually supporting firing positions. The term is of South African origin, originally meaning to circle the wagons at night for protection.] **0820 - arrived Hiway 1 0930 arrive Tay Ninh 1330 - Gen Gleason arrived 1400 - I surveyed area w/ Sgt major** [Sergeant Major, the highest ranking enlisted man in the battalion and a battalion commander's eyes and ears] -

**co** [company commanders] & [battalion] **staff meeting 1800. Too long - staff needs shaping up.**

*The Battalion Command Sergeant Major (BCSM) was John E. Wise, an infantryman's infantryman. He had been awarded a Combat Infantry Badge (CIB) for service during WW II, during the Korean war, and during his first Viet Nam tour with the 1st Infantry Division. As the battalion's senior enlisted man, he had many responsibilities by regulation and as many other's as he and I chose to assign him. One of his self-imposed duties was to be my body guard and keep me alive. He was indefatigable, never seemed to sleep, exceptionally brave, and my strong right arm.*

**Wrote ML** [my wife Mary Lou] **3 page letter - rec'd 3 letters from her plus 1 from pop** [my Father]

**Maint** [maintenance of] - **small arms, veh** [vehicles], **commo** [communication equipment]

**Personnel svcs** [services]

**4 Recon patrols - no combat**

**19 May Attended church 1030 - 25 + present**

**Inspected troops in motor pool**

**Ate lunch A-C Co. mess hall**

**Visited Spt Co. (B, 725)** [Support Company for the battalion was B Company, 725 Maintenance Battalion] **CO (Captain Taylor) S & S Bn** [Supply & Support Battalion] **CO (LTC Beherens)**

**BG** [Brigadier General] **Gleason visited briefly**

**Received 5 new Lt's** [Lieutenants] **7 EM** [enlisted men]

**PX** [Post Exchange] **open special for Bn.**

**Rained - 5 82mm mortars** [rounds] **fell outside** [base camp] **perimeter 2**

**122mm** [rockets] **PHILCAG** [Philippine Civil Assistance Group compound] **2**

**122 MACV** [Military Assistance Command Vietnam compound]

**Rec'd rain jacket**

**20 May - Maint** [maintenance] **day - award ceremony w/ MG Mearns BG**

**Gleason visited Rec'd soxs Wrote ML**

**Need to do** [all but the first item were lined out probably showing they had been done]

**Tour perimeter w/ map**

**Fix tape recorder wash clothes**

**haircut color film cash check**

**Review Rating scheme**

**Inspection 1000-1600**

**Ceremony 1500**

**Meeting 1800**

**Meeting w/ Co Comdrs** [company commanders] **& S1-S4** [principal staff officers S1-personnel, S2 - intelligence, S3 - operations, S4 - logistics]

**Visit PAE** [Pacific Architects and Engineers, a civilian firm, contracted to construct, maintain, and operate the large base camps all over RVN.]

**21 May - Command Management Maintenance Inspection (CMMI) courtesy Failed 1. Wheel vehs** [vehicles] **2. Small arms 3. Maint** [maintenance] **records; Passed combat vehs, commo** [communication equipment]

*The CMMI was a peacetime procedure superimposed on a wartime environment and was performed by division specialists. Its ostensible purpose was to give platoon-to-division commanders an objective view of the combat readiness of their assigned equipment. In peacetime it was an annual, must-do-well event. (Consequences for less than passing grades in all phases was usually relief from command.) In RVN, it occurred after a battalion had been withdrawn from combat for several days and afforded the opportunity to repair, refurbish, clean, and maintain all assigned equipment. Equipment from mess stoves to flame thrower APC were rigorously inspected by trained maintenance personnel. Consequences for failing a phase were normally a concerted effort by all hands to correct deficiencies lest they be the cause of a future combat death or injury.*

**Visited PAE about generators.**

**Base camp attacked by ground infiltrators. Destroyed artillery ammo** [ammunition] **dump, 2 or 3 guns** [artillery pieces], **6 KIA. Bn in a ready to reinforce role from 0100-0300. 6 VC. 1 company swept outside perimeter.**

**22 May - All Cos test fired weapons at Rock Quarry. Continued maint. Memorial services for 34 KIA. Had Bar-B-Que chicken w/ C Co. Received counter-attack mission from LTC Britt** [most likely for defense of the Tay Ninh base camp.]

*The Rock Quarry (a.k.a. "Rock Crusher") was exactly that; a permanent crushed- rock producing facility on the lower slopes of the most conspicuous landmark in Tay Ninh Province, Nui Ba Den Mountain. There was a US Signal outpost on the mountain top and usually a small US unit guarding the Rock Quarry. Everything else was NVA/VC controlled territory. Despite the best efforts of the US Air Force and the 25th Division, no amount of bombing or ground combat was able to dislodge the enemy from this "citadel." Regularly resupplied from*

*their Cambodian sanctuary, the NVA/VC forces were able to launch attacks with impunity into the area surrounding Tay Ninh city. The 4/23 was frequently given the Rock Crusher security role and suffered many casualties there. Frequent following diary entries will make reference to either the Rock Quarry or Nui Ba Den.*

**Painters** [no idea what this means] **Letter to Father. Haircut**

**23 May - 2d Bde OPCON. Moved from Tay Ninh to vic Hoc Mon. B Co. left 0630, main body 0730. Total mileage 60. B Co. attacked vic CP 182. [check point] north of Go Da Ha at 0830, one man killed RPG. A Co. attacked by its presence in vic of RF [Regional Force] outpost at 0930 2 km north of CP 182. Maneuvered A Co. through Rubber plantation, passed C Co. through. Gun ships rocketed area. Mortared area. Relieved by 2/ 22. Continued to march. Closed Hoc Mon 1530. Visited 2d Bde CP [command post] Received missions 1. Protect bridges D 2/27 [D Company, 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment nickname Wolfhounds] OPCON for this purpose 2. RIF [reconnaissance-in-force] in local area to prevent infiltration in local area 3. Protect FSB Breckinridge II. Sent B Co. on a quick RIF to a suspected Rocket psn. [position] Battalion began to dig in. Quiet nite. C Co. at TSN [Tan Son Nhut Air Base, on the south east outskirts of Saigon and site of RVN's largest combined civilian and military airfield]**

**During my 6 month command of the 4/23, 51 brave officers and soldiers were killed in action; they are part of the battalion's 310 KIA during 1966-70. Their names appear on the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington and on a list compiled by a veteran's organization, a copy of which has been furnished me. Following the diary entry for the day on which they were killed, each will be remembered in this document. CN**

**Gone But Always Remembered  
From the 4/23 KIA List:  
CPL Timothy Arthur McGurty B Co.**

**24 May - FSB B II - 3 company RIF's. Visited HM [Hoc Man] Bridge. Capt Ekhert. Demonstration at Cu Chi [25th Division base camp] on COFRAM [new type of US artillery ammunition nicknamed "fire cracker")] and 122 mm RKTS.**

**Strength [number of men, by company in the field.] A Co. 107 B Co. 116 C Co. 115 HQ Co. 133. Total 471 attach 17 total 488**  
**Tape to Dad, letter to ML. No mail. B Co. at TSN.**

**25 May - 3d Bde OPCON FSB B II - 3 Co RIF. Recon escorted arty btry [artillery battery - usually 6 howitzers] to Duc Hoa. Completed sweep 1200. Found dud 155 [mm artillery shell, often used by VC as a mine] LAW; 1 Chinese grenade, 200 rds LMG ammo [light machine gun ammunition] returned NL [night lager] 1330. Received order to move [at] 1500. Moved [at] 1600 to SW of TSN airbase.** [Laager was set up at the end of the runway, outside the TSN perimeter fence and across Highway 1 which ran from Saigon to Cu Chi. The lager was in the vicinity of Xom Binh Dong (coordinates 765915), a small hamlet which had been the site of a fierce battle during the February 1968 Tet offensive. So many enemy had been killed in the battle and then hastily buried, that the site reeked of decaying bodies. APC moving through the dirt disinterred body parts adding to the stench.] **Occupied 3 co strong points. Got part of trains [logistic support vehicles] stuck in mud. Left bulldozer and lowboy in mud** [flat bed trailer on which tracked vehicles such as bulldozers, among other large items, were transported.] **Spent a quiet night. Rec's 2 letters & 1 tape ML 1 letter Shirley** [my step mother]

*A Laager was the normal night defense formation used by mechanized infantry units -and tanks if they were attached. The vehicles were formed into a circle so as to provide mutually-supporting all-round defense. Fields of fire to the front were cleared and mortars and artillery were registered around the perimeter so as to be ready for rapid response. Usually each company formed its own laager and the headquarters element joined with the center company. The company laagers were within sight of each other, no more than 500 yards apart. Laagers were particularly effective in rice paddy areas during the dry season. The 2-3 feet dikes the farmers built to keep the water in the paddies during the growing season were used as partial hull defilade for the APCs. The battalion usually had an attached Engineer platoon with a bulldozer. The dozer was used to dig the APCs further into hull defilade so that the top of the APC was behind a berm slightly higher than the dike. The berm protected the gunner on the APC with the .50 cal machine gun as well as the crew from direct fire. The Xom Binh Dinh lager fit the description above. Laagers were similar to but clearly different from fire support bases (FSB) in size, permanence, and types of weapons found within them.*

**26 May - 3 Plat size RIF's no contact. Visited CO, 4/12 Inf Bn (Mastoris) [Jay**

Mastoris, an old friend] **and CO, 3/4 Cav (Otis)** [Lt. Col. Glenn Otis, an old friend, and West Point classmate. Glen had commanded the 3/4 Cav during the Tet battle mentioned above. During the visit, Glen warned me to be especially watchful that night as it was his experience that the NVA repeated their tactics no matter how unsuccessfully and might well attempt to attack TSN again over and through the position the 4/23 Inf lager.] **Bn. rested during most of the day.**

**27 May - Nite of 26, and all of 27 - 2d battle of Xom Binh Dong. Started about 262200 with B Co., then A Co., then C Co. reporting movement to the north and south, moving west to east. First attack occurred against A Co. perimeter at 2205. Small arms fire only, no mortar or RPG. Arty, gun ships, flare ships, organic mortars in spt. Continuous illumination to daylight. Attacks against A & B Co. slacked off about 0400. C Co. not seriously attacked. Attacks resumed at 0600 against A & HQ Co. 2 APC knocked out, 2 APC damaged by RPG. B Co. attacked from south. Attack continued until 1400. C Co. swept area. All contact ceased 1600. Moved to new location. 5 wheeled vehicles stuck. Quiet nite. Thank God. Received letters ML & Father.**

[My records show that the Commanders were: A Co. - Capt. Montgomery; B Co. - Capt. Hales; C Co - Capt. Mellis; Recon - Lt. Vessel]

*It was standard 25th Division tactics to employ battalion-size combat battalions during both day and night operations within range of at least one battalion - and preferably two - artillery battalions. Since artillery could fire day or night without regard to weather, this assured that some indirect firepower could always be brought to bear. (For reasons that my diary entry does not reveal and my memory can not recall, the Laager either had no or minimal artillery coverage).*

*The US Air Force rose to the occasion, providing support almost as soon as the first shot was fired. During darkness, AC-130 Spectre gun ships provided continuous flare and suppressive fire. The company commander would mark the forward edge of his APCs and the "Gatling Guns" in the 130's would "hose down" the area from which we believed the attack came. Since every 5th round was a red tracer, it looked like a red rope walking back and forth across the front lines.*

*Normally on a night attack like this, the NVA would break contact about 0400hrs and leave the battlefield for the sanctuary of surrounding jungle. However in this case, they did not and their attack ragged on with no sign of abatement.*

*About 0400hrs, we had begun to run out of small-arms ammunition and were becoming concerned that the NVA would move forward and attempt a close-combat assault. We called for helicopter resupply of ammunition. A brave H-34 Chinook helicopter crew dropped us a pallet by light of US Air Force-dropped flares. The pallet was on the Tan Son Nhut side of the Laager*

*and fairly well shielded from the enemy view and fire.*

*I ordered the supply platoon leader to take a jeep and trailer and some men and go get the ammo. He refused, saying he was afraid he would be killed. I explained to him we were all afraid we would be killed, that a lot more of us would get killed if he didn't get the ammo, and repeated the order. He refused again. I drew my .45 pistol and told him if he did not go, I would shoot him. Before the threat worked or I had to carry it out, Battalion CSM Wise stepped between me and the Lieutenant, said he'd hate to see me end my career that way, and that he'd go get the ammunition. He did without incident and later received his 3d or 4th Silver Star for his actions.*

*As soon as I could, I had court-martial papers prepared for the Lieutenant. Higher headquarters squelched the action and transferred him out of the division. I never saw or heard of him again. I do not know if I would have shot him had the BCSM not intervened.*

*At this time, the battalion had a fully-staffed medical platoon commanded by a Captain Terry Schwartz, a medical doctor. Within the platoon were aid men, each assigned to a rifle platoon; aidmen were trained much as current day fire and rescue emergency medical technicians. Their job was to stabilize a wounded man until he could be evacuated to the aid station where the doctor would take over. During operations, the doctor and the aid station were located within the Headquarters Company area.*

*Considering the duration and severity of the action, it was providential that there were only 5 KIA and 15 WIA. The WIA began to accumulate in the aid station almost from the first shot. The WIA could not be evacuated because the "Dustoffs" (helicopters dedicated to medical purposes, usually taking casualties from the battle field to a hospital) could not land due to the intense NVA .51 caliber anti-aircraft fire. After dawn, it became a typically very hot day and after the fighter-bomber attacks - see below - there was no shelter from the sun for the wounded. The water had long since been used and they suffered. They were finally evacuated in the late afternoon.*

*As dawn broke and then at 15 minute intervals, 2 fighter-bombers would take off from Bien Hoa Air Base on the opposite side of Saigon, gain about 1500 ft elevation then nose down into a bomb release pattern. Because the NVA was within 500 meters of our front line, I had to give the Air Force permission to drop 500 and 1000 lb. that close. The bombs were equipped with drag devices to retard their fall so the aircraft could get away safely before the bomb exploded.*

*After about the second bomb drop, we realized that these parachutes made the bombs easy to see as they fell. We would continue firing until the last instant while someone watched the bomb. He would yell "Down!" and we would hit the ground. The bomb would explode with tremendous concussion and spray shrapnel throughout the air about 6-8 feet over our prone bodies. Every radio antenna, truck canvass, and my command tent was shredded.*



*The effect of the bombing on the NVA was horrendous. Amid great boiling clouds of dust, we could make out soldiers staggering around from the concussion. To a man, including the cooks, every "Tomahawk" rose up and began firing at the figures in the dust. Then some one would holler "Down!" and the process was repeated.*

**Gone But Always Remembered**  
**From the 4/23 KIA List**  
**SP4 John Paul Edwards A Co.**  
**PFC Michael Eugene Ludwig C Co.**  
**SGT Ronald Ray Wallace A Co.**  
**PFC Rubel Lee Horton B Co.**

**New York Times, 27 August 1968, pp 1,3:**

***"Fighting Is Sharp at Edge of Saigon.."***

*Small but violent battles broke out on the edges of Saigon yesterday...As night fell, other armed helicopters and United States fighter-bombers attacked enemy soldiers who were fighting American infantryman five miles south of the center of the city.*

*At 11:05 P. M. an enemy force of battalion size attacked an American mechanized unit of tanks and armored cars camped for the night 6 miles west- northwest of central Saigon. Five Americans were killed and 11 wounded. There was no report of enemy losses.*

*It was not clear how many enemy soldiers were involved altogether and whether they were Vietnamese or North Vietnam regulars but both South Vietnamese and American staff officers said they thought the number was low-probably not more than a company of 150 men in each of the first two actions. The enemy soldiers were discovered early Saturday morning.*

*A senior American officer said that the command had no indication that the enemy intended a large scale attack on Saigon, comparable to those of late January or early May.*

*"What he's doing now is just harassment," a brigadier general said.*

## **TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS**



**Ready To Strike.... Anywhere, Anytime**

**Vol 3 No. 23**

**TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS**

**June 3, 1968**

### **Sheer Courage**

## **VC Ground Attack Turned Back**

**1ST BDE** - While securing a fire support base 14 kms south of Cu Chi, 25th Inf Div forces repelled a determined enemy ground attack. It was through the sheer courage and the combined efforts of the 4th Bn (Mech), 23rd Inf, three batteries from the 7th Bn, 11th Arty, and a battery from the 3rd Bn, 13th Arty, that the fire support base was saved.

Just shortly after midnight the fire support base began receiving a heavy volume of enemy mortars. Within 30 minutes trip flares were illuminating sectors of the perimeter and everyone realized that a ground attack was in the making.

With the mortars still dropping, now at a heavier rate, the "Tomahawks" still remained on line and countered with a heavy volume of fire. The 50 calibers on the armored personnel carriers glowed in the night along with muzzle flashes from the other weapons, a shield of lead was established with interlocking fire.

MAJ Jeff M. Tuten, the Tomahawk XO, realizing the precarious situation of the fire support base, directed artillery pieces to be put on line where the enemy concentration was the greatest. With their tubes lowered to point blank range, rounds were fired at the charging enemy.

The fierce fighting of the enemy forced the perimeter to be altered. At this point, Tuten radioed Bravo Co and a troop from the 3rd Sqdn, 17th Air Cav to come from their temporary night location to reinforce the perimeter.

At one time there were six gunships and four F-105's on station. But the enemy was determined to overrun the fire support base and kept pressing his attack.

When Bravo Co arrived at the besieged fire support base, they came under heavy automatic weapons and RPG fire. Realizing how badly they were needed inside the perimeter, Cpt James P. Hales organized the company on line and charged through a hail of fire over the enemy positions into the perimeter.

The gunships still peppering the area around the perimeter, Bravo and the Cav element were deployed within the perimeter and slowly but surely the enemy began to retreat. Finally at dawn the enemy broke contact and the fire support base was saved.

A morning sweep of the area outside the perimeter revealed nine enemy bodies but speculation was that many more were killed because of the blood-stained ropes that were found outside the perimeter. These ropes were fashioned in such a way that they were probably used to drag away the dead. In addition to the many blood trails, numerous RPG and expended recoilless rifle rounds were found.

## **Back Up NVA Battalion, To Swamp, Capture Cache**

**CU CHI** - More than 350 enemy soldiers were killed in three days of heavy fighting when elements of four 25th Inf Div battalions and one troop of the 11th Armored Cav

Regt supported by helicopter gunships, artillery, and tactical aircraft drove a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) battalion against a swamp.

The enemy force, believed to be the Delta 267 NVA Battalion, was first spotted by helicopter crews from the 3rd Sqdn, 17th Air Cav, as they flew armed aerial reconnaissance over the area eight kms southwest of the 25th Div's base camp at Cu Chi.

At 10:00 a.m. the crews saw an estimated 200 enemy soldiers wearing green uniforms and pith helmets and carrying AK-47 assault rifles.

CWO Sterling Holbrook, pilot of an OH-6A Cayuse, said, "I went along one tree line and saw about 20 VC below me. I banked around and followed the treeline on the other side of the rice paddy and saw about 25 more."

"I decided that there was a whole slew of them in there," he said, adding that he promptly radioed for additional gunships and artillery support.

As the gunships and artillery began devastating the enemy, a multi-battalion task force consisting of elements of the 4th Bn, 9th Inf; 4th Bn (Mech), 23rd Inf; 2nd Bn, 34th Armor; 1st Bn (Mech), 5th Inf; and 11th Armored Cav Regt moved into a semi-circular blocking position pinning an estimated 500 enemy soldiers against a large open swamp.

Throughout the night a barrage of 5,000 rounds of artillery and four tactical air strikes pounded the illuminated enemy positions as helicopter gunships patrolled the swamp to prevent the enemy's escape.

The next day, the ground forces began an aggressive drive closing in on the enemy. The NVA battalion was entrenched in fortified bunkers in a massive hedgerow complex several hundred meters in depth.

According to 1LT John LaRoche, S-3 air operation officer for the 2nd Bn, 34th Armor, "Once he left his bunkers, Charlie could only run into our blocking force or out into the swamp."

By the end of the third day, the U.S. soldiers had pushed through the enemy stronghold finding additional bodies and bringing the toll to over 350.

**28 May - Policed battlefield with A, B, C Co, 3/4 Cav. Found additional 27 BC [body count,] 40-50-RPG rds, mortar rds, ammo, documents, 1 POW. Completed 1600. A Co. had accident with 5 killed, 2 wounded, box of claymore mines exploded. Rec'd pen from ML. Wrote ML 1 page letter. Sent her junk.**

*When the attack finally stopped about mid-morning, the 4/23 troopers moved into the killing area in front of the perimeter. It was littered with bodies, parts of bodies, weapons, and equipment. We used a 5-ton truck to collect NVA weapons and took them to Bien Hoa to be distributed to the US Air Force pilots and their supporting airmen who had played such a decisive part in the attack.*

*Division sent the 3/4 "Horse" under command of Lt. Col. Glen Otis to help us police the battlefield. As we approached the battle area an NVA with an RPG shot Otis off his command APC. Fortunately he was not badly wounded but was unable to return to his command. He subsequently became a Commanding General US Army Europe.*

*The A Co. accident was determined to have occurred most likely because the crew had stored detonators in close proximity to the Claymores. Something set off the highly sensitive detonators which in turn set off the Claymores. The 5 killed were in the APC; the 2 wounded were in an adjacent APC and were hit by debris. Because of the uncertain nature of what caused the explosion, the 5 dead were listed as KIA*

*A version of the 2 day battle appeared in the **Tropic Lightning**, the 25th Division newspaper.*

*"Combat action in the division TAOI on 27 May was focused on the area 14 kilometers west of Saigon at coordinates XS671925 where the 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry was located in a night defensive position. At 2250 on the 26th, the battalion's night position came under mortar fire which was intermittent until 0330 hours when the position came under a massive ground attack. The 4th of the 23rd held off the human wave assaults with the aid of armed helicopters, artillery and air strikes. At dawn, the 4th of the 23rd was reinforced by A and C Troops of the 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry. The combined US force moved out of the NOP at first light and pursued the enemy which was attempting to break contact. The fire-fights in the general vicinity continued until 1600 hours. The enemy body count within the NDP and the surrounding area was 243 VC KIA as compared to 6 US fatalities. In addition, three personnel were taken who identified their mauled unit as the 2nd Battalion, 273 rd VC Regiment. Also captured were 28 AK-47 rifles, 11 RPG-2 rocket launchers, 16 machine guns, six 60mm mortars, 49 60mm mortar rounds, 58 hand grenades, 142 RPG-2 rounds."*

*General Westmoreland, Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Viet Nam (COMUSMACV) sent the following congratulatory message, a copy of which is in the 25th Division Foundation archives.*

*"Fighting west of Phu Tho Race Track night of 26 May and continuing through 27 May has taken a heavy toll of enemy forces. Heartly congratulations to 4/23 Inf and to A and C Troops, 3/4 Cav for outstanding combat professionalism."*

**Gone But Always Remembered**  
**From the 4/23 KIA List**  
**PFC Paul Alfred Gonzales A Co.**  
**SP4 Richard Joseph J. Jones A Co.**  
**CPL Robert James Plourde A Co.**  
**PFC Robert Michael Sopko A Co.**

**PFC William Edward Bricker A Co.**  
**PFC William Patrick Flynn A Co.**

**29 May - Quiet day. Stand down. Given reinforcing role to move south to bail out 4/12 if necessary. Cholon on fire. [Predominantly Chinese section of Saigon where US Post Exchange was located.] Heavy rains starting at 1400 through dark. All wheels, except one mess truck and trailer evacuated. Doubtful we'll be able to get out neatly. Decided to make Capt. Sisman S-4 and Lt Long Asst S-3 Air. Rec'd 1 old letter from Shirley & ML. No letters out.**

**30 May - Quiet day. Swept village of [no entry] with B & C Co. dismounted. Alpha [A Co.] blocked on the north. Held medcap [Clinic for natives using organic medical personnel] Treated 91. Moved to a new position 600m NW of former psn. Slightly higher and much dryer. Paddies filling. Sent Charlie [C Co.] out at 1800 to occupy a blocking psn. Visited ROKs [Republic of Korea forces] Charlie spotted 2 VC. Wrote Mary Lou 3 pages ltr.**

**31 May - Quiet day. Swept 1 village with ABC dismounted. Heavy rain 1400. Gave ROKs [an AK-47] rifle. A Co. sent out 1600 to establish NL [night lager]. Wrote Pop 3 page ltr. Rec'd letter & tape ML. Sent ML tape.**

**1 June - PFC TRAMADEO Sep 1 PFC HARTMAN Sep 27 [Hartman entry lined through] Quiet day. OPCON 2d Bde 0700. Visited CO, 2d Bde. Rec'd mission to move to north 4 km, conduct RIFs. Send Co. to TNS. 1 plat to bridge on Rt 1. Move to vic XS754966 in grave yard. No rain. Recon returned. 3 Tks in ROK compound. B Co. AP [ambush patrol] let 85 VC in 5-7 groups pass by during period 0030- 0430. No US casualties. Rec'd ML letter. Sent ML letter.**

**2 June - 7 hour hard rain 0001-0700. Talked to Bde Comdr about unsatisfactory patrol performance. Brainstormed w/ S3. Set up standards & procedures. A Co. (-1 plat on bridge) plus Recon made mounted/dismounted**

**sweep; B Co. made a dismounted block for a RF [RVN village-based Regional Force] sweep. C Co. (-) made local sweep. 1 Plat Co got dump trucks for road into area. B Co found old rocket site. Haircut (11 days) Rec'd letter from Vic & Pete, TIME [magazine] 24 May.**

**3 June - Quiet night - received order to move to new NDP due west TNS at 0430. Started move from graveyard 0930 after building PSP [pierced steel planking] road, completed move from graveyard 1300. Closed into 3 sep. Co. psns west of TNS. Very little rain. Took shower, visited TNS officer's club. Had steak.**

*I found this to be a bit incongruous. On Saigon's defensive front line, and I felt secure enough to get a steak at the Officer's Club. The XO, Major Jeff Tuten, took over and about 6:00 PM I went by jeep through the TNS gate and on to the OC. While there, I met a gung-ho USAF LTC who was bored with HQ duty and wanted to see a little action. I told him if he could be out to the NL by early AM, I would let him accompany one of the line companies on a RIF. I returned to the NL about dark and Jeff went to the OC for his steak.*

*The USAF LTC showed up on time the next day, went on the RIF, and returned dusty, sunburned, and exhilarated. Thanked me profusely and I never saw him again. He is still probably telling war stories to his grand kids and down at the Legion Hall. Had he been injured, wounded, or killed, I am sure I would have been severely criticized for letting him go.*

**\*rec'd copy of Gen Westy to Mearns congrat TWX on battle 26-27 May [General William Westmoreland, COMUSMACV) to Major General Fillmore K. Mearns, CG, 25th Division message quoted above]**

**Strength [MTOE authorized for combat elements in field]**

**A 100 [182]**

**B 130 [182]**

**C 125 [182]**

**HQ 120 [194]**

**total 475 [740]**

**Rec'd letter & tape ML - ltr Pop & Shirley. Sent ML tape.**

*This is the diary's first entry about field strength; there will be many more. Field strength - in today's terminology, "boots on the ground" - was always a matter of critical concern to me. Without sufficient combat troops in the field, mission accomplishment was in jeopardy.*

*The battalion's main fighting strength were the 3 rifle companies and the Reconnaissance*

*Platoon (included in the HQ figure above.)*

*Each rifle company was authorized 6 officers and 182 enlisted men.(see May 14 diary entry in Prelude for details.) Of these, the XO, first sergeant, supply sergeant, supply clerk, armorer, and company clerk would normally be in a rear area such as TNBC. This left a theoretical 182 "boots on the ground" in the field. As the figures above show, such was not the case.*

*An observer might ask the reasonable question: "Where were they all?" The answers lay in USA manpower policies and the flow of combat events.*

*Rifle companies never were at their authorized strength. The replacement stream was always behind in filling the ranks.*

*Replacements were assigned to companies upon arrival at Cu Chi, the Division HQ. Before reporting to their companies, they underwent 7 days jungle warfare training.*

*From those assigned, evacuated WIA and KIA reduced the strength but replacements did not appear in a timely fashion.*

*Assigned but not available for field duty were: recuperating and hospitalized WIA; men going on, or returning from R & R leave; and those going on sick call or medical appointments.*

*The bottom-line effect was that on any given day, only 60-70% of assigned combat troops were available in the field. Pragmatically, this meant that a rifle platoon leader would have only 26-30 of his authorized 43 available for combat duty. And after a series of combat actions, some platoons would be down to 20 men*

**4 June** - [Field strength] **0545. Quiet nite. Flap with Grecian Jigger** [radio call sign of unknown unit] **coord attack. 3 company RIFS. No results. Visited TSN PX. Briefed companies on air mobile tomorrow. No mail. Wrote ML & Father. Sent Gopher** [a close friend] a get-well card.

*Although my diary entries contain no mention of it, the 4/23 obviously had received orders to conduct airmobile (AM) operations. This was to be a BIG change for virtually everyone in the battalion since no one had ever done this, at least in a combat mode.*

*The probable cause for this change in operations was the increasingly negative effect of the monsoons on track operations in the Saigon area. We could no longer operate with impunity on dry rice paddies and narrow dusty roads. The deep mud prevented cross-country movement in areas where 2 weeks previous we had no trouble. Although later diary entries show we continued*

*some mounted operations, it was clearly time for the Tomahawks to "learn how to fly!"*

**5 June - 1:45+2:00+1:00.** [This is the first diary entry recording hours accumulated for my command & control helicopter hour usage. The digits show the number of hours on that day. When I accumulated 25 hours of combat-related missions, I submitted a form, requesting award of an Air Medal (or oak leaf cluster(s)). At the end of my tour, I had received 6 A.M.s, about average for a 25th ID battalion commander.] **Quiet nite. Airmobiled [AM] A & C into LZs due W of TSN on edge of swamp at 1020 & 1050. Pickup 1245. LZ 1300. Pickup 1500. Closed 1530. Critiqued airmobile exercises - several S1/S4 problems - no ice. Went to TSN off club for 2 hrs. Ltr fr ML.**

*This was the battalion's and my own first experience at AirMobile operations. It was a military culture shock to be deprived of the "comfort" and mobility of the APC and be thrust into a rice paddy with no way out except by a helicopter coming and finding you.*

*As subsequent diary entries will show during 5 June-1 July 1968, the Tomahawks conducted six, 2 company and three, 1 company AM operations; one entry is unclear on the number. On 4 July the battalion returned to its purely mechanized method of transportation, and did not AM again during my command period.*

*Ideally, BDE would allocate the battalion a flight of 10 UH-1 Huey troop carrier helicopters (nicknamed "slicks"). To permit the battalion to fight as a 3 company, force, each flight should have been used 3 times to pick-up and insert troops in a landing zone (LZ) within slick range and then, come back in the late afternoon to pick them up and return to the NDP. The demand for the limited number of slicks was such that only 1 or 2 flights were available to 4/23, resulting in commitment of only 1 or 2 companies.*

*Each slick could carry 8, fully loaded infantrymen, resulting in 80 soldiers lifted in a flight from a given spot and inserted in an LZ. This meant that 80 of the usual 100- 130 available personnel in a company went on an AM operation. (I do not remember what the others did but knowing soldiers, I am sure they were gainfully employed.)*

*If an LZ was defended (by enemy forces), it was referred to as "hot", if undefended, it was "cold." In all the AM operations we participated in June & July 1968, the LZs were cold.*

*The inserted company (or companies operating together) would perform one of two missions: seal and search a village for VC and weapons or RIF rice paddies, looking for arms caches in sunken sampans.*



*As Mohawk 6, I was allocated a separate command and control Huey that differed from a troop carrier in that it had 3 FM radio sets for my use. They permitted me to monitor the BDE command net, communicate on the battalion net with the commander of inserted companies, and monitor the net of one of the inserted companies. When all companies were inserted, my radiotelephone operator (RTO) and I landed and joined one of them and slogged along with everyone else.*

*Although I was in good physical condition, I soon found, that my 37 year-old body was no match for the typical, 18 year-old draftee when it came to walking for 6 hours through knee-deep paddies at 100+ degrees and 100+% humidity. I was always grateful for the breaks so we could pull off the leeches.*

**6 June** - [field strength] **554 Heavy rain. Quiet nite - airmobile exercises canceled because of difficulty in Manchu AO** [Manchu was the nickname of the 9th Infantry, a battalion of which was assigned the 25th Div. AO was area of operations, short for TAOR]. **B Co. moved to new location. A Co. conducted mtd [mounted] RIF & C Co. dismtd RIF. Visited bridge. Took Co Comdrs to supper. On return Intel report of big atk - 18 Bns.**

**Strength [MTOE authorized for combat elements in field]**

**A 100 [182]**

**B 128 [182]**

**C 125 [182]**

**HQ 125 [194]**

**total 478 [740]**

[I have no explanation as to why the field strength is shown above as 554 and the detailed breakdown shows 478.]

**Wrote ML & Doug & Clark** [my two sons]

**7 June** - **2+1 3/4+ 1 3/4+ 1 1/2 + 1/2** [Field strength] **567. Quiet nite. Spotted RKTS** [probably either 107mm or 122mm rockets, used by NVA to attack Saigon] **being fired. Airmobiled B Co. in at 0910 to ck RKTS site - A Co. lost a/c** [probably meaning a troop-carrying helicopter] **had to secure 6 slightly injured. A & B Co. continued to AM until 1530. B Co. given mission to conduct night sweep. D 1/27 OPCON** [to 4/23] **for night sweep. B Co. sprung ambush vic XS709978. Killed 3 VC carry rice 2130. No mail.**

**8 June - 1 3/4+2 1/4+1+3/4 [Field strength] 561. Airmobile A & C Co. A Co. hit small VC unit vic XS 694935 at 1030. Rooted them out. Killed 6 & captured 3 weapons. Gun ships killed 1. B Co. stood down. Col Miller [CO, 2d Bde] guidance-Keep one company active each nite. No mail.**

**9 June - Switched Mohawk prime command [FM radio net frequency] to 32.80. Quiet nite. B Co. stand down until 1630 - moved out to NL w/ tracks - will have RP. A & C Co. moved out 0800 - bad traffic jam - jumped off dismtd 1000. RIF for approx. 7 KM. Neg. results. Notified 1400 to put Co. in blocking psn. Moved C Co. to psn, closed 1630 with 4.2 mortar [platoon] & 3 tanks. C Co. went OPCON to Trojan [3d Bde] 1800. Rec'd 2 letters ML, 1 tape ML, 1 letter Shirley.**

*Radio call signs, such as "Mohawk", were assigned by the 25ID Signal Officer. Within RVN, each call sign was unique to prevent possible confusion and misidentification of units. Each call sign was a single 1 or 2 syllable word, associated in some way with the unit's history or crest. Logically, the 4/23 call sign should have been Tomahawk, not Mohawk.*

*When I inquired about this seeming inconsistency I was told that prior to the 1966 arrival of the 4/23 in RVN, Tomahawk was assigned to another unit. Hence the somewhat Native American-related Mohawk was used.*

*Once assigned, the call sign was used in non-radio conversation as shorthand to identify a unit, for instance "Mohawk" was based at TNBC.*

*Radio frequencies were changed on a regular basis, supposedly to confuse NVA radio intercept operators. It was not until August 1968, that it was realized that the habitual use of the same call sign gave the NVA interceptors immediate identification of units after a frequency change. From then on, two word non-unit related call signs came in vogue. My first non-Mohawk call sign was "Gray Ghost".*

**10 June - [Field strength] 542. 45th malaria pill. Quiet nite. B Co. spotted rct firing site; swept area, neg; C Co. OPCON Trojan in blocking position. A Co. RIF'd. Neg. Results.**

**Rec'd 2 letters from ML. Wrote ML.**

**11 June - [Field strength] 544. OPCON 3d Bde Col Ashley. Quiet nite. B Co. operated NDP vic. Rainy Towels [unknown radio call sign] village. Neg results. A & C Co. RIF'd. Neg results. 1200 OPCON 3d Bde [next items must have been the**

CO's guidance] 1st establish patrol base - co size - and maintain pressure nite and day. 2d - increase scety of Rt 1 bridge by AP [ambush patrol]. 3d - Continue to stir around. B Co. given nite patrol base mission. Recon on bridge. At 1900, culvert blown 1500 m from B Co. - neg results from nite activities, Rec'd letter ML, Pop, Vickie. Sent ML tape.

**12 June - A - 129; B - 128; C - 132; HQ - 125. Total 514. Pass on to Comdrs!**

(a) Have a light (oil drum - gas/oil) all night long effective tonite. Report location to Flexible [3rd BDE call sign].

(b) Fire by Air CAV at permission of grnd comdr - strobe light, flashlight - star cluster.

(c) Emphasis on counter-rocket activities.

(d) Ambushes - emphasize likely areas of ingress.

(e) Charlie [C Co.] send roving patrol into area B1.

(f) 1st element down 0730.

(F) B Co. prepare small gas/oil cans for nite identification for A.S.

Rec'd ltr ML

Quiet nite. TSN hit by RKTS - A & C Co. RIF'd. B Co. local RIF. Eng CO [platoon leader] accidentally shot self. Culvert in.

**13 June - [Field strength] 584. A & C Co's airmobiled - C Co. found cache - 10-122 RKTS, MTR, FZ; 82 -82 mm mortar rds w/ fuses; prop chgs, 7 cases AK-47 ammo, 4 sampans. Rec'd ltr Shirley.**

*From the Operational Report of the 25th Infantry Division for Period Ending 31 July 1968 for 13 June: "C Company, 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry (Mech) sweeping through a swamp midway between SAIGON and DUC HOA (XS695950) at 0915 hours, discovered and confiscated a large enemy ammunition cache located in four sunken sampans. The cache included 10 complete 122 rockets, 82, 82mm mortar rounds, 12 cans of 82mm fuses, 24 cans of 82mm primer, and 5,250 AK-47 rifle rounds."*

**14 June - [Field strength] 573. PFC James Lee Myer C Co US 64128813. To SGT E5. SP4 Johnny Jones Jr A Co US 54665794**

Quiet nite. B spotted Rocket fire - S [probably Scouts (Recon)] alerted to investigate 3 confirmed rocket sites at 0500. Sent C Co. mtd & B Co. dismtd to check out. Arrived in area 0600. C Co. found nothing. B Co. found sampan w/carbine, M16, RPG, ammo, documents. Killed 2 VC - 1 VC got away. A & C Co's swept swamp. Negative findings. LTG Weyand [CG, III FFV and former CG,

25 ID] visited 1045-1115. Gave him briefing. C Co. moved to new location. Rec'd ltr ML.

**15 June** - B Co received 30 rds 82mm mortar - A & C quiet. A & C RIF'd; neg. Results. Drew 2 airboats. B Co. moved to new location. Rec'd contingency mission to protect B/6/77 Arty. Passed [assigned mission] to R [Recon]. Rec'd ltr ML; wrote ML.

## TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS



Ready To Strike.... Anywhere, Anytime

Vol 3 No. 29

TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS

July 15, 1968

*The Tomahawk Navy or How Higher Headquarters Always Knows Best:*

*Usually, the Army determines there is a requirement for a specific equipment type. The Army then goes through a cycle where it performs research & development, conducts field tests, and eventually if it seems reasonable and affordable, produces the item. When stocks are sufficient, it issues the equipment to appropriate units. Once in service, the item is continually reviewed for improvement. Items as prosaic as the helmet, jungle boots, and meals-ready-to-eat are subject to this cycle.*

*Such a development cycle was not the case for airboats. The requirement arose suddenly and unexpectedly: small NVA/VC units moved at will through the rice paddies, and tributary streams and rivers in the Mekong River delta SW of Saigon. They fired 107 mm and 122 mm rockets into Saigon's suburbs, causing occasional fires but little effective damage.*

*When US troops began to operate in the area to intercept and destroy these enemy units, the troop transport of choice was the helicopter. While helicopters could insert troops into the surrounding rice paddies, the troops' speed through ankle to knee- deep water was slowed and their search area limited.*

*The requirement arose for a boat that could operate at high speed, traverse shallow water, and carry a number of combat troops.*

*Such a boat had long been used in Florida's Everglade Swamp for various commercial and recreational purposes. The so-called airboat was a shallow draft, aluminum skiff-like vessel capable of carrying 6-8 men at 30-40 mph. It was propelled by a large aircraft propeller encase in a cowling and powered with a small aircraft engine that operated on aircraft fuel.*

*The Army short-circuited its usual development and procurement practices, bought a number of these boats; air shipped them to RVN, and issued them to units such as the 4/23 defending*

*Saigon. No operational or maintenance training was provided and air boat-equipped units were left to develop tactics and perform maintenance as best they could.*

*When 4/23 was issued 2 airboats, I decided to assign them to Recon. The first problem to be solved was how and with what weapon to equip the boats. After first trying a bow-mounted .50 cal Browning machine gun, which proved too heavy, the second choice of a bow-mounted 7.62 mm M-60 light machine gun was adopted. The crews read the manuals which came with the boats; figured out how to start, stop, and operate them; determined how many combat-loaded soldiers could safely ride in them, and Recon Flotilla was off and running! (To be continued.)*



**16 June** - [Field strength] **573. Quiet nite in Mohawk AO - Trojan** [call sign of 2d BN/27th INF] **on north, Dragon** [call sign 2d BN/14th INF] **on S had small action - A Co. stand down, B Co. local RIF, C Co. airmobiled 0730. Found 14 1/4 lb blocks TNT. Mailed tape to Pop, wrote letter to ML**

**17 June** - [Field strength] **592. 46th malaria pill. Unquiet nite. 2150 received contingency mission to be prepared to resend to emergency in Trojan area. Coord w/ Warrior & Flexible** [call sign of 2nd & 3rd BDE, respectively] **- nothing came of it -Recon captured POW trying to turn claymores around; movement in vic. of bridge until 0100 - flare ships & mortars. B Co. reported movement - negative results. C Co. stand down. A Co. RIF'd in tree lines S of AO; checked village for VC. No mail.**

**18 June** - **HQ PFC Jeffrey Teger US 52751447** [no further information why this name was here.] **R AP spotted 10 men 2400 - C Co. spotted AA fire** [anti-aircraft]. **Neg. results. A & C Co's airmobile in a long stream. Worked N to S; captured 2**

**POW & 1 AK-47. Field strengths A Co. 129; B Co. 128, C Co. 117, HHC 125. Mailed ltr Pop. Rec'd letter ML, Vic.**

**19 June: 1.5 + 1.0 end 5th week** [Field strength] **589. 8171** [marginal note the meaning of which is unknown to me] **Quiet nite** [this is the first occurrence of this notation which appears in almost every subsequent entry except where the entry is Unquiet nite.] **air mobile 2 Co's to W & S of swamp** [not otherwise located]. **Found documents and 10 RPG 7. Scattered night sightings. C Co. became night Company** [do not remember the meaning of this remark]. **Repaired Flame Service Unit (FSU) charged 1 FT** [flame track] **Rec'd ltr & tape ML, ltr Vic. Wrote ML.**

*The HHC Flame Platoon was composed of 4 older model gasoline-driven M113 flame tracks whose cargo compartment was filled with a complicated, Rube Goldberg-like flame throwing system. The FSU was a truck-mounted compressor and pumping unit that were used to refill the flame track's tanks with napalm and compressed gas. A flame stream was produced by ignition of napalm as it was propelled through a gun-barrel-like device by high-pressure gas. The stream could shoot about 40 yards. Built for European battlefield use, the Army sent them to RVN in the belief they would be useful in incinerating NVA in bunkers. In practice, they were mechanically unreliable and usually unavailable on the battlefield when needed. During May-Nov 1968, I never had a combat opportunity to use them. They were tested occasionally during "mad minute" weapon firing at FSB Rawlins III. They were awesome.*

***Butch Sincock was an A Co. Platoon Leader** during the Battle Xom Binh Dong west of Saigon on 26-27 May 1968 (refer to diary entry for battle details). His 14 June 2004 message reports his remembrance of a combat use of the Flame Platoon, which I have obviously forgotten.*

*"They were employed in combat during our late-May '68 battle just west of Saigon. The two flame tracks were facing west on the perimeter. Just after dawn on the 27th when the second wave of attacks began, the concentration of NVA was to our south. The two flame tracks moved from their positions to a spot on the south of the perimeter. I don't know who called for them, but presume it was someone at Bn. level.*

*When they pulled up to the perimeter the soldiers moved away to either side. No one wanted to be next to one of those things if they took an RPG! The flame drivers came to a stop, locked the brakes, put the engine in neutral and cranked the engine up so high that sparks were coming out of the engine exhaust. I think that was to build up compression in the tanks (2 as I recall).*

*I recall vividly at least one of the flame tracks cut loose with a stream of flame at a squad (10 +/-) of VC/NVA behind a paddy dike not far away. When we finally surveyed the battlefield the next day we found that the flame track had completely neutralized that enemy squad, decapitating one or more of them with the flame stream. It was pretty grisly. The guys referred to them as "crispy critters." So, I can testify that they were certainly effective in that*

combat situation, although I shared the reluctance of the troops to get anywhere near them in a firefight."

***This is the way the Flame Platoon Leader, Gary Bennett, remembers the equipment and the combat action described above by Butch:***

*"The Flame tracks had two spheres of approximately 200 gals. These held 200 gals. of napalm and 200 gals. of compressed air. As soon as the system was charged, the track was a rolling bomb and we wanted to discharge that puppy as soon as possible. The igniters were very iffy and the TC usually carried a cigarette lighter and a can of lighter fluid to fire off the load coming out of the nozzle.*

*One of the reasons I didn't like to deploy them was as soon as the flame shot out, everyone stopped shooting to watch the fire. It was very important to maintain suppressing fire, that is why there was a machine gunner assigned to the track along with the coax. The coax was temperamental and often jammed.*

*We did get the word from Battalion to attack. We had two tracks at this event. It was my understanding that the other two were north in War Zone II with a Cav unit the flame did stop the attack cold. It actual fused an RPG launcher to the shoulder of a VC.*

*The flame members carried a Chemical Corps MOS. I figured this was a war crimes assignment. The tracks were affectionately known as "Zippos". The support truck was always getting stuck in the mud. It had a large air compressor and a mixer that used MOGAS and coconut extract to make the napalm."*

***From Flame Platoon leader, Bob Renneisen, 1969-70:***

*"The flame stream could be fired on and off through a "gun tube" like affair that projected over the track driver's right shoulder. The flame was ignited by a "glow- plug" igniter, which seldom worked. For this reason, Flame track drivers carried straightened-out coat hangers with a diesel soaked rag on the end. If the igniter didn't work (usually), the driver would use a Zippo to light the rag and hold it in front of the tube when they fired the thing off—kind of like spraying Right-Guard through a match flame—really high-tech.*

*We used the flame tracks weekly at Rawlins to burn the trash, at which they did quite well. Otherwise we employed them as part of the perimeter defense at Rawlins with machine guns (M-60) mounted and use of the flame capability was part of the overall perimeter defense strategy in the event the FSB got hit."*

***From Doug Conn, Recon Plt Sgt, 1969-70:***

*As far as I can remember they could be lit and relit a small flame on the front of the tube stayed lit. We took them out to the crescent [nickname for a part of the TAOR which resembled a crescent as it followed a wide curve to the east of the Saigon River] in the dry season to burn up some heavy jungle with huge anthills and bunkers inside. Pictures of this are in my photo album. If you see a picture of Flame you will notice no other tracks around. We sure didn't like being close to them. If chuck [derisive nickname for Charlie, nickname for Viet Cong] got mad he*

*would aim for them first. I know they were inoperable much of the time. They were stationed at Rawlins on the right side going in. They did have the mixing truck with them all the time. It was on a deuce and a half 6X6 truck"*

**20 June:** [Field strength] **591 Quiet nite - A Co. RIF along streamline, move by vehicle. Neg find. B Co plat AM [air mobile] in 1500 to swamp site. Clothes and documents. Extremely heavy wind & rainstorm. 45 mph winds. No mail - wrote ML.**

[Here follows a list of what appear to be unrelated items; perhaps they came from a BDE CO meeting.]

- 1. VCI of vehicles - should be no problem (what is problem)**
- 2. Turn-in of radar sets & pick up there of.**
- 3. BG Preer, new ADC [Support] vice Gleason. Visit 3 BDE [on the] 24th.**
- 4. Fuel cell problem.**
- 5. S5 work.**

**21 June:** 3/4 [Field strength] **620 Quiet nite - 3 rockets launched N of B Co. psn outside AO, impact BN. A, B, C Co's all saw & reported. A Co. RIF'd - neg. results. Heavy, brief rain. Went to PX. No mail.**

**22 June:** [Field strength] **613 Quiet nite - B & C Co's patrols spotted .51 cal mg fire at chopper. Arty & mortars fired. Gun ships attacked - unk results. A Co. made mtd/dismtd RIF on portion of streambed. Found 1 Chinese claymore, 6 Rifle grenades, 13 Booby trap grenades. 1 VC w/ hand grenade escaped. Called in arty. Crusaders gave me a helmet [Crusader was radio call sign and nickname of a supporting helicopter company. They actually lent me an aircrew member's helmet with integrated earphones and microphone so that I could communicate with the pilot during AM operations.] Heavy & prolong rain. Rec'd 2 letters & 1 tape ML, Father's Day P [Present]. [the following appear to be notes to myself to take action about personnel matters.] VD, Pot, Passes to Town, Liquor, Co. XO for HQ.**

**23 June:** 1.0 + 2.5. [Field strength] **599 Unquiet nite - B Co. observed personnel digging in two locations - fired mortars. C Co. observed personnel. Radar sighted personnel & fired arty VT. No attack. A Co. RIF'd in river tree line. 2 wounded by booby-trapped grenades. Light rain. VD as of today A-3, B-0, C-13, H-8= 24. No mail.**



**24 June: 1.0 + 1.5. [Field strength] 597 Quiet nite - B & C Co's patrols almost met, out posted village Ap Go, airmobiled at 0630. Sealed & searched. Found 2 VCI, 1 M16, 7 draft dodgers. Out 1420. Moved B Co. Heavy rain. Rec'd ltr. ML, Pop. Wrote ML.**

**25 June: 1.0. 47th malaria pill. A Co. left 0500 partially sealed Xom Go May village. Worked with PF. Neg. results. A Co. Policed & dug drainage ditches. 1 load crushed rock arrived. No rain. Sent ML tape, Vic letter, Pop a tape. [More notes to myself] Claymores in, Police, Drainage - gravel, grappling hooks. 1 load gravel.**

**26 June - 3.0 + 1.75 + 1.5 + .5. End of 6th week. [Field strength] 610 Unquiet nite. C Co. had move [ment] vic. NDL. Fired 2 81 mm - may have been ARVN. More confusion on possible ROK [Republic of Korea] patrols. 4.2 Plat received 4-5 mortar rounds in Rainy Towel compound. B Co. & Manchu [4/9th Infantry] spotted mortars vic. 7196; arty fired at mortars. B Co. fired 81 [mm mortars] at SA fire. A Co. AM into swamp, made 2 LZs. Found 1 French mg [machine gun], hand grenade, cooking gear. No rain. No mail.**

[List of items]

**Airboat - Mech** [struck through]

**Gravel**

**Pallets**

**Grappling hooks**

**Confirm strength figures, also in trains**

Comp	EM	O
A	128	6
B	117	4
C	119	6
HHQ	80	10
Trains	71	3

**1 load gravel**

**27 June - .25.** [Field strength] **603** Quiet nite. B & C Co's ambush patrols sealed village AP BIEN HOA at 0500. B Co. exchanged SA fire w/2 VC attempting to leave. A Co. RIF force & seal force arrived 0600 with PF [Popular Force]. Neg. results. No rain. Rec'd letter ML, Pop, Vic mailed slides. Rec'd 8 July - 11 days. [unexplained note] Spec Prom, Gen visit

**28 June - .5 + .5.** [Field strength] **598** [note at top] Fri BG Preer [ADC (S)] scheduled. Quiet nite. A Co. sweep N part of AO, W to E. Neg. results. BG Preer [ADC (S)] visited for 10 min. A Co. moved to Trang Bang 1630 - OPCODE SABER. Talked to Riley. [Radio call sign of 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry, formerly commanded by Glen Otis, now by my old company commander, and good friend, Clemens A. Riley.] B Co. arrived CP [command post] area 1830. Wrote ML, no mail. Heavy rain, 1 truckload gravel. 3 - 81mm M53 sight xtensions. [unexplained note].

**29 June -** [Field strength] **603** Unquiet nite. C Co. sprung ambush 0100. Fired SA, arty, mortars. Rec'd SA. B Co. swept village. Col's meeting. Andy Anderson & Frank Lee came to visit. [Two Armor officers, old friends of mine. Anderson commanded 1/5th Mech and Lee was his XO. Anderson later became a Major General.] Heavy rain. Rec'd 3 letter ML, Shirley. Cake from ML. Wrote ML. 1 TRK LD Gravel Special prom [no idea what this means] Track blocks.

[on diary pp for November 27-28 is the notation]

## **29 June - BDE Comdr Meet**

**1. SF** [probably Special Forces] **go by truck to RT** [probably Rainy Towel, the call sign of a MACV advisor team in a village in the TAOR.] **move by foot NW twd Vinh Loc - FWD CP at RT - call sign & Push** [FM radio frequency] **to follow -will be wearing Tiger Suit** [type of camouflage fatigues not normally issued to US forces. The note would alert US forces in the TAOR that a non-conventional operation was to be conducted and to not mistake the operation for an enemy action.]

**2. A Co. due back tomorrow -Released** [to] **Viking** [1st BDE] **0800 - TB** [do not recognize this abbreviation/acronym.]

3. Change to AO [area of operations]
4. Report on enemy equip. finds to S-2.
5. S-5 MEDCAPS - psywar team. Tape [probably broadcast] to assy pers. in village center.
6. Status of Equipment chart based on BDE report (flame throwers, MG, etc.)
7. [what follows is detailed instructions on how to search a village for VC and equipment] Cordon & Search -a. Cordon before daylight 0400- 0430. b. Quick sweep. c. Return w/thorough search - search is an all day affair. d. Special search equipment; grappling hook, rope, mine sweep, flashlight. e. Do not allow RF to do all the sweeping. f. Special personnel-interrogators, PRU, Psywar, medical, Nat. Police.
8. Bunching up.
9. Reports RT conducted a opn which we [?] but knew about but was not passed to BDE. Reduce speculation - report which we can see without added speculation. RKTS, .51 cal.
10. Daily Liaison - add Bobcat [1/5 Mech Inf.]
11. Turn-in of equip. PRC-25 vs. VRC-125 [types of FM field radios]

Line Item	#	0 Balance
Vehicle Maint. PLL	925	277
Commo Maint. PLL	217	136
Armament	215	68
D G		
TRUCK 5Ton	11	2
TRUCK 2 ½ Ton	3	8

**30 June** - [Field strength] 612 Quiet nite. B Co. mtd/dismtd sweep village of Ap Tay & deceptive measures as well as training. Heavy rain. No mail.  
**Shower/haircut** [probably meaning me]  
[list of items]  
**air boats** [struck through]  
**Track blocks**

**Flame throwers**  
**Pallets.**

**1 July - 48th malaria pill** [Field strength] **617. Julian** [date] **182. Quiet nite. B Co. mtd/dismtd to bridge S of village. Sweep stream line. Destroyed 1 sampan, found 5 ammo bandoleers, 2 122mm RKT caps. Romeo used air boat** [first mention of air boat use]; **swept bunkers; found grenades. At 1720, A Co. AM** [airmobile] **into same area. Left stay behind AP** [ambush patrol]. **Spotted 2 VC in open; Crusader got 2 BC.** [call sign helicopter battalion that supported AM operations. This was the last AM operation conducted.] **moderate rain-1 load gravel. Sent tape to Pete-No mail.**

[list of items]

**MEDCAP supplies BDE S-5** [civil affairs] **knows.**[I do not know the origin nor import of this remark. MEDCAP was an effort to use US Medical personnel to hold clinics in villages as part of the psychological campaign to win the peasants' "hearts and mind."]

**Chow late - no malaria pills.**

**Insufficient bacon & biscuits - A Co.**

**55 gal trash cans for A Co.**

**Riots - use CS not weapons**

**A Co. Psn**

**My Hanh**

**2 July - Unquiet nite. A Co. AP & C Co. AP, RP, & Perimeter spotted movement. C Co. perimeter mortared. Neg. cas. 265 arty, 60 4.2, & 80 81 mm rds expended. Neg enemy casualties. B Co. mtd/dismtd into swamp N. of 76 grid line. Air boat operated. Neg. results. No rain. 3 letters Mary Lou, brownies, Shirley, ice tea mix. Wrote Mary Lou.**

[The following are probably BDE CO notes or reminders to myself about observed problems]

**Shoot in AP positions.** [By its nature, the AP was a dangerous operation. Unlike a NDP, there was no opportunity for interlocking bands of supporting fire between units. Consequently, it was deemed advisable to register artillery around the AP perimeter. In the event the ambush was sprung, artillery fire could be brought to bear quickly and accurately.]

## **Pallets**

### **Arty prep on AP patrol - Pep**

**M14 for Starlight scope** [The M14 was an older model .30 cal rifle not widely used in RVN. The Starlight scope had been developed for the M14 and was not adaptable to the M-16 rifle. The scope concentrated ambient light at night and gave the user the ability to see in the dark.]

**Sprayer per company** [No idea what this means.]

**Water trailer per day for C Co.**

**Shower buckets**

**3 July:** [Field strength] **588** Quiet nite. **B Co.** dismtd sweep of **Ba Que** village. **Neg. results.** **2** troops swiped radios but returned same. **Moderate rain.** **No mail - wrote ML & Pop.**

**Load gravel**

**[?] reports Bull dozer for A**

**Claymores 2d echelon parts for A Co.**

**4 July:** Quiet nite. **B Co.** mtd/dismtd on swamp sweep between **945-957**. **Neg. finds.** Received word to move [to TNBC]. **A Co.** moved **1430**. **OPCON** to **1st BDE.** **Buckup** troops appearance msg. **Mailed slides.** **Rec'd 17 July.** **Rec'd Ltr ML.**

Butch Sincok, B. Co. Plat Leader has a vivid remembrance of the day's celebration not reflected in the diary.

"The battalion was laagered on the West side of Highway #1, opposite Gate 51 of Tan Son Nhut Airbase (TSNAB) on the northern edges of Saigon. I can no longer recall what we did for most of that day, but we were likely out on patrol to the Northwest trying to disrupt what had been called the "Rocket Belt" from which the NVA launched rockets on metropolitan Saigon most nights through June and into July.

That evening we left one of the officers in charge of the company and the rest of us crossed the road and were given a ride from Gate #51 to the TSNAB Officer's Club. There we had a steak dinner and a few drinks. Toward the end of the evening the Korean band stuck up "American the Beautiful," followed in short order by "Anchors Aweigh", "Off We Go Into the Wild Blue Yonder," the Marine Corps hymn, "The Caissons go Rolling Along," and finally, "The Star Spangled Banner." Besides a salute to Independence Day, it was the cue that they were closing for the night.

We walked out and four of us promptly requisitioned a jeep (Officers, as is well known, don't steal things) and drove it to Gate#51 where the USAF Air Police assured us with a wink that they were thankful that we had found the lost vehicle and would see that it was returned to its rightful owner. This was only a few months post-Tet '68 and the USAF recalled vividly the 25th Division rescue of

TSNAB the 25th ID 3/4 Cav. Consequently, was very difficult for a 25th ID Soldier to do any harm or get into trouble. It took a few more months for that welcome to wear out, but on 4 July 4 1968, it was a still fresh in the memory of the Air Police at Gate #51.

We walked across the road to our NDP and I recall heading for the latrine. One of the other guys was met by his platoon sergeant who had apparently been doing some celebrating of his own. He announced that they had something they had to do and he took his Lieutenant by the arm and headed to one of their tracks. As I exited the latrine I saw the two of them a few yards away. The sergeant promptly struck the bottom of a Star Cluster sending several green streams of light into the sky The Lieutenant followed with a red Star Cluster and before long several others joined in lighting the sky with our military fireworks.

Suddenly the horizon lit up with similar displays of green, white and red light. Every American position within miles began to fire off Star Clusters. Those red, white and green domes of fireworks dotted the horizon north and west of Saigon for miles. Soon someone from Battalion came running out shouting to stop firing off the Star Clusters. By then we had expended our supply of Star Clusters (something that we rarely had occasion to use in the course of normal operations anyway.)

I have seen many impressive displays of fireworks over the years but I will never experience as moving a display of 4th of July spirit as I did that evening thirty-six years ago when the Soldiers of the American Army showed their spirit and pride in an American tradition."

James "Farmer" Mallard, Recon remembers:

"Recon was down Highway 1 as always. What I remember was a big ring of star clusters around what appeared to be Saigon. Which was one heck of a big ring. When our star clusters were gone some of the guys threw smoke and trip flares. July. Also the ARVN Compound down the road got in on the fun by shooting off Red Parachute flares That was the biggest fireworks display I have ever seen. I think about it ever year on the 4th."

Jeff recalls;

"It came down from higher, that a display of pyrotechnics on any holiday was strictly forbidden. Col. Hodson [1st BDE CO] forbid any display. Of course each holiday, radio transmissions were always garbled but then you and I were only Lieutenants, so what did we know. I might add never was there a display that had such a lasting impression."

A 1/5 Bobcat, Roger Hayes was close by:

"Thirty-six years ago, on the Fourth of July, my company, Charlie 1/5 (Mech), was also performing security for TSNAB. At midnight on the evening of the Fourth (or was that the morning of the fifth?) I was a member of a platoon-sized ambush patrol (about a dozen soldiers) crossing a huge dried-up rice paddy en route to our ambush position. Suddenly, from probably six or eight perimeters all around us, red and green star clusters and handheld flares shot into the air, casting long shadows of our small patrol on the surrounding rice paddy. We dove to the ground, and were pinned down by the illumination for probably around fifteen minutes, although it seemed like forty-five.

The next day we laughed about it. Now, thirty-six years later, it's nice to hear from someone on the

other end of that incident. Thanks for the memory!"

From Donn McMahon of B. Co.:

"That was a glorious night I don't remember looking for red, white or blue just wanted something to lift the spirits of our quiet 4th. TSNAB raised hell because their approach was looking confused and a cease and desist order came to the perimeter. It started off slow because we used the heel of our hand (ouch) at first but then started popping them on the top of the PC's."

My involvement in that insubordination was to soon be transferred to the Mortar team as a driver. GOD bless LT Sincock for punishing me so EXTREMELY. The intoxicated SGT. was George Lovins, he knew how to make a dismal face become a smiley face.

**5 July:** Moved to TN. Left 0830, arrived 1430 (30 min Maint.) No enemy. Maj Tuten [BN XO] hit by track [he was evacuated with a badly broken leg which never healed properly. He walked with a limp the rest of his life.] Given mission by Viking 6 [call sign of 1st BDE Commander]. Made VR [visual reconnaissance] new area. Buckup appearance. Wrote ML.

*For the remainder of July-November 1968, the 4/23 was home-based at TNBC.*

**6 July:** Depart TN at 1030. Closed FSB [do not know name of FSB] vic 3944 at 1430 w/ B, C Co's, B-588 Engr, B-7/11 Arty. A Co. on road. C Co. conducted RIF.

Tomahawk - all 4 sides crappy letters off.[refers to battalion sign in TNBC]

Uniform for operations & within perimeter.

Safety - fire & explosives - Flame unit, kitchen, generators.

TK Plat SRCHLTS [M48A1 tanks were equipped with a turret mounted Xenon 1 million candle power searchlight and an infrared searchlight that some believed would be useful in defensive positions]

[tank no.] 65 - 1/2 & 1/2

66 - doesn't no IR

63 - ok.

S-4 - wire steel mat, planking.

**7 July:** Quiet nite. Conducted B & C Co. RIF in rubber plantation - B Co. found 1000+ lbs rice. A Co. blocked road. 2 WIA by short mortar round. Rec'd ltr ML, L C Hightower [Army friend of mine].

**Wire**

**Overhead cover - 1 bunker/line track 2 layers ???**

**Claymores - separation** [between detonators and mines when not employed]

**Uniform & shaves - helmet short**

**Today's results**

**Field sanitation**

**8 July:** 49th malaria [Field strength] 526 Partly quiet nite - C Co. spotted 5 men vic. wire - took under fire w/ SA & mortars. Neg. results. B & C Co's swept northeast. B Co. hit large mine., destroying track & wounding 4. Minor signs of enemy activity. A Co. moved to NDP.

**Head count report**

**Boom-Boom girls**

**wire - cover**

**Starlight scopes**

**B Co. - .50 cal.**

**Water, beer, and soda.**

**9 July:** [Field strength] 528 Partly quiet nite - several volleys of unidentified ordnance flew over. No damage - later identified 107 mm found 6 craters. A, B, C Co's, R swept. 20 bunkers destroyed. Found 3 100 kilo bags fertilizer & 1, 55 gal drum sulphur. Extremely heavy rain - estimate 6" between 1600-1800.

**Reduce cost of beer & soda**

**Report by CP [check point] not PO**

**R, B & C Co's get 292**

**6X capability**

**Radio security**

**Entrenching tools**

**Camouflage bands w/brush** [on helmets]

**Drinking - ammo & billets**

**10 July:** Start 9th week. [Field strength] 527 Quiet nite - A, B, C Co's & R RIF'd. C Co. found VC base camp - documents, bunkers, kitchen, etc. Destroyed. Trafficability marginal in paddies., OK otherwise.

[List of items]

**A [Co. To submit]- award for FO [forward observer] on ambush.**

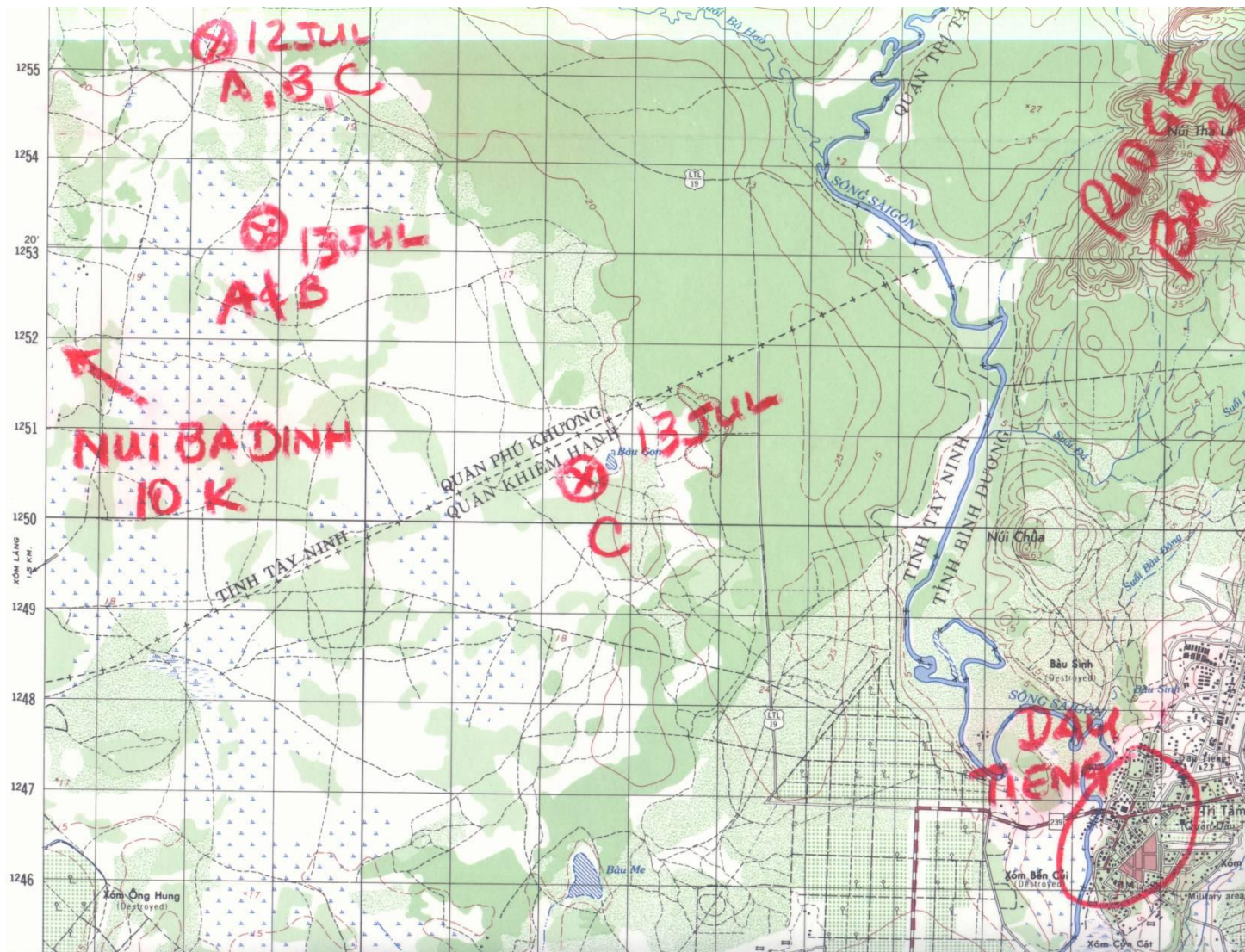
**Rec'd ltr ML, Shirley, tape from ML.**

**11 July:** [Field strength] 516 Quiet nite - R. saw 7 persons S of Base camp. Fire mortars, arty at them. Neg. results. C Co. swept alt MSR [alternate main supply



route], A Co. moved to new NDP, B Co. swept North thru rubber. Briefed BG Long, [25th ID ] ADC-MR.

Rec'd ltr ML - wrote ML 2 letters.



**12 July:** [Field strength] 513 Quiet nite - no sights. A, B, & C Co's RIF'd way to north. R. swept road, pulled 4 arty guns to firing psn. C Co. found motorcycle; B Co. found 3 fresh graves. A Co. found large ammo cache - 81 82 mm rds, 625 grenades, 22 6' Bangalore torpedoes, 10 CHICOM claymores, 2 mines, 8 satchel charges. Coord 381554

[separately] C Co. grenade incident - VIK 6 & XO

PX List

Head & shoulders shampoo

**Mailer for Ektachrome [35 mm color slides]**

**Sight savers**

**Dial soap**

**Toothbrush**

# TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS



*Ready To Strike.... Anywhere, Anytime*

Vol 3 No. 33

TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS

August 12, 1968

## ***Soldier Cashes In On Cache Cycle Worth Weight In Gold (26 AUG 68)***

**1ST BDE** - Tropic Lightning troopers of the 4th Battalion (Mech), 23d Infantry have captured a wide variety of enemy equipment, but a red motorcycle already filled with gas was almost too much to believe.

The infantrymen came upon the swift cache while sweeping through the thick undergrowth five miles southeast of Tay Ninh.

Private First Class Ronnie Dixon of Hartsville, S.C., was cautiously checking out the hazardous undergrowth when a bright red object attracted his attention. The Company C rifleman carefully approached the bright object and saw a motorcycle covered with a poncho.

"There wasn't a road anywhere around us so I thought that Charlie had left the motorcycle booby trapped because it was probably worthless," stated Dixon.

The 1st Brigade soldier carefully wrapped a cable around the handlebars and stood back 40 meters. He yanked at the cable until he had dragged it a few meters. Since it wasn't booby trapped he ripped the poncho off and exposed a beautiful bright red motorcycle filled with gas.





# **SWIFT CACHE -**

Private First Class  
Ronnie Dixon of  
Hartsville, S.C., sits  
atop a captured Viet  
Cong motorcycle.  
Dixon found the cycle  
while on a  
reconnaissance-in-force  
mission with the 4th  
Battalion, (Mechanized),  
23d Infantry, five miles  
southeast of Tay  
Ninh. **(PHOTO BY  
SP4 WALT  
CHAIKIVSKY)**



## **Troops of Charlie Company with captured VC motorcycle**

Picture from archives of LTC Cliff Neilson "Mohawk 6" 1968

**TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS**



**Ready To Strike.... Anywhere, Anytime**

## Tomahawks Find Weapons Hoarded In Enemy Bunker

1ST BDE - (12JUL68) More than 600 grenades and 81 eighty-two millimeter mortar rounds were discovered recently by the 25th Infantry Division's 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 23d Infantry. The large cache, which included 20 six-foot bangalore torpedoes, was uncovered in a well-camouflaged, 10 by 14 foot enemy bunker five miles southeast of Tay Ninh.

Sweeping through the thick undergrowth, elements of the Tomahawk battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Clifford C Neilson of Mobile, Ala., came upon a sophisticated enemy base camp. Using extreme caution, the men of A Company began checking out bunkers with four feet of overhead cover, not leaving a single stone unturned.

Then SP4 Lawrence A. Davis of Lothian, Md., spotted a well-camouflaged 10 by 14 foot bunker. Very carefully he pulled away the brush concealing the entrance and saw something covered with a poncho inside.

Immediately Davis called for his platoon leader First Lieutenant William McMongle of Colorado Springs, Colo., who placed security around the bunker and thoroughly checked the entrance for booby traps. "I looked as best as I could into the bunker and saw the words 'safety fuze'," stated McMongle, "and knew we had latched onto something good."

Private First Class Benton Hoard of Salem Ill., volunteered to enter the dark bunker for a closer look. Armed with a .45 caliber pistol in one hand and a flashlight in the other the Tomahawk tunnel rat entered. The sweat rolled as he probed for booby traps that might be connected to the poncho covering the munitions. Then he shouted: "There's all kinds of good stuff in here."

The 1st Brigade infantrymen began hauling out the mortar rounds, claymore mines and hundreds of grenades. After over an hour's work, the munitions were extracted, and a count was made. The Tomahawks counted 617 grenades of various types - "little beer can," "big beer can," "potato masher," and "torpedo" grenades. In addition there were 20 six-foot bangalore torpedoes, 81 82mm high explosive mortar rounds, 31 cans of mortar charges, 12 twelve-inch claymore mines, eight satchel charges and two "black box" antitank mines.

The Tropic Lightning infantrymen carried the cache to their night defensive position and laid the munitions in a foxhole just outside the perimeter. There, the cache was blown in place all at once. "When we left it was an ordinary foxhole, but after the explosion," said Captain Henry Montgomery of Memphis, Tenn., the Company A commander, "it looked as if a 1,000 pound bomb was dropped there."

**13 July:** [Field strength] **494 Quiet nite - Moved FSB to 388533. A & B Co's,**  
**A [Battery]-7/11 [Arty]; C Co. est. sep NDP at 423505. A Co. made RIF into prev**  
**BC [VC base camp referred to above]-neg results. Mailed film - returned 1 Aug 18**  
**days**

[separate list] **Boxes for carrying ice**

**Turn in 5 ton trucks +7**

**Arm 1/4 +1**

**Gone But Always Remembered**  
**From the 4/23 KIA list**  
**SFC Robert Creech, Jr. A Co.**

**14 July:** Quiet nite. A, B, C Co's RIF'D C Co. Cmd. Grp. ambushed - Capt Mellis wounded in stomach, Lt Pickens, FO, in shoulder. 2 others. A, B, C Co's destroyed base camps. B Co. found 110 lbs rice, 1 PRC 10, 4 RPG, 4 bolts cloth, documents-D14. Received POW camp mission. Recon OPCON Fullback. Rec'd 3 ltrs ML, 1 Clark, 1 Vic, 1 dad. Wrote ML

## TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS



*Ready To Strike.... Anywhere, Anytime*

Vol 3 No. 33

TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS

August 12, 1968

### Tomahawks Sweep Enemy Base Camp

By SP4 Walt Chaikivsky

**1ST BDE** – (14JUL68) Following up an intelligence report of enemy activity in the Boi Loi Woods, the 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 23d Infantry Tomahawks, routed through a regimental-sized Viet Cong base camp.

Company E, commanded by First Lieutenant Morgan Sincock of Natick, Mass., was sweeping on a reconnaissance-in-force mission on the northwest edge of the Boi Loi Woods when they received automatic weapons fire from both flanks. Immediately returning fire, the Tomahawks deployed in defensive positions.

The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Clifford C. Neilson of Mobile, Ala., was flying over the scene of battle in his command and control (C&C) helicopter and began directing maneuvers when he noticed a wounded U.S. soldier pinned down between Company B and the estimated reinforced VC company.

The enemy also realized the precarious situation of the wounded man and tried to prevent anyone from coming to his aid. After three daring attempts, the wounded 1st Brigade soldier was extracted to a safe location for dust-off.

The 1st Brigade infantrymen withdrew from the thick jungle and Neilson directed gunships from the 3d Squadron, 4th Cavalry, artillery from the 7th Battalion, 11th Artillery, and Air Force tactical air strikes on the enemy concealed in the dense foliage. While the area of contact was being hammered mercilessly, Charlie Company, commanded by Captain Henry Phillips of Columbus, Ga., maneuvered to link up with Bravo to form an arc around the enemy base camp.

When the suspected enemy positions were well softened-up Charlie Company attempted an assault from another flank and ran into two RPG nests. The fire fight raged into the night when

the two Tomahawk companies withdrew to set up a defensive night location just 300 meters from the area of contact.

The next day, the Tomahawks assembled on line and walked through the impregnable base camp with little resistance. "They certainly must have left here in quite a hurry because of all the equipment they left behind," pointed out Major Cain Bridgman of Chattanooga, Tenn., the battalion operations officer. There were field packs scattered all over and blood-stained bandages lying along blood trails.

Bunkers with as much as five feet of overhead cover were checked out thoroughly. Company A, commanded by Captain Henry Montgomery of Memphis, Tenn., found a weapons cache in a bunker in the center of the huge base camp. The weapons were believed to belong to the enemy's heavy weapons section.



**PREPARING FOR THE ASSAULT** - Taking cover behind an armored personnel carrier Private First Class Donald G. Stanfill of Detroit, Mich., softens up the enemy positions with his M-79 grenade launcher as Private First Class Charles Cooper (kneeling) of Paterson, N.J., prepares his M-16 for the assault. In the action the 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 23d Infantry, overran an enemy regimental-sized base camp.



**MAINTAINING FIRE SUPERIORITY** - Private First Class Larry L. Elzinga, from Charlevoix, Mich., a member of the 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 23d Infantry Tomahawks uses an M-60 machine gun to put

down a heavy base of fire into an enemy RPG nest during a reconnaissance-in-force operation in the Boi Loi Woods. **(PHOTOS BY SP4 WALT CHAIKIVSKY)**



**SEARCHING** - On operation **IN THE BOI LOI WOODS**, soldiers of the 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 23d Infantry, rumble through jungle and open terrain searching for an enemy regiment reported in the area. **(PHOTO BY CPT LES RASCHKO)**

**15 July:** [Field strength] **496 50th malaria pill.** Quiet nite - A & B Co's RIF'd - neg results. C Co. moved to new loc vic XT415439. Detail plan for POW mission. No mail -Tape to dad, postcard D & J.







**A Co. incidence**  
**Sick call - Dr. out.**

*When a soldier needed to be seen by a doctor for non- emergency reasons, he went on Sick Call. If he was at a field location and the Battalion Surgeon was in Base camp, then the soldier had to be transported to and from the Surgeon. Often this meant he was out of combat operations for 2 days. There was a belief that more than a few soldiers took this route to avoid combat. The solution was to bring the Surgeon to the field location each day where he conducted sick call. That way, the soldier was gone from his unit only several hours.*

**17 July** - [Field strength] **507 Start 10<sup>th</sup> week. Quiet nite. A, B, C Co's w/ RF Co.** [Regional Force, RVN local militia] **RIF'd. Neg. findings. A Co. stuck tank. BDE Comdr visited. 3 Art 15** [non-judicial punishment imposed by the Bn CO] **7 decorated.**

**Rec'd ltr ML & Shirley, wrote ML.**

**Rope - tow cables**

**Rearguard NCO**

**Promotion/CSMAJ/company matters**

[Beginning on the bottom of this page in the original diary and continuing on the bottom of the next 2 pages is a list of non-judicial (UCMJ Art 15) punishments. The list shows rank, last name, company, offense and punishment. To avoid embarrassment to still-living Tomahawks, I have omitted their names and used only last name initials to identify them.

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Offense</b>	<b>Grade Reduction</b>	<b>Punishment pay/months</b>
<b>PFC</b>	<b>J</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>AWOL 6 days</b>	<b>E2</b>	<b>\$50 / 2</b>
<b>SP4</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>AWOL 5 days</b>	<b>E3</b>	<b>\$50 / 2</b>
<b>PFC</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>AWOL 11 days</b>	<b>E1</b>	<b>\$50 / 2</b>
<b>SGT</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>D &amp; D (drunk &amp; disorderly)</b>		<b>\$25 / 1</b>
<b>SP4</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>AWOL 7 days</b>	<b>E3</b>	<b>\$50 / 2</b>
<b>SGT</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>HHQ</b>	<b>False Official statement</b>	<b>E4</b>	<b>\$50 / 2</b>
<b>PFC</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>UNK</b>	<b>Hit AP, Resist arrest, D &amp; D, concealed knife</b>	<b>E3</b>	<b>\$50 / 1</b>
<b>SGT</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>HHQ</b>	<b>Black Market, misappropriate ¼</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>\$100 / 2</b>

			ton		
SP4	R	A	AWOL 40 days	E1	\$75 / 2
SP5	R	467PSD	Disrespect	E4	NA
SP5	D	B	Disrespect (2 counts)	E4	NA

[For each day AWOL, a day was added to required time-in-country]

**18 July** - [Field strength] **486 Unquiet nite** - 0230 A Co. attacked w/ RPG & S/A. Destroyed 1 tank,



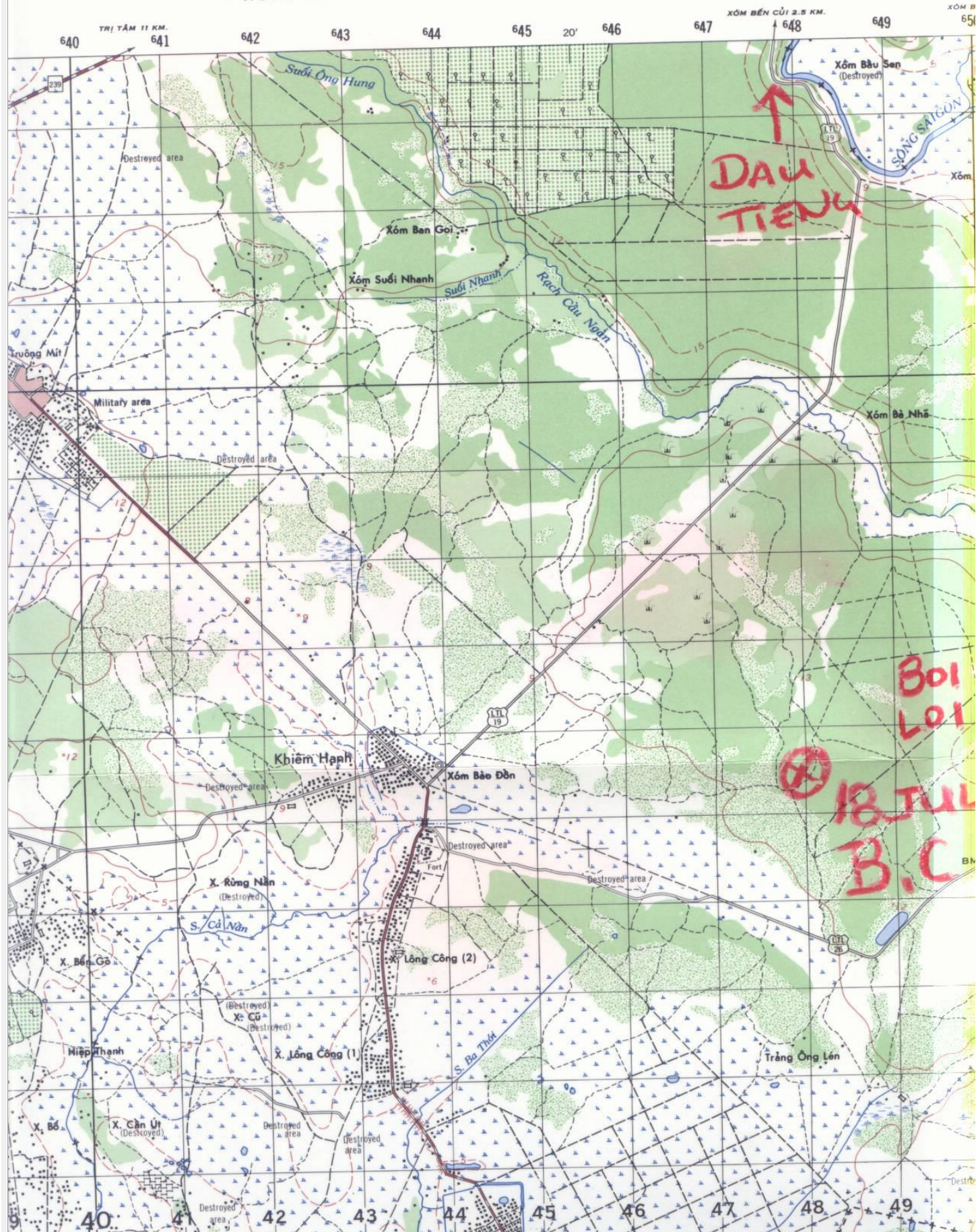
“Note a small RPG produced hole in the side of the turret”

**WIA 3. 0300** called in LFT [helicopter light fire team from 3d Sqr, 4<sup>th</sup> Cav]. **Error in delivery resulted in 2 KIA, 3 WIA A Co.** [They were in an ambush patrol about

500 meters in front of the laager.] **No further contact. B & C Co's RIF'd together W-E to junction of Rome Plow areas. B & C Co's had combat resulting in 3 KIA, 15 WIA in large VC base camp area XT480355.**



HIẾU



**2 APC destroyed. Laagered in vic. of contact. Recon returned OPCON of Bn. 12 air strikes. Moved LT Altman. Arty fired 1096 rds.**

**Causes of breakdowns**

**LTR** [light track retriever, a recovery vehicle for APC.]

**No mail**

*I remember the incident well when the 3/4 LFT fired on the ambush patrol in error. A subsequent investigation established that the pilots had spotted men in the open, assumed they were NVA/VC, and opened fire without checking with their or our operations center. This violated stringent Rules of Engagement. The pilots and battalion commander were administratively punished, effectively ending their careers. A small comfort to the families of those killed.*

## **Gone But Always Remembered**

### **From the 4/23 KIA list**

**Alvin Mack Laster. Jr., HHC.**

**Gary Bernerd Sanford, B Co.**

**Arnold Lawrence Davis, A Co.**

**Terry Kenneth Huff, B Co.**

**19 July - Quiet nite - After 4 AS. A, B, C Co's entered base camp area. Neg. contact. Destroyed BC as they advanced. A & C Co's got small caches. 4 body count. Two letters ML.**







**20 July** [Field strength] **493.** **Quiet nite.** **A Co.** [made] **quick RIF** [of former] **POW** [camp] - **then back to BC** [base camp] **B, C Co's & R RIF** to **SW** **between rubber plantations, Neg. Results. Rec'd road security mission. IG visited on rocket attack.** [ LFT attack mentioned above.] **1 letter ML.**

**Muster tonite - roster** [periodically it was necessary to confirm that troops assigned were in accordance with what the roster said should be there. In the heat of battle, normal comings and goings, casualties and replacements, the actual number of troops (muster) equaled what was supposed to be there (roster).]

### **Promotion.**

*As noted above, the battalion received tasking for route security, a mission that was to consume its capabilities for most of the remainder of July through September. Because so much of the 4/23 activities occurred on the highways connecting its TNBC (and the fire support bases it frequently occupied) with the rest of the 25<sup>th</sup> TAOR, an understanding of the MSRs along the national highway system is useful.*

*The national highway system was built by the French before and after World War II. With the exception of major cities, the highways were unpaved and surfaced with laterite, a red, iron ore-containing, clay-like soil. When dry and subject to heavy truck and tracked vehicle travel, the laterite quickly became very dusty with clouds of red dust obscuring vision. When wet, these combat vehicles caused the laterite quickly to become slippery and pot-holed slowing traffic to about 5 MPH.*

*In low lying areas in the TAOR subject to controlled water entrapment, rice was cultivated in diked paddies. To traverse the wet paddies areas, roads were built 4-10 ft above the ground level with steep embankments. In higher elevations, the French had established large rubber plantations, with trees planted close to the edge of both sides of the road. These plantations provided easy access and egress for NVR/VC forces to establish concealed ambush positions close to the road.*

*In an attempt to neutralize the ambush potential from rubber plantations, the US forces used mechanical and chemical means to destroy rubber trees close to the highways. Very large Caterpillar bulldozers, with V-shaped blades and armored cabs for the drivers, called "Rome Plows", uprooted and moved trees back from the highway shoulder. This proved ineffective as there was neither equipment to haul the trees away nor convenient unsuitable ambush areas to store them.*





Photo by Bill Peters



photo courtesy Rick Lewis

*Simultaneously, USAF aircraft sprayed the defoliant AGENT ORANGE on the trees. This caused leaf-loss with only a limited success in decreasing ambush sites. (At the time, AGENT ORANGE toxicity to humans was unknown.)*



photo courtesy US Air Force

*The highways were about the width of one lane of a typical US state highway with no shoulder. In the event that a US vehicle became disabled through combat action or mechanical difficulty, there was insufficient road width for a following or approaching vehicle to pass. Either traffic halted until the problem was fixed or the disabled vehicle was push down the embankment In both rice growing and rubber plantation areas, drainage culverts under the road were a frequent feature providing an easily-accessible, ready made site to position a mine.*

*Every few miles, the highways typically bisected a small village The inhabitants were either rice farmers or plantation workers and their families by day and a ready cadre for VC at night.*

*To facilitate radio transmission brevity while operating on these roads, 25<sup>th</sup> ID established a set of check points, each designating a road junction, village, or identifiable land mark.*

**21 July - [Field strength] 483. Quiet nite - moved to route security. No mail.**

**22 July - [Field strength] 485. Quiet nite - A Co. alt [alternate] MSR, sec [probably secure] arty. B & C Co's RIF'd from CP [check point] 170 at 1045. B Co. made contact, moved on north. Tank reinforce. A Co. reinforced 1200 hrs. GS, CS used. A Co. secure obj. at 1800. C Co. hooked around and assaulted. Stopped cold at 1800. B Co. wouldn't or couldn't move. B & C Co's put in**

**laager. A Co. & A Co Bobcat [1/5 Mech] laager on south** [although the entry does not explicitly so state, A Co., 1/5 must have been made OPCON to 4/23. The 25<sup>th</sup> ID Quarterly Report shown below states that both A & B Co's, 1/5 were OPCON.]. **13 body count. Arty fired 250 155-mm rds, 450 105 [rds].**

[By any standards, this was a large tonnage of artillery shells.]

**Agent report D-14 Bn** [VC battalion desination]-**21 K, 19 W. No mail. 5 days to DEROS** [(probably a sardonic) reference to my original rotation date had I not extended to command the 4/23.]. **Twice wounded-hosp over 48 hours.**

#### **Field/Base Camp**

##### **HQ**

**A 105 / 54**

**B 88 / 87**

**C 117 / 59**

*From the 25<sup>th</sup> ID Quarterly Operation Report for Period Ending 31 July 1968: "B Company, 4th Battalion, 23rd Infantry, sweeping four kilometers north of GO DA HAU (XT392301) engaged an unknown size enemy force. Armed helicopters, artillery and air strikes were called in on the enemy positions, and B Company was reinforced by companies A and C, 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry (Mech) The contact lasted through the day and into the night. At first light, a sweep of the area revealed 13 VC KIA."*

**23 July - 51<sup>st</sup> Mal Pill.** [Field strength] **502. Quiet nite - A, B, C Co's w/ 2 co's PF (Savage Kettle) RIF'd North from pt. of contact. A [Co.] Bobcat [1/5 Mech] in reserve. Found many bunkers, fighting psns. Neg. contact. Had scout/tracker dogs. Laagered XT385303 all 3 Co's. Made [Captain] Shiplett S-4.** [my hand drawn battalion organization chart which I prepared upon return from RVN shows Captain Zizman, then the S-4 switched jobs with Shiplett, then the HHC Comdr.] **Letter ML - Letter to ML.** [following is an unexplained list of routine items that I suspect had caught my eye as needing attention]

**Mermite can** [refer to previous remark about use to ice down beer and soda.]

**Maint daily**

**Tow cables**[struck through]

**VEH PARTS TRACK BLOCKS** [and]

**MEDICS 5 per Co - A-1, B - 2, C -4**

**24 July Start 11<sup>th</sup> week. Quiet nite. A Co. RIF'd w/ Savage Kettle RF. B Co. block; C Co. bunker busting. Told to cease operations at 1130. Return to TNBC ASAP. Departed 1345; arrived 1600. Major attack predicted. 5 Regts identified in area. A & B Co's [defend] strong point NE of TNBC. C Co. OPCON Bobcat. Letter ML, tape father. [following is an address the importance of which I do not remember.]**

**Paul Thompson  
Matson Cruise Consultant  
110 Mission St.  
San Fran 94105**

**25 July Quiet nite - TNBC got 17 rounds mortar. Maint in AM. PM - A, B, C Co's, A Co. - 2/34 RIF'd. [2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 34<sup>th</sup> Armor was one of two M48A3-equipped tank battalions in RVN. The HQ & 3 line companies were assigned to 25<sup>th</sup> ID; the 4<sup>th</sup> line company was attached to 4<sup>th</sup> ID in the Central Highlands. The text implies A - 2/34 was OPCON.]**

*Being an Armor officer, I was a contemporary of, and in a "former life," friends with the two 2/34 battalion commanders while I commanded the 4/23, the late John Tipton & Ted O'Connor. The 4/23 occasionally would have a company or platoon of tanks OPCON.*

*The M48A3 tank when combat loaded weighed about 60 tons. Designed for rapid armored warfare on the European plains, it was armed with a high velocity 90 mm gun. Experienced quickly showed it was out of its design element on the roads and in rubber plantations and jungles of Tay Ninh province.*

*They frequently got stuck in mud or ditches and were very difficult to recover. (In Week 10, 18 July, there is a great picture of a stuck M48A3 that was destroyed before it could be recovered. Tipton, 2/34 CO at the time, was MOST displeased with me & the 4/23 for the manner in which we had cavalierly misused his tank!)*

*Advocates asserted that tanks were useful in defense of a NDP because they were equipped with a turret-mounted [reputed] million candle power Xenon search light which could illuminate the area outside the perimeter. They also could fire a 90 mm, anti-personnel "beehive" (flechette) round.]*

**Established NDP for each company. Letter to ML, rec'd letter ML. [following is a list of routine items that I suspect had caught my eye as needing attention]**

**Tow cables, rope, cable clamps**

**Track blocks**

**1/4 ton vehicles - tires**

**Area - no vehicles**  
**Promotion**

**26 July** Quiet nite - A, B, & C Co's RIF'd in AO Mohawk. A Co. captured 1 POW. All found old bunkers, tunnels, & fighting positions. Recon maint. 1 Plat B Co. assumed Bao Cao security role. [Have not identified this village yet; current thinking is that it may be at French Fort, N of Tay Ninh city.] A & C Co's in one NDP; Bn & HQ in other. No mail.  
**Awards - not timely after contact gets hot.**

**27 July** Unquiet nite - VC exploded Claymore on perimeter, wounded 4. B Co. had road sweep to GDH.

For the remainder of July- November 1968, the primary (but not sole) mission for the 4/23 was to ensure that resupply convoys which left Cu Chi (CC) daily reached TNBC and Dau Tieng (DT.) This mission resulted in mostly hot boring days punctuated by occasional intense fights at ambush sites cleverly selected and fortified by small NVA units; many KIA and WIA resulted on both sides. In the diary the mission is variously described as "road sweep," "open the road," or "outpost the road"; operationally the terms mean the same thing. Here is how we did it.

At about day break each day, one or more line companies and sometimes Recon, would leave TNBC or whatever FSB or NDP they were in and head through Tay Ninh city, south along Highway 22 toward CC. In stretches of the road where there was cover for a potential ambush site, they moved down the road slowly, preceded by an attached 65th Combat Engineer Battalion soldier with a mine sweeper. Since culverts and pot holes were easy places to mine, these received special attention. In open area where there was little cover for an ambush, the sweeper would mount up and the unit would roll down the road at 15-25 mph. Since the NVA did not favor using small villages astride the road as ambush sites, the troops would roll on through, waving to the people.

Periodically, a platoon would be dropped off to outpost and overlook the road to prevent the NVA from planting a mine in a swept area.

This process continued until the unit reached the agreed-upon hand off point for convoy security, frequently the thriving and picturesque village of Go Dau Hau (GDH). The unit would report the road was open and secured.

During this out posting process, I was usually in a 4 passenger, OH-1 "Loach" C & C helicopter with a pilot, an Arty LNO, and the BCSM. As long as there was no



ambush, it was a pleasant, cool way to spend 4-6 hours in RVN.

In the meantime the convoy left Saigon at first light bound for CC. A typical convoy consisted of up to 50 vehicles, mostly 5 ton trucks but also with the military equivalent of 18 wheelers, 5000 gallon POL tankers, and flat bodied open trailers with palletized ammunition and supplies. Each truck had a driver and usually a gunner who manned a cab-mounted .50 cal mg.

In addition to the 4/23 convoy overwatch and security responsibility, two other command organizations had responsibility for the convoy's safe arrival, the Transportation Corps (TC) unit that "owned" the trucks and drivers and the Military Police (MP) unit that escorted it. When things went smoothly, having three responsible organizations was seamless. When an ambush occurred, it led to confusion and possibly unnecessary deaths and wounding.

- A TC officer, usually a newly-arrived in-country LT, commanded the drivers and hence the convoy. He was responsible to organize the trucks and drivers and keep them moving. When the convoy was ambushed it was his job to get the drivers out of the ditches (were they had all gone at the first shot) and order the drivers to get their trucks moving again.
- An MP officer, also a usually newly-arrived in country LT. commanded a small Military Police escort unit with 2-4 jeeps with stand mounted .50 cal mg. The MP's provided the only armed protection from Saigon to CC, that area being relatively free of NVA. They provided traffic control through small villages, set the convoy's pace in mph, and controlled kids who ran out on the road to seek candy and cigarettes from the drivers and offer to sell them beer, soda, and other items. When the convoy was ambushed, the MP LT got the jeep-mounted machine guns firing on the NVA while he also attempted to get the convoy moving again.

The convoy usually reached CC by 0900; dropped off the trucks bound for there, and headed out on Route 22 toward TNBC. Some other 25<sup>th</sup> ID unit had swept and opened the road from CC to the hand-off point in the same manner as 4/23 described above (usually 3/4 or 2/22) To my memory, the convoy was never ambushed between CC and GDH; it was beyond GDH that the "Bad Lands" begun.

As the convoy preceded up RT 22 and passed an out posted platoon, the platoon could relax until the return convoy passed about 1700. If no ambush occurred, the convoy reached TNBC about 1200. A majority of the trucks would unload at TNBC and form up for that afternoon's return trip to Saigon. The remainder of the convoy left at 1300 along Route 26 past FSB Rawlins bound for DT. This route would be out posted and

the process repeated.

When the convoy reached DT about 1500, there was insufficient time to unload that day's trucks and return them to Saigon during daylight hours. Instead those trucks remained and trucks from the previous day's convoy returned to TNBC about 1600, then to CC where that day's unloaded trucks were picked up, and eventually Saigon.

As the DT-TNBC bound now-empty convoy passed out posted 4/23 platoons, those units would return to their night location. Similarly, as the TNBC-CC convoy passed out posted 4/23 platoons about 1700 they would return to their NDP.

In a day with no combat, troops were up at 0500, on the road at 0600, back at their NDP 1800, then pulled guard shifts until the next morning when it was time to do it again.

[An explanation of how the out posted 4/23 units reacted to an ambush will follow the first diary entry in which a convoy attack is reported.]

**27 July (cont) -A & C Co's RIF in area to river line. D-A** [makes no sense to me] w/RF to south. Neg results.

**2 letters - ML, package Vickie.**

**Promote 1 B, 3 HQ to E-4; 2 B, 2 HQ to E-5.**

[list of vehicles followed by list of corrective actions pertaining to those vehicles]

**HQ-26-2 1. Trailers - Turn-in**

**53-2 2. 1/4 ton w/ drivers**

**6-2 3. Police- ammo, trash barrel**

**17-2 4. Signs**

**??-2 5. Fire barrel**

**1-1 6. Drainage ditches**

## TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS



*Ready To Strike.... Anywhere, Anytime*

Vol 2 No. 34

TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS

August 28, 1967

### Support Platoon Keeps Tomahawks Rolling



**1ST BDE** - The infantrymen have been fighting, sweating and trudging through waist-deep water for the last eight hours. They are mounted on their armored personnel carriers discussing the day's accomplishment with a certain pride. They know that they are returning to their night location for a few hours of well-deserved rest.

Enroute, there seem to be certain questions asked of the squad leader - "Sarge, is the mail in?" or "Are we getting any hot chow tonight?" Or maybe it's the track driver who notices the needle on the fuel gauge almost magnetically approaching "empty" and jokes to his platoon leader, "Sir, I hope they've got some diesel at the night location because old Betsy has got a powerful thirst.

Once inside the wire the company commander says, "Send your people to chow, have the resupply truck pick up the mail, ammunition, C-rations, ice and soda. Also have your drivers refuel their APC's at the diesel point."

To the soldiers of the 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 23d Infantry, this makes a perfect ending to a very hard day. As pointed out by many commanders in-country, "Give the infantryman a hot meal at night, his mail, and cold drinks and you've got a contented soldier." The unsung heroes who make this all possible for the Tomahawk battalion are the dedicated men in their Support Platoon, led by First Lieutenant Gary D. Bennett of Seattle, Wash.

"Regardless of where he is - whether it be deep in the Iron Triangle, in the thick of War Zone C or at a lonely outpost securing a bridge - he can be sure he has a hot meal coming and , very frequently cold drinks to rehabilitate his morale," pointed out Bennett.

Lieutenant Colonel Clifford C. Neilson of Mobile, Ala., the Tomahawk battalion commander, has a special pride in his support platoon. They accomplish the impossible and surmount the insurmountable," stated Neilson.

Although attached to the battalion S-4, headed by Captain Franklin D. Shiplett of Vidalia, Ga., the Support Platoon quite often works independently. The platoon is split into two teams; one is responsible for sending out the resupply to the field while the other is responsible for field distribution of the resupply.

There is no such thing as an eight-hour day for these dedicated Tomahawks. The men of the Support Platoon can recall many times when they worked at the "chopper-pad" well into the hours of darkness, or one particular day when they loaded 300 rounds of 4.2 inch mortars and over 100,000 rounds of small arms ammunition case by heavy case.

**28 July** Quiet nite - B Co. in base camp, A Co. on outpost NE of TNBC, C Co. in AO. B Co. swept road; A Co. moved to FSB; C Co. stood down. B Co. moved to FSB. Inspect motor pools & CO areas. OPENED FSB RAWLINS. No mail.



**FSB Rawlins looking from North to East**



**FSB Rawlins looking West to East**



**LTC Cliff Neilson in front of his tent at FSB Rawlins**

25<sup>th</sup> ID Artillery was responsible for deciding when and where FSB were to be established. The general criteria were that every maneuver unit would receive supporting fire from a minimum of one FSB and preferably two, and that every FSB could receive supporting fire from another FSB.

DIVARTY also named the FSB usually after a historically-notable USA artillery officer frequently from the Civil War. If a FSB once named was moved to a closely located area, a roman numeral was added to the name.

Each FSB was defended at night by a maneuver unit under the unit's commander. The maneuver unit battalion commander established the FSB perimeter, picked the sites for the artillery weapons, and located all the support activities. There was never a

question in my mind that FSB Rawlins III was my responsibility in all respects except the efficacy of the artillery unit. When the FSB was attacked, the 4/23, under my command or my second-in-command, defended it and the artillery unit helped. It was never under the command of an artillery officer!

*Ron, C Co., Feb 69-69, in a June 03 message remembers this about setting up FSB Rawlins:*

*"We had come in from the field to our new company area in TNBC thinking we would get the night off. Sometime during the night we packed up and went to a patch of land that we were told was going to be FSB Rawlins. The bulldozers showed up and dug out spots for the tracks to park, putting the .50's at ground level. We had a couple of pup tents and that was about it. We would come and go for the next couple of months. We split our time between Rawlins, FSB Buell, and God knows where and each time we returned to Rawlins a few more sand bags and more permanent structures appeared.*

## **29 July - 52<sup>nd</sup> malaria pill. Quiet nite - A & B Co's RIF'd Football**

"A" [nickname for a piece of terrain within the TAOR whose shape in some eyes resembled a football.]- **Bunkers & trench line. C Co. opened road to Go Dau Hau. C Co. plat at Bao Cao. R sweep w/ D 2/34 - escorted Btry 105 to vic FSB Hull. Gen. Preer [25<sup>th</sup> ID ADC (S)] visited NDL. Chaplain Byron got SS [Silver Star].** [It was highly unusual for a chaplain or a doctor to be awarded a SS since the usual criteria envisioned a soldier performing a heroic combat action. In this case, Chaplain Byron - and the by-then-departed, Captain Swartz, the Surgeon - in a series of actions on 6-8 March near GDH had performed heroically in recovering and attending wounded soldiers while under intense fire.] **Took LTC Wolf [new 1<sup>st</sup> BDE CO vice Col. Hodson] to field. C Co. out posted MSR for nite thrust. Neg. contact for NT - convoy left CC 1900 - arrived GDH 2030 - TNBC 2315. Departed TNBC 0215 - arrived GDH 0445.** [This was the only night convoy run during my command. It worked well, there were no attacks, and seemed to me something we ought to have done occasionally to keep the NVA/VC off balance.]

**Maj Starnes reported for duty.**[new Bn XO vice Maj. Tuten]  
**No mail.**



**30 July** Quiet nite. [field strength] **490 A & B Co's RIF'd Football. R OPCON D-2/34. C Co. swept road & outpost Bao Cao. Neg results. R OPCON D.** [This is the first of several notations of this arrangement; it may be my shorthand reference to the day's OPCON to D-2/34.]

**EM**

**A - 116**

**B - 110**

**C - 110**

**Heavy rain**

**Ltr ML - Letter to ML**

[notes to myself]

**Review off eff [efficiency] rating scheme - Bn XO rates Co XO**

**Bumper stencils - all wheel vehs by 6 Aug**

**Status of CM**

=====

**31 July** Start 12 week. Inspect ditches. Quiet nite - A & B Co's RIF'd Rubber. [nickname for one of two rubber plantations whose southern boundaries abutted Rte 22 from CC to TNBC. To further distinguish them, the northernmost and the larger of the two, was called "Big Rubber." Naturally the other was "Little Rubber." Diary entries are not always clear as to which of the two was being RIF'd.] **C Co. open road to Bao Cao (large mine on road). R OPCON D.** [probably Dreadnaught, 2/34 Arm] **Neg. results. Insp. BN. area. Very little progress. Setup insp. for Sunday. Heavy rain. Letter ML.** [List of items, each checked and entire list crossed out as if all items were corrected.]

Unit Fund

Athletic equip

Promotions A2, B2

Police

Outside Wire

.50cal-B34

[note] Boatwright B, Reno, C Btry



**Command briefing at FSB Rawlins TOC. LTC Neilson, MG Long, COL Hodson  
(note: TOC consisted of two APCs back to back with tarp)**



**Command briefing. LTC Neilson, BG Long, COL Hodson**

**1 Aug - Quiet nite - A Co. RIF then rotate with C Co. B Co. RIF N of Rubber. C Co. sweep road then come to field. R OPCON [not stated but presumably to D.].** Andy Parks, Westinghouse Radio visited. No mail

[List of items]

Trailers - B52

Lube levels

Police

Mil Courtesy

Haircuts



View of rubber plantation in foreground.

**2 Aug Quiet nite - C Co. swept rubber on foot east of airfield - engage 3 VC - killed 1 (nurse). B Co. stand down - A Co. opened road to Bao Cao. R OPCON D-A.**

A 116

B 107

C 122

Post card Vickie

[List of items]

Steam jenny

Traversing - elev mech - 50 cal turn in



Unload weapons in NDP

Engr - cokes

.50 cal grnd mts

De LA HO Y A [No idea of significance.]

**3 Aug**      **Quiet nite - C Co. stand down & insp. B Co. sweep rubber to SE.**  
**A Co. open road. 2 men KIA while chasing boy who stole camera.**  
**R OPCODE-A. 2 ltrs ML - wrote ML. Xtremely heavy &**  
**prolonged rain 5-6" [lined out] Kilgore - 2d Plat C**  
[Major General Ellis W. Williamson assumed command 25<sup>th</sup> ID. This  
was his 2<sup>nd</sup> RVN tour, his first having been as the CG, 173rd Infantry  
Brigade (Airborne.)]

**Gone But Always Remembere (From the 4/23 KIA list)**

**CPL Frank A. Harah, A Co.**

**CPL Larry La Vern Elzinga, A Co.**

# TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS



*Ready To Strike.... Anywhere, Anytime*

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Special Edition

TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS

August 3, 1968

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## MG. WILLIAMSON ASSUMES COMMAND



**Major General Ellis W. Williamson**

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## 25th's General Commands:



# The Finest Division Going!

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TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS

August 3, 1968, 1968

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## NEW DIVISION COMMANDER

Major General Ellis W. Williamson, new 25th Infantry Division Commander, assumed command during ceremonies held at Cu Chi Saturday morning, August 3, 1968.

He replaces Major General F. K. Mearns, who moves to Saigon to become Deputy Commander, II Field Force and Commanding General, Capital Military Assistance Command.

General Williamson was born in Raeford, North Carolina on June 2, 1918. Through high school and college, he was a member of the 120th Infantry Regiment, North Carolina National Guard.

Upon graduation from Atlantic Christian College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1940, he entered the Federal Service with his unit.

General Williamson remained with the 120th Infantry Regiment throughout World War II serving in rank from Private to Colonel. Following commissioning as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry in March, 1941, he served as a commander at platoon, company, battalion and regimental level and as a battalion and regimental staff officer. He was regimental Commander at the time of the unit's return to state control in January, 1946.

The same year, he was integrated into the Regular Army. For three years he was an instructor of tactics at the Infantry School. He graduated from the Command and General Staff College in 1950 and was assigned to Headquarter X Corps in Korea. He participated in the amphibious landing at Inchon as Assistant Operations Officer, X Corps, later becoming Operations Officer.

General Williamson was assigned in 1952, to the Office of the Army Chief of Staff, next attended the Armed Forces Staff College, and then returned to Washington for duty in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

He assumed command of the 13th Infantry Regiment at Fort Carson, Colorado, in 1956 and took this unit to Germany on Operation Gyroscope. After 27 months as Regimental Commander, he became Chief of the Training Division, Headquarters, 7th U.S. Army. He returned home to qualify as a parachutist and attend the National War College.

Following three years in the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel at Department of the Army, General



Williamson assumed command of the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) upon its activation in Okinawa in July 1963. He organized and trained this unit for its mission as Pacific Theatre Reserve Force during the next two years.

After extensive training on the Pacific islands of Okinawa, Taiwan, Irimote, and the Philippines as well as in Korea and Thailand, General Williamson's brigade, in May, 1965, became the first U.S. Army ground combat unit to enter the conflict in Vietnam.

Under his command, the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) participated in actions designed to protect friendly installations and to destroy enemy forces in the Bien Hoa-Vung Tau-Ben Cat areas and into the mountain plateau areas of Pleiku and Kontum.

In addition to the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), General Williamson's command in Vietnam included all Australian and New Zealand combat elements, plus some Vietnamese units.

He served in five campaigns in Europe during World War II and seven during the Korean conflict.

General Williamson assumed command of the U.S. Army Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana, November 1, 1966, and comes to the 25th Infantry Division from that post.

Major General Williamson has received the:

Distinguished Service Cross

Distinguished Service Medal

Silver Star with five Clusters

Legion of Merit with Cluster

Bronze Star Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters

Air Medal with nine Clusters

Army Commendation Medal

Purple Heart with two Oak Leaf Clusters

American Defense Service Medal

American Campaign Medal

European, African, Middle Eastern Campaign Medal

World War II Victory Medal

Army Occupation Medal (Germany)

National Defense Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster

Korean Service Medal

United Nations Service Medal

Vietnamese Service Medal

Distinguished Unit Emblem

Department of Defense Identification Badge

Army General Staff Identification Badge

Combat Infantryman's Badge

Master Parachutist's Badge

British Distinguished Service Order

French Croix de Guerre with Silver Star

National Medal of Vietnam Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, with Palm

Vietnamese Army Distinguished Service Medal, First Class

Belgian Fourragere

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation Badge

#### **MG Williamson Is Div's 22d CG**

Maj. Gen. Maxwell Murray	October 1941.
Maj. Gen. James L. Collins	May 1942
Maj. Gen. Charles L. Mullins	December 1943
Brig. Gen. Everett E. Brown	May 1948
Maj. Gen. William B. Kean	August 1948
Maj. Gen. Joseph S. Bradley	February 1951
Maj. Gen. Ira P. Swift	July 1951
Maj. Gen. Samuel T. Williams	July 1952

Maj. Gen. Halley G Maddox. Maddox	August 1953
Maj. Gen. Leslie D. Carter	May 1954
Maj. Gen. Herbert B. Powell	November 1954
Maj. Gen. Edwin J. Messinger	December 1955
Maj. Gen. Archbald W. Stuart	September 1957
Maj. Gen. John E. Theimer	October 1958
Maj. Gen. J. O. Seaman	June 1960
Maj. Gen. James L. Richardson	September 1960
Maj. Gen. E. F. Easterbrook	April 1962
Maj. Gen. Andrew J. Boyle	March 1963
Maj. Gen. Fred C. Weyand	August 1964
Maj. Gen. John C. F. Tillson III	March 1967
Maj. Gen. F. K. Mearns	August 1967
Maj. Gen. Ellis W. Williamson	August 1968

**MAJOR GENERAL F.**

**K. Mearns**, who has led the 25th Infantry Division since last August, has left for Saigon, where he will assume duties as Deputy Commander, 11 Field Force, and Commanding General, Capital Military Assistance Command.



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MG Ellis W. Williamson . . . Commanding General  
 MAJ Andrew J. Sullivan . . Information Officer  
 2LT Don A. Eriksson . . . . Officer-in-Charge  
 SP4 Stephen Lochen . . . . Editor  
 SP4 Bill Berger . . . . . Editorial Assistant

*[If you have complete issues to add to the online collection, please send me a note](#)*

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**4 Aug** Inspect MP - A 1000 [probably motor pool at 1000] Billets A 1330. Quiet nite - B Co. (-1 plat) & C Co. swept N of road in rubber to the east. A Co. opened road. R OPCON D-A. B Co. assumes Bao Cao mission tonite.

Switched to new call signs (Noble Corner) [This was the demise of Mohawk as the 4/23 call sign; hereafter at random intervals, a new two word call sign would go into effect for OPSEC reasons.]. MG Williamson made brief visit.

*From Gen. Williamson's Journal for 4 Aug 1968; 4/23-Emphasis placed on (1) importance of proper vehicle maintenance and (2) problems with fuel cells.*

Had good inspection of base camp.

3 ltrs ML.

\$215 Aug will include ded [deduction] for meals for June-July \$40.92/mo. \$33 + \$40.

**5 Aug** 53<sup>rd</sup> malaria pill. Quiet nite - B Co. road sweep to Bao Cao. R OPCON D-A. A & Co's RIF'd rubber. C Co. found \_100 lbs bag rice, 1 100 lb rock salt, 4 bicycles, VC flags. Col Hodson - LTC Wolf change of command. [LTC Wolf was a USMA Graduate Class 1946 and an Armor officer selected for, but not yet promoted to, COL. In 1963-64 he commanded an Armor battalion in the "spit and polish" US 7<sup>th</sup> Army in Germany. Many of his initial policy directives (see below) stemmed from that era. After a short time, he came to recognize their non-applicability to RVN.]

MG Richardson visited. [MG Richardson was a former 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division BDE CO of mine in Germany in 1957-58. At the time, he was a COL and I a LT company commander The troops nicknamed him "Big R" and he had a reputation of dealing quickly and severely with officers who he deemed not up to his standards.]. No mail.

#### **LTC Wolf Policy:**

1. Safety - riding on tracks. Clear off top. [This meant, no one rode on top and everyone rode inside, the way mechanized infantry doctrine called for in Europe.]

2. Security - LPs & NOD's - 1900

3. Stowage plan, basic load list. [A 7<sup>th</sup> Army requirement.]

4. Green tabs for leaders - ldrs must have shirt. [A then-current US Army-wide requirement virtually ignored throughout RVN.]

5. All weapons fired each day - 1900

6. .50 cal - TC - have HS & T [head space & timing] gauge on shirt

7. No deal [dealings] w/ VN (Vietnamese nationals)



8. Weapons in the perimeter

9. **No APC in jungle.** [Another European battlefield holdover where doctrine decreed that tanks & APC stay out of woods.]

Command briefing at FSB Rawlins TOC. LTC Neilson, MG Long, COL Hodson  
(note: TOC consisted of two APCs back to back with tarp)



Command briefing. LTC Neilson, BG Long, COL Hodson



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**6 Aug**      **Quiet nite - C Co. OPCODE 3/22 for seal & search of village. R OPCODE D-A. A Co. stood down. B Co. road security mission. (1 man minor injury when .50 cal blew up.)** [See Item 6 above; the BDE CO did know something about what happens to .50 cal mg when the H & T is not properly gauged.]) **Contact team rep [representative] visited.**  
**Ltr ML, Molino - wrote ML & Molino**  
Condition of weapons - Art 15.  
Knocking down trees

**7 Aug - Start 13 week. Quiet nite - B Co. on road mission. A & C Co's RIF big rubber to SE. R OPCON D-A. Neg. results. 2100 - C spotted 2 persons 200 m from wire on NW side of perimeter. A & C Co's fired M79. A Co. fired 1 81 mm, short rd, wounded 1 [from] Flame (Died 9 Aug). 2200 - A Co spotted 3-5 men SE of perimeter. Fired M79, Killer Jr. [ Nickname for a type of artillery direct fire technique used by towed 105 mm and mechanized 155 mm howitzers; the suffix Junior or Senior was applied to 105 or 155 projectiles, respectively.. The crew set mechanical time-fused high explosive (HE) projectiles to burst approximately 30 feet off the ground at ranges of 200 to 1,000 meters. The explosion pattern spread shrapnel in a cone shape. Since firing a fuse setting less than what corresponded to a range of 650 meters placed both the firing crew and other friendly troops in close proximity in danger, Killer was used only in combat emergency situations. (The name Killer came from the radio call sign of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn (105 mm), 8<sup>th</sup> Arty Regt, 25<sup>th</sup> ID Artillery that perfected the technique.)] All quiet after 2200. No mail, wrote ML.**

Control of firing

Everyone shave

**8 Aug - Quiet nite - Super contact team began arriving 0730. Maj Dendtler OIC [Officer-in-Charge. The 25<sup>th</sup> ID sent the team to help restore a unit to greater combat readiness. It was composed of skilled repair & maintenance personnel capable of fixing the entire spectrum of battalion equipment from radios to stoves.] All Co's stood down. Contact team did not bring needed parts. LTC Wolf visited. Very unhappy about B Co. stowage. [Neat and orderly storage of APC equipment and supplies was a 7<sup>th</sup> Army measuring "yardstick" to gauge combat readiness. LTC Wolf had not been in RVN long enough to conclude there were more effective measures. The soon-to-come Battle for Tay Ninh city would disabuse him of this "Old Army" "yardstick." Consequently Threaten [me] relief from command.] No mail. Wrote ML. PVT Dunn [or Dinn] Medic driver**

**Gone But Always Remembered**

**From the 4/23 KIA list**

**19. SGT Dwight Edgar Mooney, HHC.**

**9 Aug - Check parts van. Quiet nite - A & B Co's RIF'd area to east of big rubber - found base camp XT343373. C Co. on road. One man shot himself playing Russian Roulette. R relieved OPCON D. B Co. moved out 1830 to establish FSB OPCON to D. R arrived 1845. Started small malaria pill.**

**No mail.**

**No personal weapons or foreign.**

**Gone But Always Remembered**

**From the 4/23 KIA list**

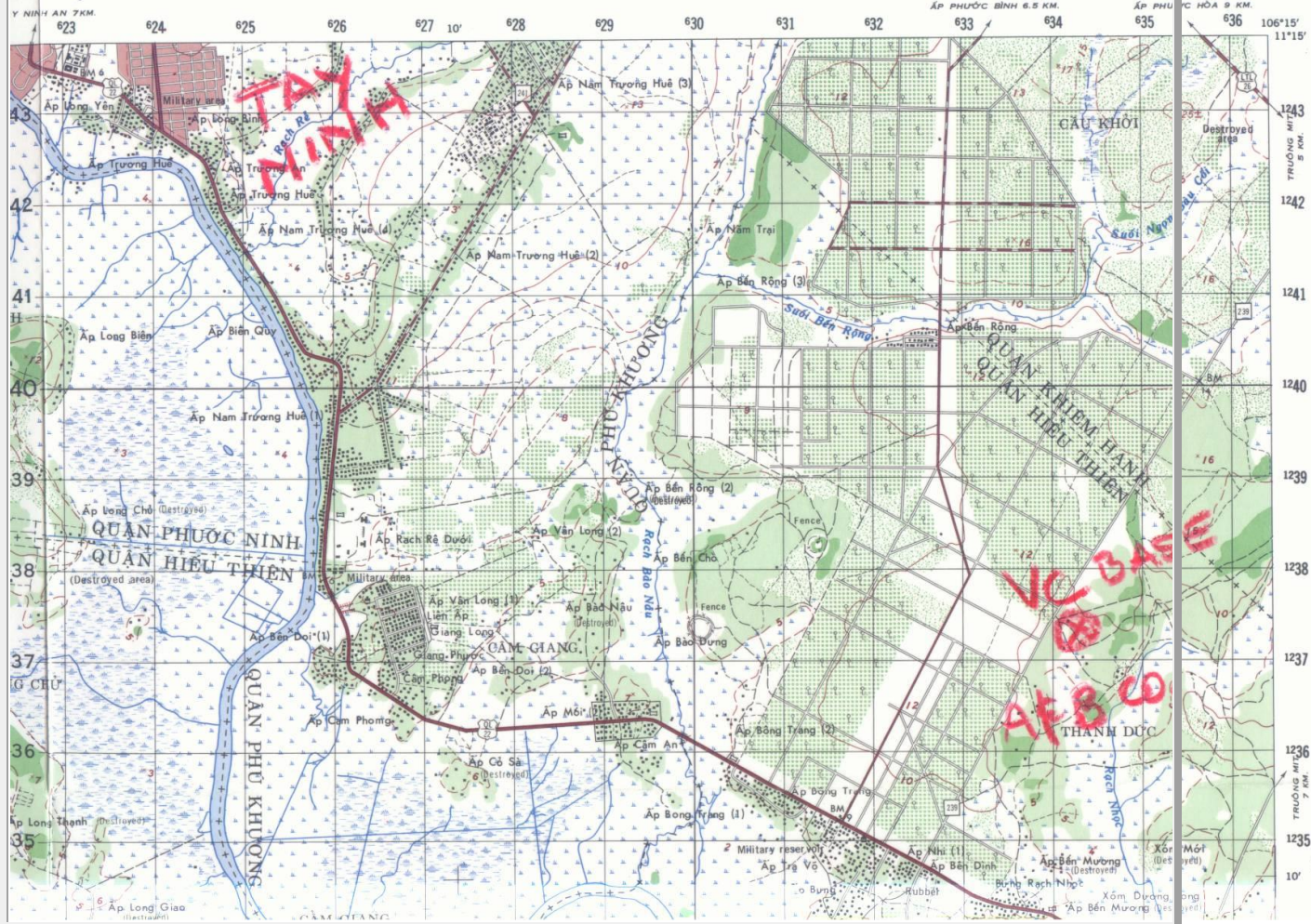
**20. PFC Statue Mosby, Jr. C Co.**



THANH

Y NINH AN 7 KM.

SHEET 6231 III  
SERIES L7014







**4th/23rd moving through clearing east of Tay Ninh**



**Examining captured VC documents from small base camp deep in jungle**



**Entrance to VC bunker complex**



**Burning VC base camp**





**VC Claymores, Bangalore Torpedoes, mortar and RPG rounds discovered in Crescent Forest**





**Cliff Neilson and cache of VC weapons and ammunition found by Alpha Company**



Cliff Neilson holding the remains of an enemy 107MM rocket

**10 Aug** - Quiet night - A Co. spotted movement - 2-3 personnel. Neg. results. A Co. & R RIF'd W of Rubber. A Co. found 3 -100 lbs [sacks of] rice. BDE CO found B Co. Short 85 flak vests & 75 steel helmets. B Co. OPCON D. No mail.

**LP-do not come in on sighting; [go out] well-armed; [use] Claymores**  
**Minesweeper - early start**  
**Return from AP - weapons and police**  
**Notebooks for leaders**  
**Test fire - mortar conc**

**11 Aug - Unquiet nite - A Co. LP spotted 3 personnel. Sprang ambush, fire mortars, & arty. Neg results. RIF'd in Rubber w A Co. - R searched village by ford - neg. results. B Co. OPCON D.**

Names, number, signs on track  
No standing on tracks when moving or riding on front slope  
Everyone put on steel pots when combat starts.  
**SHORTAGES**

	Hel	ARM Vests	Prot Mask
A	+1	22	28
B	19	19	30
C	0	0	0
HHC	0	0	0

Letter from & to ML

**12 Aug - 54<sup>th</sup> malaria pill. Quiet nite - R stand down. A Co. RIF'd rubber east of airstrip. B Co. OPCON D. C Co. opened road, arrived NDP 1710.**

**Machetes, pioneer tools**  
**Cracked fuel cells - excess speed**  
**No mail**

**13 Aug    Quiet nite. C Co. dismounted sweep alongside rubber SE then circle back through Rubber. R block. B Co. OPCON D. A Co. on road. Neg results. B Co. has 6 wounded by command det claymore vic. Base of Nui Ba Din. Letter from & to ML**

## Gone But Always Remembered the 4/23 KIA list

### CPL James Arnold Lisenby, B Co.

*Here is a remembrance of the claymore incident posted 8 December 2003 by "Butch" Sincock, the on-site commander:*

*"My one "up close and personal" encounter with Nui Ba Den was in mid-August '68. We were ordered to dismount, move up to the mountain and start climbing. We moved through a banana grove along a trail that led to the base. Right at the base we found a clearing with a small campfire still burning and a pot of boiling water propped up on a couple of rocks above it. Bad sign! Another platoon moved up into the clearing. I went up with my RTO just to look around. Got a bad feeling and thought we ought to return to the platoon. As we got back to the platoon (on the right flank) I could look up and see part of the clearing above us. At that instant they blew a huge Claymore on the platoon searching the clearing and then opened up with AKs. The other platoon pulled back, but left one of their guys up there. I took part of my platoon back up and got him out, but he died en route to TNBC. A number of the guys in the other platoon got peppered with pieces of the Claymore. The platoon leader, Dave Blanchard, had a pocket bible in his pants pocket that stopped a huge piece of metal that might have otherwise done a lot of damage.*

*One of the wounded was the soldier we went back up to pull out after the Claymore went off. We couldn't get a Dust off, so, as I recall, you landed in your LOH, the Arty FO got out, we put the WIA in the back and you flew him to TNBC. I was told later that he died en route. He was from West Virginia and the guys all called him "Pappy" because he was about the oldest guy in the company at 26."*

## TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS



*Ready To Strike.... Anywhere, Anytime*

Vol 2 No. 34

TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS

August 28, 1967

## Wounded Priest Found Praying For War's End

1st BDE - The Viet Cong showed no respect for the sanctuary of a temple when they shot a Buddhist priest praying for an end to the fighting.

The 4th Battalion (Mechanized), 23d Infantry, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Clifford C. Neilson of Mobile, Ala., was pushing the enemy out of a village 14 miles southwest of Tay Ninh near Go Dau Ha. The Tomahawks cautiously approached a Buddhist temple which miraculously seemed unmarked by the scourge of battle.

Specialist 4 Engle B. Smith, a senior medic from Pensacola, Fla., entered the temple and noticed a priest poised in the position of prayer. "His snow white habit was smeared with blood, but yet he continued to pray," stated Smith.

Through an interpreter it was discovered that the priest was shot twice in the arm while he was kneeling and praying for an end to the bloody battle raging outside.

The 1st Brigade medic applied first aid to the priest's wounds and carefully carried him off to a helicopter landing zone where he was evacuated to a military hospital for further treatment.

**14 Aug - Start 14 week. 95 days. Quiet nite - C Co. Dismounted sweep through Rubber to NE to suspect BC [NVA/VC base camp]. R mtd sweep through rubber. A Co. swept road. B Co. OPCODE D. C Co. got contact with several individuals. AK47. 2 WIA. Discovered 2 BC - total 35 bunkers. 11 destroyed. B & C Co's switched at 1700 hrs. 2 scout dog teams arrived. Bunker construction. GOCHOLA [entry in pencil; do not know significance.] 2 weapons AK47-carbine. Letter from & to ML, package Letter to Pop & Shirley**

**15 Aug - Quiet nite - B Co. RIF'd north of rubber. R & F [Flame] formed block. [this is the first mention of Flame Platoon committed to a mission.] A Co. on road. C Co. OPCODE D. R OPCODE at 1600. A Co. returned.**

**Pickets**

**Paint brushes**

**Sandbags**

**16 Aug - Quiet nite - B Co. stood down. A Co. went OPCODE to D to open road from 0600-1200. Returned to NDP at 1300. C Co. OPCODE 3/22 [3d Battalion, 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry, a leg outfit normally assigned to 1<sup>st</sup> BDE). R OPCODE D. Arty battery left for Prek Lock [probably Loc or Lok.] at 1600. Wrote ML.**

**17 Aug - Quiet nite. C Co. OPCODE 3/22. A Co. (-) stand down. Arty btry returned 0800. B Co. swept rubber to NW. Got 3 VC suspects. Rec'd intel at 1200 of VC conc (500) in rubber to NE. [In retrospect, these sightings were probably of NVA troops moving into position for the Battle for Tay Ninh.] A (-) & B**

**Co's moved out 1430. Swept area until 1715. 3 VC fired at - neg results. Returned at 1900. AP Patrol 3/22 spotted large VC formation.**

**Helmets**

**Noise on opns.**

**Security on opns.**

**2 letters ML.**

**18 Aug -** [This was the first day of the 9 day battle of Tay Ninh city.] **Capt. Montgomery [CO, A Co.] departed R & R.**

*During my 6 months in command, I had 8 Captain line company commanders:*

*A- Montgomery, Beech;*

*B- Hales, Campbell, & Marlow;*

*C- Mellis (WIA), Phillips (KIA), & Lincoln.*

*They were all effective, brave officers and I and the soldiers of the 4/23 who they led were lucky to have them.*

*Their normal command tour was 6 months; Montgomery served the longest under me and was a soldier's solder. Of the eight, he was the most careful of his men's lives, and the hardest one to convince that I really wanted him to put the men of A Co. in danger's path.*

**Unquiet nite - attack on Tay Ninh, Nui Ba Dinh, FSB Buell. All quiet at FSB Rawlins. At 1<sup>st</sup> lite, A Co. moved out to sweep road to [checkpoint] M. B Co. to move to Soui Da. Plans changed to move SE of Tay Ninh. Enter TN at 1400. Contact at 1715. D Co 2/27 OPCON [2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Wolfhounds]. Fought to 1930. A Co & D Co. CO wounded. [Butch Sincock (in April 2004); thinks the acting A Co. CO may have been a Lt. Hirsch.] Denied arty clearance. Gun ships used. Extracted & night laager on east end of bridge. C OPCON 3/22. 7 wounded plus 10 from mine. 1 A Co track dest. D -2/27 had 2 KIA, 4 WIA. Did not get [recover bodies of] 2 KIA.**

*My remembrances of this day:*

*Tay Ninh was the headquarters of the powerful anti communist Cao Dai sect and the location of their "Vatican" the Cao Dai temple complex. The Cao Dai adherents were virulently anti-NVA and the US had always gone out of its way to encourage their support of our efforts.*

*The temple complex area was composed of several large buildings in the middle of extensive*



*grounds and surrounded by an impressive masonry wall. It was on the city's outskirts and immediately adjoined the built up area of one side the city. There were roads leading to it and homes surrounding that side.*

*continued:*



**The walled grounds of the Cao Dai "Holy See"  
Located ESE of downtown Tay Ninh Vietnam (photo CN)**



Holy See main gate and inside the "Holy See" Temple (photo Rick Lewis)





**The Cao Dai "Holy See" looking Southeast. (photo CN)**

*My remembrance cont.*

*The US had always been careful to avoid combat in the temple complex area. The rules of engagement (ROE) explicitly forbid the use of weapons of any kind on or near the temple grounds.*

*We entered the city close to the temple and at 1715 discovered the NVA had seized it along with probably 500 worshipers, monks, and townspeople. We were faced with a dilemma: obey the ROE and see the NVA occupy part of the capital of Tay Ninh Province or disobey the RoE, engage the NVA, and risk the deaths of hundreds of innocent Cao Dai civilians.*

*After we discovered the NVA entrenched in the temple and on its grounds, we began "self defense" fires (always allowed under RoE) while I sought permission to fully engage. Permission was granted to use only organic small arms and to absolutely minimize civilian casualties.*

*It was quite a sight seeing the Tomahawks on their bellies lined up along one side of the temple grounds firing while across the grounds and in the temple itself uniformed NVA jumped up and*

*fired then dropping down. All the while terrified civilians milled around the areas controlled by the NVA.*

*It was getting to be a standoff when I asked for permission to use artillery and Gun ships under very controlled conditions; artillery was denied and we got a few gun ship runs.*

*As night fell, we saw the NVA slip away into the alleys behind the temple. No idea how many of them or the civilians were killed.*

***Butch Sincok was a platoon leader during this action; here are his recollections sent 13 April 2003.***

*"I recall well that day. Some of my recollections are at slight variance from yours. I thought we made contact earlier in the day, but you may be right that it was late in the afternoon.*

*I don't recall any Gun ships. Matter of fact, I recall the frustration of knowing where the NVA were and not having political clearance for artillery, TAC-air, Gun ships or even our own mortars.*

*We were not fighting in the main Cao Dai temple complex. That complex is about 3.5 KM NW of the small Cao Dai complex where we fought. We used to pass the larger complex (called the "holy sea" I think) on the way to and from Tay Ninh West & Rawlings.*

*The complex where we fought that day was in the southern most part of the city. I have been back to that site several times over the past few years and discussed that battle with several women who were in the crowd that day. For over 30 years I had questions about that day.*

*Two major questions were: 1) why were the civilians standing around in the open knowing there were warring forces to either side and 2) were any of the young men in robes really NVA (there was a rumor that when gunfire broke out some of the "monks" pulled AK-47s out from under their robes. Everyone could quote someone who heard this, but no one was an actual eyewitness).*

*Today that complex is a retirement facility for aging Cao Dai religious. The half-dozen or so women I have spoken with who were there then said 1) they took refuge in the complex because they thought that they would be safe in a holy site and 2) because the buildings in the complex were the only masonry ones (i.e. somewhat bullet resistant) in that part of town - all the other houses were essentially shacks.*

*Regarding the "monks", the ladies told me that they were DRAFT DODGERS! They said they had no problem recruiting would-be monks in the 60s because many young men saw it as a legitimate way to avoid both the ARVN and the NVA.*

*During the battle my platoon sergeant attempted to throw a grenade over the main temple building when NVA were spotted shooting around the corner of the building. The grenade did not clear the top of the roof and bounced back into the temple itself. We had seen women & children flee into the doorway where the grenade went just seconds before. According to the women I have spoke with in recent years about 14 were KIA - either immediately or died of wounds.*

*Incidentally, when the firing first started, my platoon was moving around one of the buildings close to the road. We were ordered back to the south end of the compound by the CO. We low crawled part way and ran into a barbed wire fence around a garden. I worked the wire with my hands until it broke and we opened a big hole in the fence for the men to crawl through. That hole is still there! I found it on my first return trip there about 5 years ago.*

*In 2002, I briefed MG Eric Olson on the Battle for Tay Ninh just after he took command of the 25th. He wanted to use a historic battle for a presentation to the officers and NCOs of the 25th on the Oct. 1st "birthday" of the 25th Division. He covered many of the battles in his presentation, including the Temple battle. He gave his briefing in the Conroy Bowl at Schofield Barracks. They had a huge map of Tay Ninh Prov. on the floor - probably 20 feet tall and 12 or 15 across. Very impressive!"*

***This message I received from Gary Bennett, Recon Platoon Leader:***

*"...It was around the time of the Tay Ninh Offensive that CAPT Montgomery went on R & R.. He left [A Co] with a full complement of tracks, officers, and around 140 men foxhole strength. When he returned a week later, there were 4 tracks, no officers, around 90 men fox hole strength and I believe an artillery LT as acting CO. That was one helluva week for Alpha."*

**Gone But Always Remembered From the 4/23 KIA list**  
**Sgt Randolph Charles Kett, C Co.**  
**Sgt Michael Ralph Manno, C Co. (WIA 18AUG68 / DOW**  
**20SEP68)**

**19 Aug - 55<sup>th</sup> malaria pill. Quiet nite - 0800 A & B Co's moved to block on west side of bridge. Recovered 2 KIA from D-2/27. VN civ report pulled out to SE. 1200 change in orders. B Co. moved to FSB then went OPCODE 3/4 Cav. 3/4 Cav on road CP C. A Co. blocked to SE on NDP. Dreadnaught swept N. C Co. OPCODE Dreadnaught. A & B Co's closed NDP w/ A -1/5 & A-3/4.**

**20 Aug - 1.5+1.5+2.0+2.25+2.25+2.0=11.5 C Co. OPCODE Dreadnaught. Quiet nite - not a round fired. Jumped off with A-1/5 on N; A-3/4 on road; B-4/23**

**dismtd on South into rubber. Blown culvert vic. CP C stopped mtd.  
elem. [mounted element.] Arty prep & AS. A-4/23 in reserve at FSB. [My C & C]  
Helicopter had tail rotor failure at 20-30'. Crashed. No injuries.**

*The pilot skillfully kept control of the OH-6A Loach chopper by increasing air speed to compensate for the rotational effect of the lack of a tail rotor. He flew the chopper into the ground at high speed, pulling back on the main rotor control as he cut the engine. We settled roughly in the TNBC aerial refueling area between two 1500 gal rubberized cloth pods of aviation fuel. The OH-6A exoskeleton fuselage collapsed as it was supposed to and absorbed the crash impact. The pilot, the BCSM, the Arty LNO and myself walked away without a scratch. Contact was in progress and the BDE CO took over direct control of the 4/23 until I returned to the scene in a new chopper. The second chopper, a UH-1 Huey, got over the combat action and promptly took two .51 mm mg hits in the same place on opposing rotors on either side of the hub. This cause the Huey to be a little wobbly with more than the usual vibration but it and we managed to stick it out until the contact ended.*

**Contact started half [way] between CP C & [CP] O. B Co. suffered 3 KIA, 3 WIA, 1 APC. Withdrew. Pounded area with arty, CS, and air strikes for 4 hours. Moved in 1720. Met scattered enemy resistance, withdrew. Did not recover body of SGT. Couch, B Co. B Co. [had] 3K, 11 W. BC [body count] 10. A-1/5 1 K.**

**Letter ML**





**On Rte 26 between Tay Ninh and Dau Tieng.  
7 soldiers died as a result of this. (photo courtesy CN)**

*In 1987, James R. Arnold authored, and Bantam Books published the multi-volume series *Illustrated History of the Vietnam War* (ISBN 0553343475). One of the volumes was titled *Armor* which included the author's perspective of the contribution of mechanized infantry during the war. In chapter 7 "Out on the Border," he describes the efforts of the 25<sup>th</sup> ID armored and mechanized forces in the battle of Tay Ninh city. On pp. 91-105, Arnold provides a great deal of additional detail not included in my diary entries concerning the events of 20-24 August 1968. When last I checked the book was available through <Amazon.com> for about \$11. For those of you who were there, its purchase might provide you additional "evidence" when the discussion down at the AL/VFW hall rolls around as to who had it worse.*

**Gone But Always Remembered**  
**From the 4/23 KIA list**  
**SGT Freddie Lee Couch, B Co.**  
**SP4 Raymond Luna Perez, A Co.**  
**CPL Robert Wallace Lais, B Co.**

**21 Aug** - Quiet nite - C Co. OPCON 3/22. A Co. 1/5, A Trp. 3/4 (-), A Co. 4/23 in NDP recovered body of MHA at 0900 - A Co. 1/5 at 1400 began sweep through rubber to NE on right flank 51<sup>st</sup> ARVN Rangers. At 1600 contact initiated 1 KM NW of CP T. Co. A [4/23] hit. Lt. Blake, Plt Ldr & Lt. Russell, FO both KIA; 5 wounded. Withdrew & put in air strikes. Reinforced with 51<sup>st</sup> ARVN. Laager vic. old airstrip w/ A Co. 1/5 & A Trp. 3/4. A Co. & B Co. 4/23 Inf defend FSB [not stated but probably Rawlins which was not too far away.] Lost 4 APC. 20 BC.

Diary notes; (USSR invaded Czechoslovakia)

*The laager was several miles E of FSB Rawlins down Rte 26. I had been airborne all day and landed to take command. I passed command of FSB Rawlins to my capable XO, Major Don Starnes (who flew out from TNBC, his usual location, to assume command.) I found myself in the unusual position of commanding 4 US company-sized units from three different battalions and one ARVN unit. We were in a hastily occupied NDP in deep scrub jungle close to Route 26 at the end of a very intense combat day and with no intelligence about the presence of NVA units. We had minimum daylight to prepare the NDP perimeter, no resupply of food, water, or ammunition, and every expectation we would be attacked that night.*

*That night, I monitored the BDE & BN command nets and slept fitfully in an APC. I remember clearly getting the word over the BDE command net about the invasion of Czechoslovakia and thinking "The Czechs will just have to look out for themselves, I've got my hands full right here."*

*Thankfully the NVA did not come our way; unlucky for them, they decided to attack FSB Rawlins (see next entry) where they were decimated. I later thought how much more higher the odds would have been for them had they attacked the NDP I commanded that night.!*

**Gone But Always Remembered From the 4/23 KIA list**  
**LT Danny Lee Blake, A Co.**

**22 Aug - 1K 9W 1 Flame track C Co. OPCON 3/22. Unquiet nite - Mortar, rocket atk on FSB R at 0120 followed by grnd attack from N thru rubber, from east & west along tree line. Arty fired Killer Jr. & Beehive. Gunships, flareships, air strikes. Battle died down finally 0430. No breach of perimeter. 46 BC. 2 RPG-7 & 2 RPG-2 launchers, 5 AK-47, 2RPD, 42 rds RPG-2, & 9 rds RPG-7. 4 POW.**

*At first light, I flew to FSB Rawlins to assess the situation. My impression was the infantry and artillery had done a heroic job in repulsing a determined enemy. The perimeter was not penetrated and the losses were few. And then I turned my attention to that day's needs. Major Starnes was later awarded a Silver star for his personal heroism and leadership while commanding the FSB.*

**Move A-1/5 & A-3/4 from nite laager thru [CP] T (0900) to new FSB 1000 . Put AVLB [Armored Vehicle Launched Bridge An M48A1 tank chassis on which was mounted a hydraulically-extended 2 section "scissor" bridge. Used by track and wheeled vehicles to cross streams and ditches up to 30' wide.] in place 1300. Moved out 1415 to secure airfield. POW identified 5<sup>th</sup> Regt - H-5 & H- 6 Bn; 45<sup>th</sup> Regt - D-3 Bn; 8<sup>th</sup> Regt - D-3 Bn.**



**AVLB in action 22AUG69**



AVLB in action

**Gone But Always Remembered  
From the 4/23 KIA list  
PFC Larry Davidson Cook, HHC.**

*[From the New York Times, 22 August 1968, p. 4.]*

*"...Yesterday afternoon, American soldiers fighting from armored personnel carriers and heavily supported by artillery and air power, killed 182 enemy soldiers in a sprawling rubber plantation 44 miles northwest of Saigon.*

*The [sic. Two] American soldiers died and 23 were wounded in the plantation which is 15 miles east of the city of Tay Ninh.*

*Although more than 700 enemy troops have been reported killed in several actions in the last four days, the death toll in the plantation was the largest in a single battle in several weeks. According to initial reports, the Americans lost two dead and 23 wounded.*

*A spokesman for the United States 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division said the fighting began when enemy troops opened fire on a column of armored personnel carriers advancing toward the plantation on a routine jungle sweep.*

*"Some of the enemy charged right at the vehicles" the spokesman said.*

*As they did, machine gunners atop the armored cars [sic: carriers] cut them down and infantrymen inside [sic: atop] the vehicles leaped out to join the fight.*

*After about an hour and a half of steady firing, the armored column pulled back for a new supply of ammunition "They burned out several machine gun barrels in the fight" the spokesman said.*

*When the armored cars [sic: carriers] withdrew, nearby howitzers began pounding the area and until late in the afternoon jets and helicopters swarmed over the plantation.*

*Because supplies did not reach the armored unit until night was approaching, the commander decided against going after the enemy again until morning.*

*The division spokesman said that six armored vehicles were "severely" damaged in the fight."*

**23 Aug - Quiet nite - A Co. to TN pick up & escort ARVN arty btry. A-1/5 & B Co. open road & outpost to Kheim Hanh. Arty Btry arrived 1100; A & B Co's & R closed 1300.** [Following is a list of items probably received at a 1<sup>st</sup> BDE CO meeting. The entries are in pencil and difficult to read.]

**1. Ldrship - not correcting obvious faults** [probably meaning failure to wear] **green tabs, steel pots, armored vests** [BDE CO had not yet given up his 7<sup>th</sup> Army belief that all commanders from BN to squad should wear green epaulet tabs to designate their leadership role. In my observation, soldiers seldom wore helmets or vests until the first shot was fired, then put them both on until combat ceased, then took them off again.], **prot masks**, [I am at loss to explain why failure to wear, carry, or otherwise have available protective CBR masks would be of concern.] **stowage.**

**2. No [illegible] combat gear on operations.**

**3. Ambush patrols out before dusk.**

**4. Strobe lights.** [Used to mark friendly positions when night air operations were in progress.]

**5. Command [radio] net - monitorship, reporting\*.** [Probably refers to the often-heard complaint by commanders at each echelon that maintained a command net, that "I can't ever get you when I call" and "You are not reporting what is going on in sufficient detail. "I used to tell company commanders the same thing.]

**\* Gunships when there report back to Sun Tutor** [radio call sign?] **AM** [air mobile] **Co.**

**6. Check fire - shift arty**

**7. Present CIB.**

**Vehicle Status M113 M125 Opn Field (incl) FDC, CO, Sup,Maint**

**A Co. 8 2**

**B Co. 8 + 2 DL 2**

**C Co. [no entry]**

**HQ [no entry]**

*From the New York Times, 23 August, 1968 p. 3. "*

*...Calling in helicopter gun ships, fighter-bombers, and artillery barrages, United States troops today fought for the fifth straight day for control of a road 40 miles northwest of Saigon.*

*In today's action, which began in mid-morning, the enemy attacked with rocket grenades and automatic weapons against three companies of American infantry.*

*The fighting raged on a road leading from Tay Ninh, an important headquarters city. The road is a supply route for American forces astride a Viet Cong [sic; NVA] infiltration corridor leading from Cambodia.*

*The fighting near the Cambodian border was part of the stepped up ground war in which a dozen allied positions and populated areas, including Saigon, came under enemy rocket or ground attack early today."*

**24 Aug - SPEC promotions E6 - 2, E5 - 2, E4 - 3. Quiet nite - A Co. local RIF to north. B Co. escorted TN convoy. R took resupply column to & from TNBC. A Co. worked on [perimeter] wire. C Co. OPCODE D-N; returned OPCODE 1700. TF 4/23 A, B, C Co's & R**

**New mission**

**1. C Co.(-) Rock crusher-open MSR to GDH [Go Dau Ha]. 1 Plat to FF [French Fort].**

**2. Return A Co. Plat to Rawlins.**

**3. Recon - escort [convoy] DT-TN & TN-DT.** [As explained in an earlier narrative about convoy out posting procedures, empty trucks at DT from the previous day's convoy had to be escorted from DT to TNBC so they could return with the main body of that day's empties to CC.]

**4. A & B Co's. - Open & post TN-DT route. Conduct offensive operations + strengthen FSB. Defend FSB at nite.**

**5. 2/34 open MSR 25 only.**

**6. C-7/11 [Arty] move to Rawlins - [FSB] Schoefield closes. 4/23 provide security.**

**7. Move C mess hall; recover supply items.**

**8. Bulldozer**



**25 Aug - 6+1.5=7.5 Quiet nite - 0700 -Bn formation. [Gave] HHC, A, B Co's pep talk. B Co. opened road. R convoy escort for arty then DT-TN convoy. C Co. open road GDH-TN & FF. A Co. work on base camp defense.**

**1230. C Co 2d Plat heavy contact vic. S edge small rubber. Convoy attacked. C Co. (-) moved south. B-3/22 air landed in CP 182. B-3/4 moved up from south. B-3/4 linked up w/ C26 [call sign for 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon leader, C Co.] heavy casualties, circled rubber. Linked w/ B-3/22. Drove north. Hit trench line at 1900 laager vic CP 182. C Co. (-) plus 1 plat B-3/4 initially laagered, then moved to GDH. 1 plat B Co. moved to Rock Crusher. Capt Honsard, C-3/22, Lt Headley, B-3/4 2K [can not tell if the 2K entry refers to Honsard and Headley], 15 W APC-C12 destroyed.**

*Captain Henry R. Phillips commanded C Co. during this combat encounter and for his actions earned the Distinguished Service Cross. Quoted below are excerpts from the DSC citation which provide additional details of the action:*

*"...his company and a convoy that it was supporting were ambushed by two North Vietnamese Army battalions...Captain Phillips flew to the scene of the battle and jumped to the ground from his hovering helicopter amid intense enemy fire. Finding that his first platoon was in danger of being overrun, he quickly gathered a force to assist the threatened element and halted the advance of the communist. As he was leading a counterattack to secure a landing zone for an ambulance helicopter, he and his men came under heavy rocket-propelled grenade and automatic weapons fire from the flank. Grabbing four light antitank weapons, he moved through the hostile fusillade to a point from which he was able to destroy a rocket-propelled grenade team and an automatic weapons position. Once the casualties were safely evacuated, Captain Phillips led a small group of volunteers into the killing zone of the ambush to extract several remaining dead and wounded personnel. He then organized a withdrawal as darkness set in and although wounded by an enemy rocket-propelled grenade, succeeded in leading his men to an allied command..."*

Additional historical first-hand account of this battle:

<http://www.katzenmeier.wordpress.com/2008/11/02/ambush-at-ap-nhi-stories-of-valor-and-heroism/>

<http://www.virtualwall.org/dh/HansardJB01a.htm>

Special thanks goes to: Charlie Co. 3/22 Senior Medic Ivan Katzenmeier  
alpha23

**From the 4/23 KIA list  
CPL Jeffrey Willis Pohjola, C Co.  
CPL Patrick John McCormick, C Co.**

*[From the New York Times, 25 August, p. 2.]*

*"...Sharp fighting has also developed in Tay Ninh Province, one of the enemy's key infiltration routes to Saigon. United States 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division [sic: forces] in the province came under recoilless rifle, mortar, rocket, and machine-gun fire shortly after midnight. The American soldiers, in night defensive positions 11 miles east of Tay Ninh, called in helicopter gun ships, artillery, tanks, and armored personnel carriers. Eight United States soldiers were killed and 45 wounded in the three hour attack. A total of 62 North Vietnamese soldiers were also reported killed."*

**26 Aug - 1.5+2=2+2. Quiet nite. 0700 B-3/22 & B-3/4 moved S from CP 182 laager into convoy area with plat [from] C Co. C Co. (-) moved north from GDH. B Co. less 1 plat plus 1 plat A Co. opened road TN-CP. 1 plat B Co. Rock Crusher. 1 plat C FF. R convoy duty DT-TN-DT.**

**Gone But Always Remembered  
From the 4/23 KIA list  
SP4 Earl Sherman Bazemore, C Co.**

*[From the New York Times, 26 August, p. 2.]*

*"...A United States convoy moving toward Tay Ninh was ambushed today by dug-in enemy troops who lobbed mortars and fired machine guns from both sides of a road. Six Americans were killed and 51 wounded in the attack.*

*The United States Command said this morning that a reaction force of gun ships, tactical aircraft, and tanks repulsed the enemy force but only after an all day fight. Spokesman said that 96 enemy soldiers were killed..."*

*An ironic headline on the same page reported that "Nixon Spends a Quiet day with Friends in Bahamas.*

**27 Aug - 10W 27BC 56<sup>th</sup> Mal Pill Capt Montgomery back in cntry. Unquiet nite - Mortar, RPG, Rocket attack on FSB 0030-0100. Ground attack from NE, W, SE. Arty fired 1400 rds Killer Jr, 10 W (plus 4 arty), BC 27. 5 RPG launchers, 3 MG 7, 6 AK47.**

**A & B Co's refit; Mission Tanker opened road to CP O. AVL B hit mine. C Co. opened MSR.**

**LT Col Wolf relieved - Col Fair assumed command.**



VC/NVA weapons captured from 27AUG 68 firefight

*Col Fair arrived in RVN on 26 August and was slated to take a BDE; do not know where. He had just come from commanding a BDE in Europe and was still full of "spit & polish" ideas. When Wolf was relieved on 26 August, Fair got reassigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> BDE sometime that nite and arrived at TNBC early on the 27th.*

*MAJ Don Starnes, BN XO alerted me by radio that the NEW! BDE CO was inbound to Rawlins about 10 minutes before he arrived. I first saw him on the helicopter pad, dressed in heavily starched jungle fatigues and spit-shined boots and no doubt determined to make a*

*name for himself.*

*He must have viewed me as the sorriest looking, dirtiest, and most disheveled LTC he had ever seen. I can not imagine what must have gone through his mind when he looked around the FSB.*

*There were bodies and parts of bodies on the wire and in front. A bulldozer was digging a trench outside the perimeter where we intended to put the enemy remains. There were piles of expended .50 cal brass near every track, Guys were exhausted and either asleep where they dropped or trying to clean up. Nobody had a shirt on except me.*

*He walked around awhile and it was easy for me to see he was appalled at what he saw. First, he told me I could not bury the remains without properly identifying them as that was against the Geneva Convention. Next, he wanted me to mount the troops up and pursue the long-departed NVA. I told him "Yes, Sir, as soon as we get re-supplied with ammunition." He nearly exploded. He sternly informed me I had 24 hours to shape the mess up or I was out of there.*

*He next visited nearby FSB Buell defended by 2/22, their perimeter had been breached, and conditions were far worse. Later, their BN CO, Alex Hunt, told me he got the same treatment only Alex had no bulldozer and no plan to bury the enemy.*

*That night TNBC got rocketed, his hooch took a near miss, and he got a frag in the butt. Welcome to RVN, Col Fair! After that he was a prince, a great BDE CO to work for and eventually became a LTG.]*

*[In 1998, MG Williamson, CG, 25<sup>th</sup> ID during August 1968 when LTC Wolf was relieved, provided the 25<sup>th</sup> ID Association a copy of his General Ellis Williamson's Vietnam Journals which I have had the privilege of reading. In the Journals he recounts the reasons for his relief of a BDE CO he does not identify. It is clear to me from his Journal's description of the circumstances that he was referring to LTC Wolf.*

*LTC Wolf is still alive and to my knowledge has never publicly discussed the circumstances leading to his relief. Since I value my combat-forged remembrances of both these fine soldiers, I would refer those interested in General Williamson's side of the story to his Journals.*



**Mohawk 6 LTC Cliff Neilson at Rawlins Helipad on a better day than 27AUG 68**





FSB Rawlins 1968

## **27 Aug - cont**

3 Letter from ML & cheese from Dad

Letter to ML & Dad

[List of items]

**Special Promotion**

**Sump**

**New BDE Comdr**

**BC**

**Ice cream**

**Resupply & RIF**



**28 Aug - Quiet nite - A Co. opened road. B Co. RIF - 1 plat [B Co.] escort Engr to RC & CP O; C Co. opened road. B Co. got 1 POW & one body. At 1635, Engr convoy returning from culvert site was attacked. B Co. escort plat and A Co. reacted. Arty, helicopters & gun ships broke ambush. All [operable] vehicles cleared by 1830. Left 1 crane & 1 dump truck. One Engr KIA & 1 WIA. 2 BC.**

An escort mission was different than out posting for a convoy.

While on an escort mission, a company or platoon had complete security responsibility during the outbound and inbound move of a unit not equipped to defend itself from an ambush.

In this case an Engineer construction unit assigned to repair a culvert had to first go to the Rock Crusher and pickup supplies and then proceed along Highway 26 to Check Point O where there was a culvert to be repaired (probably from a enemy mining). Previous diary entries have detailed towed arty howitzers being escorted to a temporary FSB.

Upon arrival at the destination, the escort unit remained and secured a perimeter around the escorted unit's work site.

It was while returning from the engineer escort mission that the ambush occurred.

[List of items that appears to be instructions to Company commanders and staff]

**Move at 0630** [probably meaning begin move out of FSB at 0630]

**Chow - 0500-0600.** [keep] **Troops moving.** **Close** [mess line at] **0600.** [Begin] **Opn 0645**

**Changes** [probably meaning on orders] **passed to CO only**

**Sumps**

**29 Aug - Quiet nite - C Co. on MSR, A Co. on MSR to CP T. B Co. RIF in local area then stand down. R escort TN-DT convoy. Neg contact. MG Williamson awarded SS to S-3 [Silver Star to Captain Cain Bridgeman.] [and] gave base camp staff pep talk. [I] Received**

**guidance [from MG Williamson] on convoy escort role.**

[List of items.]

**Special promotions**

**Claymores**

**Police & sumps**

**1 man/plt [no idea what this means]**

**Awards**

**Ambush & sniper**

**Personnel for 06-14 A C [no idea what this means]**

**Prompt at meetings**

**Malaria - Rock Crusher**

**Head space**

*From General Ellis Williamson's Vietnam Journals, (un-paginated) for 29 August 1968:*

*"Fire Support Base Rawlins III, Col. Fair, LTC Neilson: Reviewed current operations, flew key personnel around the FSB perimeter in order that they might fully appreciate the value of artillery support. CG proposed that the battalion might work out a plan whereby during a period of contact, all fires around the perimeter are ceased for 20 seconds or so, in order to confuse the enemy and possibly locate his strong points.*

*...Evening Briefing ... CG voiced his disappointment with the appearance of FSB at the Trang Bang bridge and his pleasure at the appearance of FSB Rawlins III...*

**30 Aug - Quiet nite - C Co. on MSR. A Co. stand down. B Co. on MSR to CP T. R stand down until 1200. Then escort Cu Chi - TN convoy both ways. C Co. attacked vic. North side of Big Rubber. 3 WIA. B Co. found 2 40 lb mines & 3 graves.**

[I have no knowledge about the address below]

**CMD**

**National Def Col**

**APO 96222**

[List of items]

**Chap [Chaplain] Little**

**19 A**

**11 B**

C - To E6 Prichard 11B  
To E5 Ludwig (Resupply)  
\* To E4 Summerhill

**31 Aug** - Quiet nite - B Co. & R open Rt 26. A & C Co's open Rt 22.  
Rt 22 - open 0915  
Convoy depart CC - 1015 Last elem 1110  
Lead element [of convoy] security [at] edge of Little Rubber 1125  
Lead element convoy 1145  
B Co. received 1 RPG & scattered AK fire at CP O - one man WIA  
[List of items]  
SVC Co.  
Full SOJ for C Co. - Crackerjack [do not know meaning of this]  
Shots  
Awards - Gen Long [25<sup>th</sup> ID ADC (M)]  
H & I - 81mm POL  
90 mm RR

**1 Sep** - Quiet nite. RF outpost received mortar & rocket fire. A Co. & Recon opened MSR 22, B Co. opened MSR 26. C Co. stood down. B Co. found 1 Body.  
Lead element convoy - Little Rubber 1015  
Lead element of return convoy - Little Rubber 1345

**2 Sep** - 57<sup>th</sup> Mal Labor day Quiet nite - R at Rock Crusher (RC), open road to TN, reinforce C Co. C Co. open 22. A open 26. B Co. escort Rome Plow, replace FF plat, local RIF. Large mine on FF road - 1 Arty KIA, truck destroy; 1 RPG fired at A Co. 1700.

**3 Sep** - Quiet nite - R at RC, open road to TN, reinforce C Co. C Co. open 22. B Co. open 26. A Co. Plat escort Rome Plow, 2 plat escort engr at [FSB] Buell.

Open road - 0758  
Convoy by - 0930  
Return by - 1330  
[List of items]  
Canvas repair kit  
Signs, mess tent  
Move S1/S4  
flower seeds  
children - RT 292

**4 Sep** - Quiet nite - R at RC, open road to TN, reinforce C Co. C Co.  
opened road 22. B Co. on standby 0630-1200. A Co. opened Rt. 26. No TN-DT-  
TN convoy.  
Road open - 0820  
Convoy by Little Rubber - 0900  
Convoy return - 1245.

**5 Sep** - Quiet nite - R at RC, open road to TN, reinforce C Co. C Co.  
opened Rt 22. B Co. opened Rt. 26. A Co. on standby to escort D-3/22. A & C  
Co's to switch. A & C Co's switch every 7 days  
Road open - 0810  
Convoy by Little Rubber - 1045  
Convoy return - 1245.  
DT convoy left TN - 1445  
DT convoy arrived DT - 1610 33 vehs.

**6 Sep** - Quiet nite - Recon RC & open road to TN, reinforce A Co. A Co.  
opened Rt 26. B Co. opened Rt. 26. C Co. stand down until 1100; 1 plat SD all  
day. C Co. (-) escort DT-TN-DT convoy.  
Road open - 0750  
Convoy by Little Rubber - 1020  
Convoy return - 1345.  
DT convoy return - 1450  
DT convoy close - 1620 50 vehs.

**7 Sep - Quiet nite - Recon RC, escort Arty from [ FSB] Buell [coord XT230575, on Rt 4, N of TNBC, W of Nui Ba Dinh, S of FF] to TN [logically, TNBC]; open road & reinforce A Co. A Co. opened Rt 26. C Co. stand down until 1100; 1 plat SD all day. C Co. (-) escort DT-TN-DT convoy.**

**Road open - 0745**

**Convoy up - 0930**

**Convoy - 1245.**

**DT convoy return \**

**convoy cancelled**

**DT convoy close /**

**8 Sep - Quiet nite - Recon at RC, open road to TN, stand down. A Co. open Rt 22. C Co. (-) road reinforce. B Co. open Rt 26. 1 plat C Co. escort DT convoy to CP 36, then stand down.**

**Road open - 0800**

**Convoy up - 1045**

**Convoy - 1415.**

**DT convoy left 1000 (one way only)**

**MAILED FILM**

[list of items]

**radios on line after dark**

**alcohol in field**

**Purchasing from VN**

**Checking during the nite**

**barb wire - ARVN**

**Troop safety**

**BDE Comdrs Meet - no beer in field**

[on diary pp for November 29-30 is the notation]

**8 Sep 68**

**DIV COMDR/BDE COMDR NOTES (AS A RESULT of IIFV/III CORP)**

[This is a good example of "pass down the word" from higher HQS. IIFV was the next higher US HQS above 25<sup>th</sup> ID; III Corps was the corresponding ARVN HQS.]

**1. Do not question directives.** [May have been CG 25<sup>th</sup> ID reflections on his reasons for relieving 1<sup>st</sup> BDE CO.]

**2. G2 - 3 [NVA] Div in area: 5<sup>th</sup> [with Regts] 33, 275NE, 88; 4<sup>th</sup> [with Regts] 273, 174, 271; 101<sup>st</sup> Regt; 9<sup>th</sup> Plain of Reeds [in vic of] Sgn. [NVA has taken] Heavy losses. Timetable off; pickup local forces. [NVA mission is to:] Destroy 1/3 to 1/2**

of 25<sup>th</sup> ID; all of 25<sup>th</sup> ARVN. Intends to go to TN & disrupt convoys. If he can, then in good psn to atk SGN.

3. ABN BDE being replaced by Ranger [probably refers to ARVN units.]. Combined operations [US-ARVN] whenever possible.

4. III Corps. VC infrastructure not being hit.

5. Find enemy & destroy before he hits SGN. Added emphasis on convoys. In near future, CMAC boundary to increase. Taking part of 2d BDE

TAOR. [Capitol Military Assistance Command - the US-ARVN organization focused on defense of metropolitan SGN.]

6. 3<sup>rd</sup> BDE, 82<sup>nd</sup> [Airborne Division] will move to CMAC - 14 Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup> BDE, 25<sup>th</sup> ID [formerly the principal combat headquarters at CC] will move forward to Dau Tieng. 2<sup>nd</sup> BDE, 25<sup>th</sup> ID [formerly the controlling combat headquarters at DT] move north. BN will straighten out [probably refers to realigning battalion OPCON to the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> BDE]. Will take 5 days as a minimum.

7. When 2 or more Co's are on opns, must have a BN rep on ground.

8. Lost weapons.

9. Kit Carson scouts.

10. Finding caches.

11. Combat commanders notes - dist[ribute] down to NCO level. Increased professionalism. Watch formation. Haircut, clean clothes, NCO [insignia] on collar.

\*12. No more beer in FSB.

13. Security - width & depth.

14. Maintenance.

15. Take minimum casualties.

**9 Sep** - 58<sup>th</sup> malaria. Quiet nite - R at RC, open road, reinforce A Co; A Co. open & outpost Rt 22. B Co. open & outpost rt 26 to CP 36 - 1 plat stand down, 1 plat escort 4/23 resupply, 1 plat escort engr.

Road open - 0800

Convoy up - 0930

Convoy - 1245.

D convoy left - from DT only 1030 $\pm$  - 1/5 escort

E5-E6 board in field? A Co.?

Wrecker for FF Rd

MEDCAP

**10 Sep** - Quiet nite - R at RC, open road, OPCON A Co; A Co. open Rt 22. C Co. open Rt 26. B Co. escort resupply & DT convoy, 1 plat B Co. Stand down.

Road open - 0800

Convoy up - 0930



**Convoy - 1245**

**D Convoy left 0750 - 1115.**

[list of items]

**Hats & shirts.**

**Tomahawks**

**Storage plans**

## **Gone But Always Remembered From the 4/23 KIA list**

### **SP5 Ronald Gordon Hack, A Co.**

**11 Sep -** Quiet nite (FSB Buell, French Fort, a 1/5 NDP hit by RKT, mortar, grnd attack.) R at RC, open road, OPCON A Co; A Co. open Rt 22- 2 large craters at CP 22 held up opening road until 1200. C Co. initially opened Rt 26. Then escorted engr work party to crater site and return. B Co. - 1 plat stand down, 1 plat resupply convoy, 1 plat to FF road. [B Co.] stand down plat OPCON 3/22 at 1400. B Co. (-) with 2 A Co. tracks opened FF road to CP Black. Ordered to return 1610. Attacked on way back. 2 KIA 8 WIA (one from A Co. at FF by mortar.) 9 BC by Stogy and AS.

**Road open 1200**

**Convoy up 1400**

## **Gone But Always Remembered From the 4/23 KIA list.**

### **SSGT David Oliver Painter, B Co.**

**12 Sep -** Switch A & B Co's. Quiet nite - A Co. open RT 22; crater in same place as yesterday. R at RC, open road, pickup AVLB & Engr work party, escort to crater. 1 sect outpost Big Rubber. C Co. open RT 26. B Co. (-) open FF road ( 1 plat B Co. OPCON 3/22.)

I. C Co - engaged enemy in bunkers w/ air strikes, arty, & gun ships at end of Rubber. VC hit DT convoy as it passed. C Co. broke contact at 1700. 2 BC.

II. B Co. - opened road to FF. Stodgy got 1 BC & 1 poss[ible].

III. A Co. & R - Romeo moved into ambush site at Big Rubber; broke VC attack. A Co. moved to reinforce. Sprung convoy. Cleared Rubber. 14 BC, 9 wpn. R had 1 K, 2 W (Lt. McCollough)

Convoy ran north to TN only, 1/3 convoy ran DT-TN.

*From the 12 September 1968 New York Times, p. 1,3: "TAY NINH REPELS BIG ENEMY FORCE 2d Drive in Month on City of 200,000 Is Hurled Back. Allied forces turned back a major enemy assault on Tay Ninh City and nearby American installations today but the enemy was holding on in several suburbs trying to increase his foothold. ...one North Vietnamese prisoner said this morning that three regiments had been sent into the area and told to capture and hold Tay Ninh for three days...."*

**Gone But Always Remembered**  
**From the 4/23 KIA list**  
**PFC Leonard Joseph Liparoto, HHQ Co.**

**13 Sep - Quiet nite (Buell attacked) - A Co. secure FSB Hull, open Rt 22 to CP 04; B Co. escort resupply to CP 31, pick up Engr & take down to craters vic [CP] 03 & 04, outpost; C Co. open Rt 26. R at RC; open road to TN, escort Engr vehs back & forth to RC. A (-) & B Cos, & R - neg. contact. (Convoy rolled south only.) Engr work accomplished. C Co. contact vic. CP 36 - AS, arty & gun ship. 1 KIA, 3 WIA - 12 BC, 10 wpns. A Co. plat - ambushed XT285655 5 K south of FF - 2 KIA (LT Elbert, 1 medic; 2 LRP. 1 Engr Marino), 9 WIA, Brought plt back to FF. Arty, gun ships & AS. Lost 1 APC. 88<sup>th</sup> NVA [Regiment, identity of the attacking force.]**

**Sgt E-5 Hopkins, Robert L US 53702443**

**SP E-4 Noonan**

**PFC E-3 Young, Barney**

**PFC E-3 Wallert, Harvey**

[No notation as to significance of these four names.]

*The entry above "Brought plt back to FF" pales to insignificance concerning the circumstances surrounding it. I was in my C & C chopper with the Arty LNO, Captain Ken Koy, and the BCSM, John Wise over Charlie Company. There was heavy contact at CP 36 and I was coordinating fire support for them when I got the call about the ambush, probably from Captain Montgomery, Alpha Co. Comdr. I do not know how he knew about it because the ambushed platoon had no reliably operating radio and A Co. was many miles away. I transferred fire support coordination responsibilities to Col. Fair, 1<sup>st</sup> BDE Co who was in his chopper in the vicinity and had my pilot fly the chopper to the ambush site.*

*When I arrived I saw 3 APCs on the road with troops milling about and someone waving at the*

*chopper pointing at his PRC-25 radio. It turned about to be the Platoon Sergeant who I later discovered had 20 months in the Army and 8 in RVN. I finally contacted him on the company net and through very broken transmissions, he told me that his was the only operable radio in the platoon, the platoon leader had been killed, there were several wounded on the APC with him, and a wounded trooper with a fourth APC disabled at the ambush site further north toward FF.*

*I had the chopper land next to the road with the intention of giving the platoon sergeant the ARTY LNO's PRC-25 so that he could have radio contact with me as he led the platoon back to FF. I gave him the radio and instructions to take the platoon back up the road, stop at the ambush site and recover the wounded trooper, and then continue to the "French Fort". It became obvious to me that such a mission was too much to lay on the shoulders of a well meaning but inexperienced NCO when so many lives were at stake. I quickly decided I could not abandon the platoon in such a precarious position and that I would lead them back to FF.*

*I had the platoon mount up with every weapon on top of the APC loaded and ready to fire. The .50 cal machine gun on APC 1 covered to the front; APC 2 covered to the left; and APC 3 to the right. An M60 machine gunner covered to the rear from APC 3. Everyone else lay down on top and arranged themselves to fire alternately left or right.*

*In the meantime, the ARTY LNO arranged for artillery to cover both sides of the road and began the fire missions before we were ready to leave. A USAF TAC showed up and started scrambling Air Force fighter-bombers.*

*We moved up the road at top speed, not knowing the exact ambush site location. We "hosed down" both sides of the road until we got to the inoperable APC. We stopped, everyone hit the ground, stripped it of radios, weapons, and ammunition and looked for the wounded trooper. We could not find him and presumed the NVA had captured him.*

*We reloaded and continued to FF. Fighter bombers laid napalm down on either side of the road and as soon as they finished the artillery started again. We pulled into FF without a scratch, got off the APC, and the NVA started mortaring the Fire Base. Several troopers were wounded.*

*I got back in my chopper and returned to the Charlie Co. action.*

*In my 6 months of command, this is as close as I ever got to engaging in combat at the "grunt" level.*

*As we roared up the road firing wildly I do not recall that anyone shot back!*

#### **AFTERMATH:**

*The wounded man had been rescued by some nearby villagers in the field but he died; we recovered his body the next day from them at the same time we fixed the disabled APC.*

*COL Fair found out what I had done and really chewed me out for using bad judgment since I was a Battalion Commander not a Platoon Leader. Then he assured me that he would have done*

*the same thing.*

*I received my second Silver Star.*

*My real reward came when the platoon sergeant came up to me in the chow line several days later with tears in his eyes and thanked me.*

*"All in a day's work in Tay Ninh Province."  
Cliff*

**Gone But Always Remembered From the 4/23 KIA list**  
**SGT Edward Kenneth Ryan, C Co.**  
**LT Joe A Elbert, A Co.**  
**SP4 Kenneth George Cushman, A Co.**

**14 Sep - Special prom**

**1 E6 1**

**10 E5 111**

**5 E4 11**

**Quiet nite - A Co. (-) opened Rt 22. R at RC, reinforce A Co. (Lt. Bennett Plt Ldr). B & C Co's open Rt 26. B Co. in contact 1200 hrs vic CP 25. Arty, air, gun ships, until 1820. 1 KIA, 5 WIA B Co. 1 WIA C Co. 2 AK-47 A - 5 NVA graves BC damaged 1 APC.**

**Cu Chi-TN-Cu Chi convoy ran both ways  
DT-TN convoy one way to TN  
SP-4 Hust, Brent B Co. BS "V"  
SP-4 Ferguson, Daniel B Co. BS "V"**

**Gone But Always Remembered**  
**From the 4/23 KIA list**  
**SP4 Robert Paul Walsh, A Co**

**15 Sep** Exit interview - today, tomorrow, or next [I have no idea to what this refers.] Unquiet nite - Sporadic mortar & RPG (?) fire until silenced about 2400 by arty. 3 WIA. A Co. & R open & outpost RT 22; B Co. & C Co. (-) open & outpost Rt 26. 1 plat C Co. accompany resupply. RF Co. 164 w/ B Co.

**Convoy up 1030 Down 1530**  
**DT convoy to DT only - 1530**

**Weapons count - 3 AK47, 1 RPD, 3 RPG-2, 1 RPG-7, 15 RPG rds, 15 grenades. 9 BC.** [Something must be missing from the entry above which would account for the weapons and bodies.]

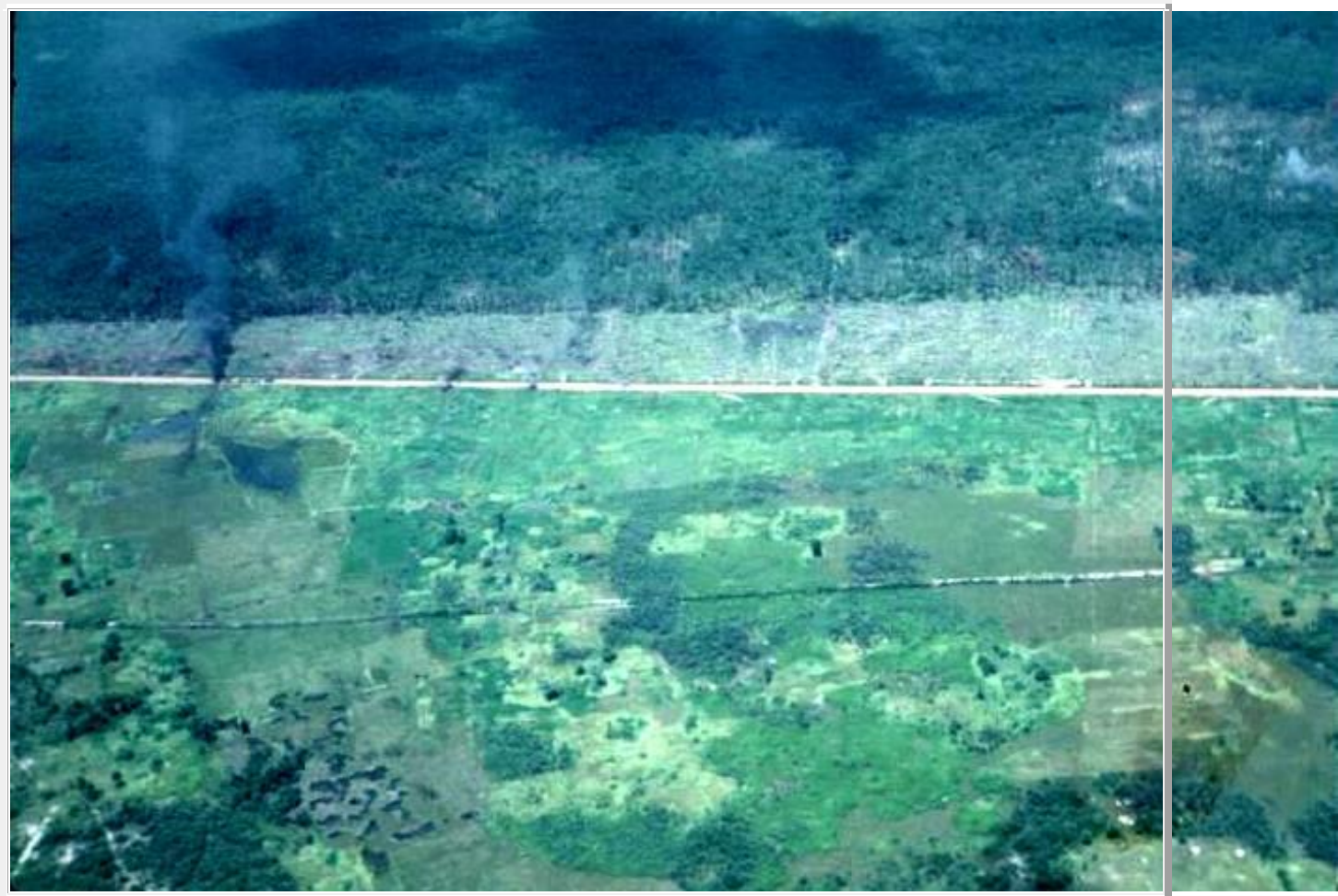
**16 Sep - 59<sup>th</sup> malaria.** Unquiet nite - 6 mortar rds at 0200 - no cas. A Co. & Recon - open Rt 22. B Co. (-) & C Co. (-) open Rt 26. 1 plat B Co. stand down. 1 plat C Co. escort resupply.

**Road open 0810**  
**Convoy up - 0945**  
**Convoy down - 1400**

*[Then all hell broke loose on Rt 26 when the 4/23 suffered the most KIA in one day while I was its commander.]*

**DT to TN convoy hit vic CP 36 (coord XT354441) at 1230. Gun ships, arty (956 rds), AS, CS [incapacitating tear gas] [incapacitating tear gas. 2 APC destroyed, 1 APC damaged; 1 ST tractor truck destroyed. Several vehicles dam. 7 KIA, 6 WIA, no body count. Letter to ML & Dad**

**Letter to ML & Dad**













**Gone But Always Remembered From the 4/23 KIA list**

**Lieutenant Alfred Vincent Schofield, C Co.**

**SP4 Anthony Robert Signa, C Co.**

**SGT Dale Arthur Morrow, C Co.**

**SGT Donald Eugene Glime, C Co.**

**PFC James Ray Miller, C Co.**

**SGT Joseph Raymond Brown, C Co.**

**PFC Ralph Warren Kuchinski, C Co.**

*(From a message sent to me in 2004; My Apology to the author as I neglected to note the name. )  
"I knew James Miller, we called him Red. We were both in the third platoon, Charlie Company.  
He was KIA on September 16th 1968 when our platoon was ambushed on Route 26. We had 7  
KIA and 8 WIA (myself included) that day. Started the day with 22 men and 3 APC's, two APC's  
were completely destroyed by satchel charges and the third got hit with a RPG. Red was a good  
guy and is remembered fondly by the other guys that I have been in contact with from the third  
platoon."*

**17 Sep - Quiet nite - Admiral McCain** [CINCPAC. At the time of his visit, his son, COMDR John McCain, USN (now Senator McCain) was a POW in Hanoi.], **LTG Kerwin** Deputy COUSMACV], **assorted VIPs visited. Adm presented decorations, received trophy** [AK 47 mounted on a plank with the 4/23 crest]

**observed arty & flame thrower demonstration.  
Departed pleased**

**B & C Co's, 3/22 opened Rt 26.**

**A Co. & R - open Rt 22. B Co. (-) & C Co. (-),  
1 plat C stand down.**

**B plat escort.**

**B Co. rec'd mortar fire vic blown culvert CP 25.. B-3/22 on north side ran into enemy in bunkers. Called in arty, gun ships, air strikes, CS. Broke contact. Pulled out 1630. 3 KIA, 10 wounded - 3/22, 12 WIA - B Co.**

**Cu Chi-Tay Ninh convoy ran okay**

**No DT convoy**

Letter from ML



*[During the Admiral's visit, FSB Rawlins was mortared . The Admiral, his aide, and I went in a bunker. Making small talk, the admiral asked me where I was going when I left RVN. I told him I had no orders yet but that I had requested Hawaii. He turned to his aide and said something to the effect "Make sure that happens." The aide did as he was told and on 31 December 1968, my family and I arrived in Hawaii for our next tour.*

*The Admiral heard I was aboard, invited my family and I to meet with him in his office. He showed my three kids the AK47 the 4/23 had given him which was hanging on his wall and then surprised us all by presenting me with the Silver Star awarded because of the ambush on 17 Sep discussed above.*

*While in Hawaii, my wife and I attended several cocktail parties at which he was present. When he noticed us he would called us over and told the crowd around him about being mortared at FSB Rawlins. Since he was a highly decorated submariner from WWII, I figured he wanted me there as backup so his Navy buddies wouldn't think he was telling a sea story.]*



# TROPIC LIGHTNING NEWS



Ready To Strike.... Anywhere, Anytime

23 September 1968



**VIP VISIT** - Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., Commander in Chief, Pacific, (left) talks with Major General Ellis W. Williamson, 25th Infantry Division Commander, (center) and Lieutenant General Walter T. Kerwin, Jr., Commanding General, II Field Force, (right) at Fire Support Base Rawlins during the Admiral's recent visit. **(PHOTO BY MAJ. A.J. SULLIVAN)**

**18 Sep - Quiet nite - A Co. & Recon open Rt 22 to CP 22 (not resp. for Little Rubber). Convoy ok in both directions. B & C Co's open Rt 26 with OPCON A & B Co's 3/22. Neg contact. 1 of 2 culverts repaired. DT convoy ran. Closed 1830. Mailed film**

*From the Tropic Lightning: "Fire Support Base ST. BARBARA at BAU CO XT275685), 17 kilometers north of TAY NINH City"*

*"The enemy's threat to ST. BARBARA continued on 17 September as the base was hit by two separate mortar attacks (1851 and 2050 hours) which resulted in 15 men being wounded. On 18 September the fire base was struck by three separate attacks by fire at 0810, 1520 and 1612 hours which wounded 16 personnel within the base. These attacks by fire on the base continued for several more days but were gradually eliminated as the 4th Battalion, 23d Infantry (M) moved to BAU CO to conduct extensive sweep operations in the area and drive off the harassing enemy elements."*



**19 Sep - Quiet nite - A Co. & Recon open Rt 22 to CP 22. Convoy okay in both directions. B & C Co's open Rt 26 with OPCON B Co. 3/22. Neg contact. Culverts repaired 1030-1615. No convoy. Closed 1730.**

Rec'd pkg from Pop  
Ltr to ML & Pop

**20 Sep - Quiet nite - A Co. & Recon open Rt 22 to CP 22. Convoy okay in both directions. B Co. & C Co. (-) open Rt 26. C Co. hit 1200. Arty, gun ships, AS, 81 mm. B-3/22 hit by small arms only. One arty short rd killed 1, wounded 3 from B-3/22. Results - 28 BC, 2 POW, 19 weapons, 1 APC destroyed from C Co.**

Culvert repairs completed.

No convoy.

Letter from ML. To ML

B & A Co's switched 1700 (15 days). B Co. secured down chopper on way in.  
POW from 174 Regt.

*From the Division commander's Journal, 20 Sep 68:*

*"CG states that the action involving the 4/23 on the Dau Tieng MSR appears to have been conducted in a good manner."*

**21 Sep - 1<sup>st</sup> day for B Co. on Rt22. Quiet nite - B Co. & Recon open Rt 22 to CP 22. Convoy ran in both directions. A Co. (-) & C Co. (-) open Rt 26. C-3/22 came out in trucks. Convoy ran in both directions. FSB [probably Rawlins] received 7 rds 82 mm mortar.**

Rich\_\_\_\_\_, AP correspondent [visited and interviewed troops]

DT-TN convoy by CP 36 - 1315

TN-DT convoy by CP 35 - 1630

**22 Sep - Quiet nite - B Co. & R open Rt 22. Convoy up and down with no problem. A Co.(-) and C Co. open road to French Fort. C Co. hit at base of mountain 1200. Arty, AS, gun ships, CS, re-entered contact area 1600. Found 2 BC , 1 AK47, trench line, spider holes, bunkers. Leaving area at 1630 hit by RPG, 122 mm mortar. Capt Phillips KIA. 9 WIA. Lt Hockett died of wounds.**

*Carl Berning, on 22 May 2004, provided this platoon leader's eyewitness description of the day's action:*

*On the day Capt. Phillips was killed my memory tells me that we (Charlie Co) were reinforced by LT Belzik's platoon from Bravo. When we got into the mess, our column stopped. As we were heading South, Belzik's platoon was in the lead and my Charlie, 2nd platoon was the last of the column. From what I learned right there, Belzik's driver or TC's on his then lead tracks saw one or two RPG teams crossing the road from the West to the East and started setting up in the short undergrowth along side of the road. As they didn't want to drive through them, Belzik sent a squad or two, I think still mounted, off the road to the West to see if they could find a way to lead the column off the road and toward the bananas.*

*Seems like straight down the road the bananas would have been 600 to 800 meters, if that far. As I could see it and hear it, Capt Phillips had dismounted with his RTO's on the West side of his track and was 5 to 10 meters West of the road trying to raise Belzik on the radio and see what was holding us up.*

*The first mortar or two came in and wounded Capt Phillips in the leg, I was looking right at the explosion sites and could see the next two 82 mm's in the air as they came down in the same spot. At least one of these was a direct hit on Capt Phillips.*

*A couple of minutes later the two medics came to me running, both were slightly wounded. They said Capt Phillips was gone. I didn't understand and asked them what they meant and they repeated it . They said they knew he was wounded and were headed the few meters back to the track to get help when the other rounds hit and they couldn't find him after that.*

*Later we thought that the explosions had blown his body into a B52 crater and it sank. I think I am repeating myself here. Anyway, as far as I know, Capt Phillips was the only KIA that day. I had my driver Silvers, from Atlanta, hurt pretty bad, and the two guys lying on top of the track with me both got slight shrapnel or ricochet wounds.*

*Also want to add, that the day we went back into the fray after losing Capt Phillips, the pucker factor was as high as anytime I could remember. Our line of departure was the bananas and we were on the West side of the road. We were going to sweep back through at least as far as we were when we got hit, and see if we could recover Capt Phillips. I think, and I could be wrong, that the*

*2nd Platoon was a full nine members strong on the ground. That included me, the medic, RTO and the Platoon Sgt.*

*We didn't have the personnel to cover the area from the road to the berm which was about 75 to 100 meters off the road. This berm was made from Rome Plows clearing the area for fields of fire and it left Charles a wonderful place to ambush us from. Which is exactly what he did and just the other side of it was where we found him and his spider holes.*

*I remember the guy on our far left flank as we were headed back in going North, an AK started firing about 5 meters to his left from the berm. Evidently the NVA had just held the gun up and fired it over the berm. The rounds came down the line right in front of us and didn't hit any of us. The left flank guy was so startled he dropped his 16 and started scrambling back and toward the road on his hands, knees, and feet. He looked like a spider flying across the ground. We were in the open with only a few scrub bushes and Charles was behind the berm. We shot the hell out of the berm and probably not much else. We were too close to back off and call in anything. Fortunately, Charles left the area and we looked around and went to the house.*

#### ***My remembrances:***

*I was flying over the area when the attack occurred. When I could no longer reach Captain Phillips on the radio, I landed on the road and temporarily took command of C Co. We could not find Captain Phillips' remains and as it was getting dark and we were in a dangerous situation, I decided to load up and hauled ass out of the area. We went through the banana plantation with everyone firing in all directions.*

*cn*

#### ***In a message received 26 January 2004, Don Starnes, former 4/23 Executive Officer observed:***

*"...Hank (Phillips) was a member of the USA pistol team prior to coming to the 4/23. His combat record was brief but outstanding. He was killed on TL 4 on the west side of Nui Ba Dinh shortly after the convoy ambush. Col Wolf [1<sup>st</sup> Bde CO] ... recommend Hank for the DSC [Distinguished Service Cross]. A pistol range at Ft. Benning was named in Hank's honor. In my mind the ambush was caused by the desire of truckers and others to operate on a fixed schedule and an 8 hour work day..."*

### **Gone But Always Remembered From the 4/23 KIA list**

**Captain Henry Richardson Phillips, C Co.  
Lieutenant James Raymond Hockett, C Co.**

**23 Sep - 60<sup>th</sup> malaria.** [Field strength] 455 [This is the first notation about field strength since 30 July. The strength is about 30 men less the lowest previously noted. I do not know why field strength ceased to be of sufficient concern to me that I went nearly 7 weeks without recording. ] **Quiet nite - B Co. & Recon open Rt 22 (OPCON to BDE). Convoy ran okay in both directions. A Co.(-) & C Co. open Rt 26. Road open 1300. Convoy by at 1430 (DT->TN)no return convoy. Closed 1630. Capt Lincoln assumed command [of C Co.]**

**Letter from & to ML.**

**24 Sep - [Field strength] 450 Quiet nite - B Co. & R open Rt 22. Road open 0730. Convoy okay in both directions. A Co.(-) & CRIP [Combined Reconnaissance & Intelligence Platoon. This is the first time the diary entries contain notice of this newly-created organization.] - open Rt 13 to Phuoc Hoa (Sioi Da) escort engr. C Co. (+ 1 plat B Co.) Open Rt 22 to Rubber factory. Road open 1235 - TN-DT convoy by at 1430. Road open 1300. Convoy by at 1430 (DT->TN) no return convoy. Closed 1630.**

**25 Sep - [field strength] 469 Quiet nite - B Co. (-) & R opened RT22- Convoy okay in both directions. C Co.(-1 plat stand down) secured FSB Logan, occupied for nite. A Co. (-) & 164 RF Co. opened RT 22 - open 1030 - convoy 1330. B Troop, 3/4 OPCON 1300 - one plat escort convoy to Logan & Rawlins. C Co.-3/187 [ABN INF Regt] (CPT Bond)-OPCON 1400- Secure FSB Rawlins. A Co. 2/27 (Capt Mulligan) OPCON 1400. Secure FSB Logan. Letter from ML.**

**Open Thunder Road** [No explanation found in diary as to a mission with the codeword THUNDER ROAD. From the diary context, this was a concerted effort to open the road to FF.]

**26 Sep - [field strength] 457 Quiet nite - B Co. & R opened RT22- Convoy up & down okay. B Co. (-) closed [returned to] FSB Rawlins.**

## **OPN THUNDER ROAD**

**C Co. 4/23 & 1 plat B Trp. -3/4. Open road from FSB Bragg to FF (open by 1105). Out posted road. Occupied NDP. Liberated 3 Plat, A Co. from**

**FF. [facetious remark about returning the platoon to company control.]**

**A Co. 4/23 & 1 plat B 4/23. Moved to old [FSB] Bliss. Started at 1530 to open Front [?] road. Stopped at 1630. Occupied FSB Bragg.**

**B Troop, 3/4 (- 1 plat). Escorted bulldozers to FSB Bliss & FF. Had 1 M48A3 hit 2 mines, 1 WIA. Closed Tay Ninh [probably TNBC] with all elements.**

**C Co.-3/187. Local RIF, defend FSB Rawlins.**

**A Co. 2/27. Improve defense FSB Bragg.**

**HQ 14 hit mine & destroyed (5 WIA). Engr tractor trailer hit mine & damaged (1 WIA).**

**4 NVA Chu Hoi**

**No mail.**

**27 Sep - [field strength] 464 Quiet nite - B Co. & R opened RT 22- Convoy both ways okay. B Co. escort dump trucks to blown culvert site. Closed in Rawlins with all platoons 1930. Sgt [R] at RC.**

## **OPN THUNDER ROAD - 2d day**

**C Co. 4/23 & 1 plat B Trp. -3/4. Open & out posted from RJ [probably a reference to the intersection of RT 4 & RT 243] to FF (open by 1200)**

**Recovered remains believed to be CPT Phillips. Closed NDP. Lost OPCON B Co. plat.**

**A Co. 4/23. Open & out post road to RJ. Received lost plat. Closed FSB Bragg.**

**B Troop, 3/4 (-1 plat). Escorted engineer columns. Had AVLB hit mine (1 WIA slight). Blew tank in place. Left 1 plat OPCON to 3/22 at FSB Bliss.**

**C Co. - 3/187. Open & out post RT 26 - 35 to 35 E**

**A Co. - 2/27. Improve defense FSB Bragg**

**No mail.**

**28 Sep - [field strength] 466 Quiet nite - B Co. open RT 22- Convoy up only - late, including Rome Plows. Closed Rawlins.**

**Sgt [R] escort engineer vehs on RT 26.**

**A Co. 4/23. Open route 243 to RJ Green. Found 5 mines.**

C Co.4/23. Open route 4 from RJ Green to FF. Lost 1 APC to mine. 4 WIA.  
B Troop, 3/4. Escort engineer column to & from FF. One tank destroyed by mine. One engr dump truck destroyed by mine.  
A Co. 2/27. Improve defense FSB Bragg.  
C Co.-3/187. Open RT26 to 35 E.  
3 letters Mary Lou - 1 to her  
ammo back in boxes.

**29 Sep** - 1<sup>st</sup> day on RT 22 for C Co. [field strength] 470 Quiet nite - C Co.  
4/23 open RT 22- Convoy down only. Rome Plow up by MP. Closed TNBC.  
Scout [R] stand down.  
B Co. 4/23 & C Co.-3/187. Open and outpost RT 26 - convoy to and from DT.  
Secured VTR. [Vehicle Track Retriever]  
A Co.4/23 & 1 plat, B Trp, 3/4. Open RT 243 and 4 to FF. Found no mines. 1  
dump truck (1 WIA) hit mine. Escorted ammo resupply late.  
B Trp-3/4 (-). Escorted convoy. 1 plat at Bliss, 1 plat at Bragg.  
A Co. 2/27. Improve defense FSB Bragg.  
Ambush nite with whole company.  
No mail.

**30 Sep** - 61 malaria. [field strength] 476 Quiet nite - C Co. 4/23 & Sct open  
RT 22- (2 plat C Co. stand down.) Convoy up & down.  
A Co. 4/23 & 1 plat B Trp. -3/4. Open FF routes. Found 4 mines. 1 DT [dump  
truck] hit mine (1 WIA).  
B Co. 4/23 & C Co. -3/187 & A Co. - 2/27. Open RT 26.  
A Co. 2/27. Returned night ambush.  
B Trp-3/4 (-). Escort convoy.

[I] Left field 1300. - Rec'd SS & DFC [probably from 1<sup>st</sup> BDE CO at TNBC] -  
went to SGN on chopper - met by rep. of Sang Woo tailor - stayed at  
Embassy Hotel -had supper w/ Sy Fong & group of officers.

[Thus began my 5 day R & R to Hong Kong. The Saigon arrangements had  
been made by the 25<sup>th</sup> ID CSM whose name I forget. He was later involved in  
a great scandal involving rake-offs from clubs. In retrospect, I was being  
steered to a business man in Hong Kong who no doubt made it worth his



while. I was young and innocent then and more trusting of senior NCOs than I should have been.]

**2 - 5 Oct - R & R** (All my entries for these days, discuss expenditures for tailored clothes and uniforms for myself, gifts for Mary Lou and the children, and housing and eating. On the final page it shows I spent \$675.)

The following remembrances of what occurred while I was on R & R were supplied in October 2004 by Don Starnes, who at the time was the Battalion Executive Officer and in-charge during my absence:

*"During the week, we ran a convoy around the east side of Nui Ba Den from Soui Da (FSB Bragg I or II) to Katum (FSB Barbara, Old French Fort). The vehicles were mostly supply and dump trucks. However, an M-88 Vehicle Track Retriever (VTR) was included.*

*As the convoy was driving around the mountain, a dump truck detonated a mine, killing the passenger and severely wounding the driver. The VTR operator, on his own, pulled out of the convoy and attempted to approach the dump truck. The ground was very spongy and wet. As a result, grass, dirt, and brush became entwined in the tracks and drive sprockets. Between the truck and the VTR, the convoy was halted.*

*I landed the OH-6A (Loach) and began to attempt to clear the road way and get the VTR back on the road. Of course, I began to receive call after call from BDE demanding that I get the convoy moving again. The dump truck was loaded with laterite and was very heavy. The VTR could only move a few feet until the tracks were filled with debris. The stuff was so thick that the track was raised several inches away from the drive sprockets. You had to clear the stuff to move the vehicle or lose a track and that was something horrible to contemplate.*

*Of course having hit a mine and there being a likelihood of others being planted in the area, COL Fair only flew over the site giving orders. As a consequence I didn't have to contend with his presence on the ground.*

*At one point, he ordered a second VTR to be dispatched to the area. I asked that he delay that order as I did not need a second vehicle stuck. He insisted. Fortunately, MAJ Cain Bridgeman, S-3, used a land line to cause the VTR to be delayed until I got the first one on the road. After several hours, the VTR moved ahead of the damaged truck, hooked up and moved north.*

*While all of this was going on, BDE was demanding to know the exact size of the mine and the extent of the damage. I was at a loss as to the size, etc. A soldier sitting on a track, said, "Tell*

*them it was a ten pound mine and left a three by four crater." I did and they were happy.*

*A second event happened when I received a call from BDE to report to COL Fair at once. I flew into TNBC and walked to BDE HQ where COL Fair was waiting for me. He ordered me into his jeep and we sped off to the 25<sup>th</sup> ID Direct Support (DS) Company that supported the 4th (M)-23rd. On the way he accused me of not keeping our tracks running as there were parts and engines available and we were not drawing parts, etc.*

*When we got to the DS company, he demanding that our PLL clerk come across the street and check his due out list. He did and it was for the second time that day. The 1LT commanding the DS Company admitted that he did not have any engines available but thought perhaps some might become available in the salvage yards. In other words the LT had tried to impress COL Fair with BS.*

*COL Fair got so mad that he jumped into his jeep and left me standing. I walked across the street and got a ride back to the pad and went back to work.*

*(As a footnote, in 1970-71, I was assigned as the Chief, Operations Center, USARV. One day I saw then BG Fair walking toward me. As I tried to duck into an office, he followed and you would have thought we were blood brothers. He began telling all who would listen about our daring dos in the 25<sup>th</sup> ID. He was assigned as the guy in-charge of automated information and was on a junket to learn about our needs for information)*

*That entire week was made very easy for me through the efforts of MAJ Cain Bridgeman, CPT Houston (S-2) and BCSM Wise. They took the load off of me and tried to anticipate missions, troop requirements, etc. They would present the BDE requirements along with their recommendations. They would answer my questions clearly and distinctly. As a result, orders were issued and the companies complied.*

*One last thought. I remember that you were impressed with the BCSM's ability to plan and arrange your R&R."*

*Don Starnes*

**6 Oct - [field strength] 520. Return to Saigon 0900 - caught chopper to Div & then to Tay Ninh, then to Rawlins. Arrived 1900.**

**Final Results - Opn Thunder Road (25 Sep-3 Oct)**

**1. Vehicles destroyed**

**2 - M48A3 Tanks**

**3 - M113A1 APC**

**3 - 5 ton Dump Trucks**

**2. Vehicles damaged**

**1 - AVLB**

**1 - 5 ton Dump truck**

**1 - M113A1**

**3. Personnel**

**2 - KHA (1 from 4/23; 1 Engr)**

**9 - WIA (8 from 4/23; 1 Engr)**

**7 Oct** [field strength] **485. 62 malaria, 10 APC DL** [probably meaning dead lined, e. g., inoperable. This is the first of many such entries about dead lined APC's. Funny, when combat was intense and APCs were destroyed with great regularity, higher headquarters was not concerned about DL. Let the action die down and we're back to Regular Army - dead lined vehicles, haircuts, and inspections.] **Quiet nite - B Co. stood down - 1<sup>st</sup> day.**

**A & C Cos - open road to Dau Tieng.**

**Scout - escort battery to Hull, secure & return. Also artillery convoy & DT convoy.**

**2 plt AP**

**No mail. Mailed films. Wrote ML.**

**Visit by MAJ Redden, LT Reid, & CAPT ?**

**8 Oct -** [field strength] **487. 10 APC DL. Quiet nite - Sct plt escort DT-TN convoy one way.**

**A & C Cos - open Rt 26.**

**B Co. moved to TN. B Co. - stand down, move to Rawlins.**

**2 letters ML, 1 letter Vic**

**2 plt AP**

[notes at bottom of page]

**Motor stables**

**Delegation of auth to sign 02**

**Supervise Maint**  
**Maint of weapons in arms room**

**From the 25<sup>th</sup> ID CG Journal, 8 may 1968:**

*"...Colonel Fair [1<sup>st</sup> BDe CO] stated he is concerned about the level of maintenance in the 4/23 Mech...."*

**9 Oct -** [field strength 495. 14 APC DL. Quiet nite. Sct plt escort TN-DT convoy w/ 1 sect; open Rt 22 to CP 23 with one section.

A Co. - open Rt 26 w/2 plats & 164 RF Co.

B Co. - Road runner\* to Soui da & then join A Co.

C Co. - Stand down - 1<sup>st</sup> day.

2 plt AP

No mail

[notes at bottom of page]

Unauth head gear

Clean numbers on tracks

**\*I do not remember the meaning of the term "Road Runner."**

**I queried the 4/23 message board in October 2004 and got the following replies:**

*"From the Glossary of Mounted Combat in Viet Nam by Donn Starry: Normally an operation with a group of vehicles that travel a road for the purpose of keeping the enemy off balance and making the presence of friendly forces felt among the local populace."*

**From Doug Conn:**

*"We used the term "Running the road" or "Road Running" when we didn't have time to do a thorough sweep and had to use the road anyway.*

*Many times we would "run" Rt 26 to secure the convoy.*

*It was a hard decision to make when I had to pick who was lead track that day."*

**From Rick Lewis:**

*"Having never heard "Road Runner" before but judging from the term, I would have to agree with the others that "Road Running" was probably actually traveling within the convoy instead of our normal practice of sweeping the road and then setting up static security for the convoy as it came through.*

*If the term refers to running the road without first sweeping for landmines, then we made just such a "run" from Rawlins to DT around midnight one night to help secure a downed*

*helicopter.*

*NOW, That was one scary ride!! Any of you that missed out on a full-speed, "Balls-to-the wall" blacked out, run down the highway at night, you missed a mighty fun experience. The "pucker factor" is really elevated at night. The tracks, throw sparks all the time, but they are real visible at night. The first thing that goes through your mind is that someone has hit a landmine. Add choking dust into all of this and you have a real "barrel of fun night" on your hands. I don't think I breathed from the time we hit RT 26 until we cleared the rubber at DT."*

**From Donny M:**

*"I hated the days we had to be lead track to sweep Rt 26.*

*I was sent to TNBC mine sweeping school after arriving; but we never used a mine sweep method because we did not have time to actually sweep Rt 26.*

*Just run it.*

*First thing was to make sure to over-ride the governor on the track engine so you could go wide open. Second thing was make sure the soda girls were waiting for you. (great intel.)"*

**Quotes from 1966-67 After-Action Reports furnished by Jim Yarborough:  
route-domination operations using all-arms teams ('Road Runner')**

**10 Oct - [field strength] 488. 10 APC. Quiet nite. Sct plt open Rt 22 to CP 23 & escort DT-TN-DT convoy.**

**A Co. - open Rt 26 then return to TNBC**

**B Co. - Road runner to Mo Co, local RIF**

**C Co. - Stand down, move to Rawlins**

**2 plt AP**

**1 letter ML**

[notes at bottom of page]

**B & C Co less Berning**

**Military courtesy**

**Loaded weapons**

**Mess, clutter, dirty areas - top of tracks**

**Claymores out**

**Inside track**

**Shirts not on**

**Police of chopper supply pad**

**Penepime**

**Officers Call**

**11 Oct** - [field strength] **482. 10 APC Quiet nite. Sct plt open Rt 22 to CP 23 (Departed 0700-arrived 0800). Escort arty from Buell to Logan then DT-TN-DT convoy both ways.**

**A Co. - stood down - 1<sup>st</sup> day.**

**B Co. - open Rt 26.**

**C Co. -road runner to Loc Ninh with RF Co.**

**2 plt AP**

**No mail**

[notes at bottom of page]

**Ammo storage area**

**Reporting**

**police - chopper pad**

**A11 - no E Co D?**

**A51 - ?**

**C43 - no 461-5 from Maint**

**HQ 84 - no job order - switch w/ HQ 10**

**A13 - release signal should have been WO**

**12 Oct** - [field strength] **505. 10 APC Quiet nite. Sct plt open Rt 22 to CP 23 (Departed 0700-arrived 0800). Escort DT-TN-DT convoy both ways.**

**C Co. -Open Rt 26 w/ RF.**

**B Co. - RIF in north Rubber w/ RF164**

**A Co. - stand down - 2nd day.**

**2015 - Rec'd mission to escort 155 btry to TNBC. C Co. given mission.**

**Returned by 2400.**

**No mail**

**6 - 1/4 ton trls in G4 yard for TI [technical inspection]**

**Pre AGI [Annual General Inspection]-CMMI [A pre-inspection was a courtesy-type look at the battalion's equipment to give the commanders an idea of what maintenance areas needed to be emphasized prior to the real inspection.] -**

**Passed weapons, commo, and special purpose equipment.**

**Failed automotive and shop procedures.**



**13 Oct** - [field strength] 490. 10 APC. Quiet nite. Sct plt open Rt 22 to CP 23 (departed 0700-arrived 08050. Escort DT-TN-DT convoy.

**C Co. Open Rt 26 w/RF**

**B Co. RIF mtd north of base camp. Returned to base camp at 1600.**

**A Co. Stand down 3d day - arrived Rawlins 1600**

**2 AP's**

**Rec'd letter ML & Shirley - wrote ML 7 Pop**

**14 Oct** - [field strength] 470. 63 malaria. 9 APC + 8 tracks. Quiet nite. Sct plt open Rt 22 7 escort TN-DT-TN convoy.

**C Co. W/ 163 RF Co. - mtd/dismtd RIF north of Rubber - one old BC.**

**A Co. - open Rt 26 w/ RF Co.**

**B Co. - stand down 1<sup>st</sup> day**

**2 Ap's**

[list of items at bottom of page]

**Foot Recon - Topping off** [These were probably two separate items placed side-by-side.]

**Tracking of vehs**

**SP4 Hayes, Homer RA 14912798 SVC Co (S4)**

**15 Oct** - [field strength] 459. 10 APC (+ 6 tracks).

**Quiet nite except 105 fired 1100 rds,**

**155 - 500 rds.**

**Scts open Rt 22 & escort DT-TN-DT convoy.**

**C Co. open Rt 26 w/ 164 Co.**

**A Co. OPCON 1½7**

**B Co. stand down 2d day**

**2 AP's**

**Rec'd 2 letters ML - wrote ML**



**FSB Rawlins III 1968**  
**LTC Cliff Neilson (l) presenting trophy to LTC Forrest Pierce (r) CO 7-11 Arty,**  
**for "Superior Combat Support"**



FSB Rawlins III Oct 1968  
 LTC Forest Pierce (l) LTC Cliff Neilson (r)  
 Commander's trophy presentation for Superior Combat Support

**16 Oct** - [field strength] 461. (10 APC & 6 TRACK). Quiet nite. Scts escort 2 btrys arty to FSB Washington II, secured & returned.

A Co. - Open Rt 22(1 plat), escort DT-TN-DT convoy (1 plat).

B Co. - Stand down 3d day.

C Co. - Open Rt 26 w/RF

2 APs

Letter ML & Pop

**17 Oct** - [field strength] 453. 10 APC & 6 TRACK. Received today accelerated promotions 1-E6, 3-E5, 10-E4. Quiet nite. Scts - same as Oct 16.

A Co. - Open Rt 26 w/RF Co.

B Co. - Stand down 4<sup>th</sup> day.

C Co. - Escort DT-TN-DT convoy.

1 AP

No mail

**18 Oct** - [field strength] 464. 10 APC & 6 Track. Quiet nite. - Scts same as Oct 16.

OPN THUNDER ROAD II - DAY 1

A Co. - Open Rt 4; linked up at 1230; depart 1815.

B Co. - moved to NDP (XT287657) at 1300, arrived 1530 w/ 1 plat C Co.

C Co. - Escort, closed 2100.

Engineers had 1 DT & 1 10T tractor cab hit mine. 1 WIA (mod)

**19 Oct** - [field strength] 469. Quiet nite - Scts same as Oct 16.

DAY 2

A Co. - Open Rt 4; linked up 1 km N CP White at 1045. Secured VTR opn. Returned Rawlins 1930.

B Co. - Open Rt 4 from NDP to A Co. at 1045. Found 2 mines. Returned NDP 1700.

C Co. - Escort 2 round trips (3 hrs per rd trip) closed 1800. 78 dump trucks moved to FF.

2 letters from ML

Move of DL track from MP [motor pool at TNBC] to field - M548 HQ 94 (D26)

XO List

AGI 19-21 Oct

S-2 - Clearance of TOC Personnel

Classified document secured  
S-3 had no program records  
CMMI  
Maint on individual & TA & unit equip  
Send maint personnel to work with CMMI Team  
Security of small arms - Key control

**20 Oct** - [field strength] 492. 10& 8[This style notation about DL APC & tracks continues.] Quiet nite - storm hit 0130; heavy rain (8-10") and high winds until 1200. All operations called off except short RIF's by B & C Co's. Maint & police 1300-1700.

No mail

**21 Oct** - [field strength] 489. 64 malaria. Quiet nite -IG INSPECTION (less CMMI) went well. All area satisfactory except A Co. security.

THUNDER ROAD II - Day 3

A Co. - Open Rt 4, linked up 0930 at PL Pink. Change of Command [most likely, CPT Beech relieved CPT Montgomery] Closed NDP Mohawk w/ 1 Plat B Co. at 1930.

B Co. - Open Rt 4, linked up 0930. Departed [?] P at 1900. Secure 175 gun. Closed\_\_\_\_\_

C Co. - Escort 3 round trips (approx 150 DT plus misc) Closed RC - 2100.

Letter from ML & Vic

CMMI - Wpns 90 [% score out of 100]

Tac & Spt eq 80

Commo 90

Spec Purpose Eq 94

Chem 92

Maint Opns 88

Tracks 74

*From the 25<sup>th</sup> ID CG Journal:*

*The requirements for crushed rock in the reconstruction of Bao Co have been increased to 200 dump truck loads and the requirement for laterite to 150 dump truck loads.*

**22 Oct** - [field strength] 490. 7 & 9. Thunder Road - Day 4 (Last day) Quiet nite.

A Co. - Moved out of NDP; opened Rt 4 to CP White at 0930. Closed Tay Ninh 1930.

B Co. - Escort . Closed FSB R 1830 ["closed", in this sense, means arrived]

C Co. - Open Rt 4 to CP White. Closed FSB R 1930.

Scts - Escort.

No mail-wrote Vic

**M113 WATER OPNS REQUIREMENTS (p 64-65 - Driver's**

**Manual)** [Apparently we had been ordered to prepare for water operations; the items below were critical ones to be checked before the M113 entered the water or it would sink!]

**Trim Vane**

**Side Shrouds (2)**

**No RPG holes** [doubtful this was in the Driver's Manual]

**Drain Plug Hull (30)**

**Drain Plug Final Drive (2)**

**Bilge Pump (2)**

**Ramp Seal**

**Ramp Door Seal**

**Engine Door Seal**

**Tow Pintles**

**Rain**

**23 Oct** - [field strength] 513. 10 & 9. Dental apt tomorrow. Quiet nite.

A Co. - Showed flag to Soui Da w/ 1 RF Co, closed 1530.

B. Co. - Opened Rt 26 w/ 1 RF Co. Closed 1500.



**C Co. - Stand down. 1<sup>st</sup> day.**  
**Scts. - Escort Wolfhounds**

**1.5 hour briefing on how to get VCI [Viet Cong infrastructure.]**  
**Letter Mary Lou**  
**No rain - 1**

**24 Oct - [field strength] 523. 11 & 9. Quiet nite - Scts. - Stand down. A Co. w/ 164 RF - Open Rt 26 and RIF to the S.**  
**B Co. w/ 1 RF Co. - Open Rt to Mo Cong. Picked up 2 VCI suspects.**

From the 25<sup>th</sup> ID CG Journal of 30 Oct:  
Col. Fair, CO, 1<sup>st</sup> BDE quoted as reporting that Mo Cong is the center for VCI activity in Tay Ninh Province. There are currently some 64 names on the blacklist.

**C Co. - Stand down. 2<sup>nd</sup> day.**

**Meeting with District Chief (MAJ Mach) & Dist. Sr. Adv. (MAJ Gray).**  
**Attack [probable] during 24-29 w/ 26 most likely.**

**1400 Dent apt.**  
**Letter from & to ML.**  
**No rain - 2**

**25 Oct - [field strength] 529. Quiet nite' A Co. & 164 RF -open Rt. 26 and RIF'd rubber (Found many personnel working the rubber).**  
**B Co. & RF Co. - open road to Soui Da, dismtd RIF, 1 RF wounded. 3 VC sighted.**  
**C Co. - stand down - 3d Day.**  
**Scts. - Mtd/dismtd RIF'd vic. XT 2 [no additional digits] at base of mnt [Nui Ba Dinh]. Received SA fire 0930. Backed up & pounded w/ 6 AS & 700 rds Arty. Reentered 1400 w/ neg. results. Drew fire coming out. Total 8 WIA.**  
[This was the 4/23's last day of combat in which we sustained WIA during my command.]

*The 26 October 2004 remembrance of Gary Bennett, Recon Plat leader on that day:*

*"The men of Recon will remember this day. We had a simple morning mission to RIF from the Rock Crusher to the east along the base of Nui Ba Den. We stopped at the end of the road at a small abandon village. It was my fault. I thought we had gone too fast and would return too early. Higher ups may want to give us another assignment.*

*I sent Sgt Kirby up the trail across the foot bridge toward the little temple. He and another trooper were shot and from then on it was wild. "Doc" Day went to help Kirby and he was wounded. I felt we must have been the only unit in contact that day because we had every artillery unit, gun ship and fighter bomber over head wanting a chance to shoot.*

*The command & control choppers for higher echelon commanders were stacked up to 10,000 feet. Every commander in III Corp seemed to show up. What should have been a simple little walk in the bananas turned into an all day fight. I give credit to the soldiers of Recon. We fought like mad and all got out alive. We did take eight casualties, but all survived.*

*I remember the last two wounded were Keith Star and Ed Schwab. There was a lot more to this story, but that's for another day. October 25, 1968. It was a test by fire for this Lieutenant."*

*Gary*

*Another remembrance about that action comes from Johnny Chavers on 31 October 2004:*

*"I remember that day, almost as much as I remember my own birthday. That was the second or third fight I was in.*

*Danny Bostwich was the regular driver for HQ33 to which I was assigned. For some reason unknown to me, I was driving the track instead of Danny who was in the track commander's (TC) hatch.*

*Starr went out on patrol with everyone else. When I first got to Nam, Starr was the TC and Danny was the driver. They had to pull off the day Pizza was hit cause something was wrong with their 50cal. Dinky Dau stayed there with him with his trusted 60 cal. to keep them safe. (I was gonna say something else, but decided not to.)*

*Back to the fight. Sgt. Kirby was brought back to HQ 33, by the medic's. I saw his wounded leg. They also brought to HQ 33 a new in country guy (from Kentucky, I think) with a bullet hole through his chest coming out the radio he was out there on the sweep with. What was worse than that was being hit by mortar fire at the dust off site.*

*I feel sorry for anybody that got in our way or was there on the side of the road as went fast as we could and shot everything in sight trying to get the rest of our wounded Brothers back to the Rock Crusher. They were dusted off from there. Don't know the status of any of them.*

*Johnny*

**2 letter & card from ML - Ltr to ML**  
**Uniform arrived**  
**No rain - 3rd day**

**26 Oct** - [field strength] 547. 7 & 7. Quiet nite - Scts stand down 1<sup>st</sup> day. A Co. w/164 Co. - Open Rt 26; Rome plow 1<sup>st</sup> day.  
**B Co. - Cordon village (19 suspects). Sent 1 plat to Soui Da for stationing.**  
**C Co. - Moved to and opened FSB Bragg w/ C-7/1** [7<sup>th</sup> Squadron, 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division [1<sup>st</sup> ACD] was OPCON to 1<sup>st</sup> BDE, 25<sup>th</sup> ID pending the completion of the airlift of 1<sup>st</sup> BDE, 1<sup>st</sup> ACD to TNBC. Upon completion of the move, the 1<sup>st</sup> BDE, 1<sup>st</sup> ACD was to take responsibility for parts of the 25<sup>th</sup> ID TAOR while 25<sup>th</sup> ID units were being repositioned further north and east toward Cambodia.]

**No mail. Wrote ML, mailed \$100 check to bank.**  
**(Light sprinkle 2000) Heavy 15 min shower**

**27 Oct** - [field strength] 544. 9 & 7. Quiet nite - Scts stand down - 2<sup>nd</sup> day. A Co. - Open Rt 26 - Rome plow 2<sup>nd</sup> day.  
**B Co. - Open road to FSB Bragg; escorted FA Btry & convoy to Grant. (One comd det [command detonated] 105 rd exploded in vic Camel [Diary contains no reference to this location], killed 1 RF and 3 RF & 1 Civ wounded).**  
**C Co. - Secured FSB Bragg; opened Rt to FSB Grant.**

**No mail**  
**Reg 614-30, para 4f - personnel in confinement will have DEROS extended to include period of time lost.**  
**No rain - 1<sup>st</sup> day**

**28 Oct** - [field strength] 547. 9 & 7. 65 malaria. 3 months in Rawlins. Quiet nite. Scts - Escort convoys to & from FSB Bragg.

**A Co. & 164 - Open Rt 26, security of RP. VTR stuck. Left out; co ordered to secure [VTR] at 2130; reached 2400.**  
**B Co. - Sweep North of Rubber. Neg Results.**  
**C Co. - Open road to FSB Grant & outpost.**

**No mail**

**Applied for passport** [I needed a passport because I had been approved for return to the US on the USAF diplomatic support flight that left SGN. Since it stopped at a number of foreign capitals - Bangkok, New Delhi, Riyadh, and Madrid - I needed a passport. From Madrid I hoped to catch a flight to Germany to visit my father.]

**No rain - 2d day**



**Rainbow over FSB Rawlins III**

**29 Oct** - [field strength] 563. Quiet nite. Scts - Escort convoys to & from FSB Grant.

A Co. & 164 - Open Rt 26, recover VTR.

B Co. & 2 RF Co's - RIF'd through rice fields & hedge rows. Captured 1 VC suspect.

C Co. - Open & outpost road to FSB Grant.

2 letters ML-answered ML.

**No rain - 3rd day**

**30 Oct - [field strength] 547. Quiet nite. Scts - Escort convoys to & from FSB Grant.**

**A Co. & 164 - Open Rt 26; outpost to [36].**

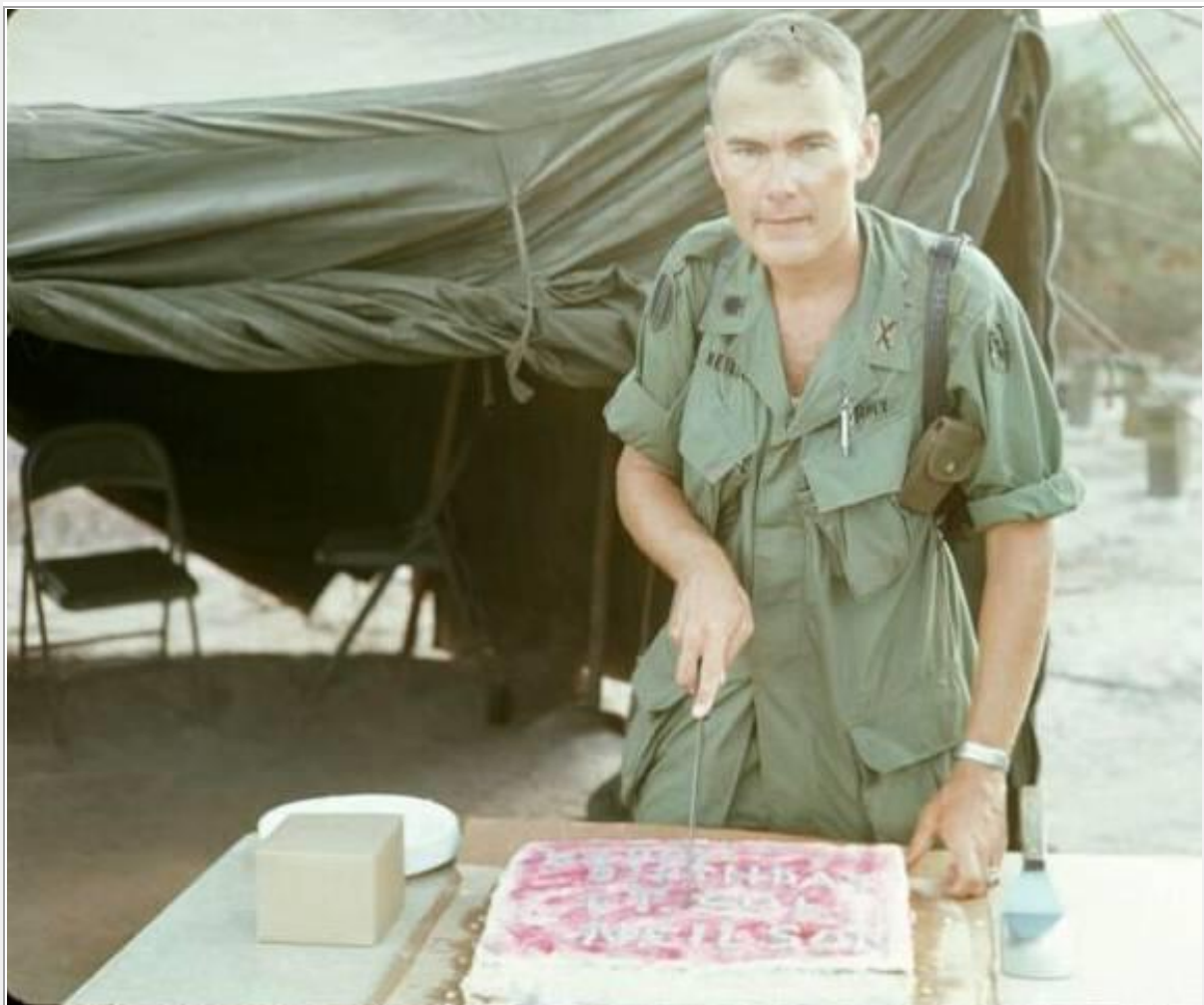
**B Co. - RIF'd N of Rawlins. Encountered 5 VC and engaged with SA - neg. results.**

**Found small base camp.**

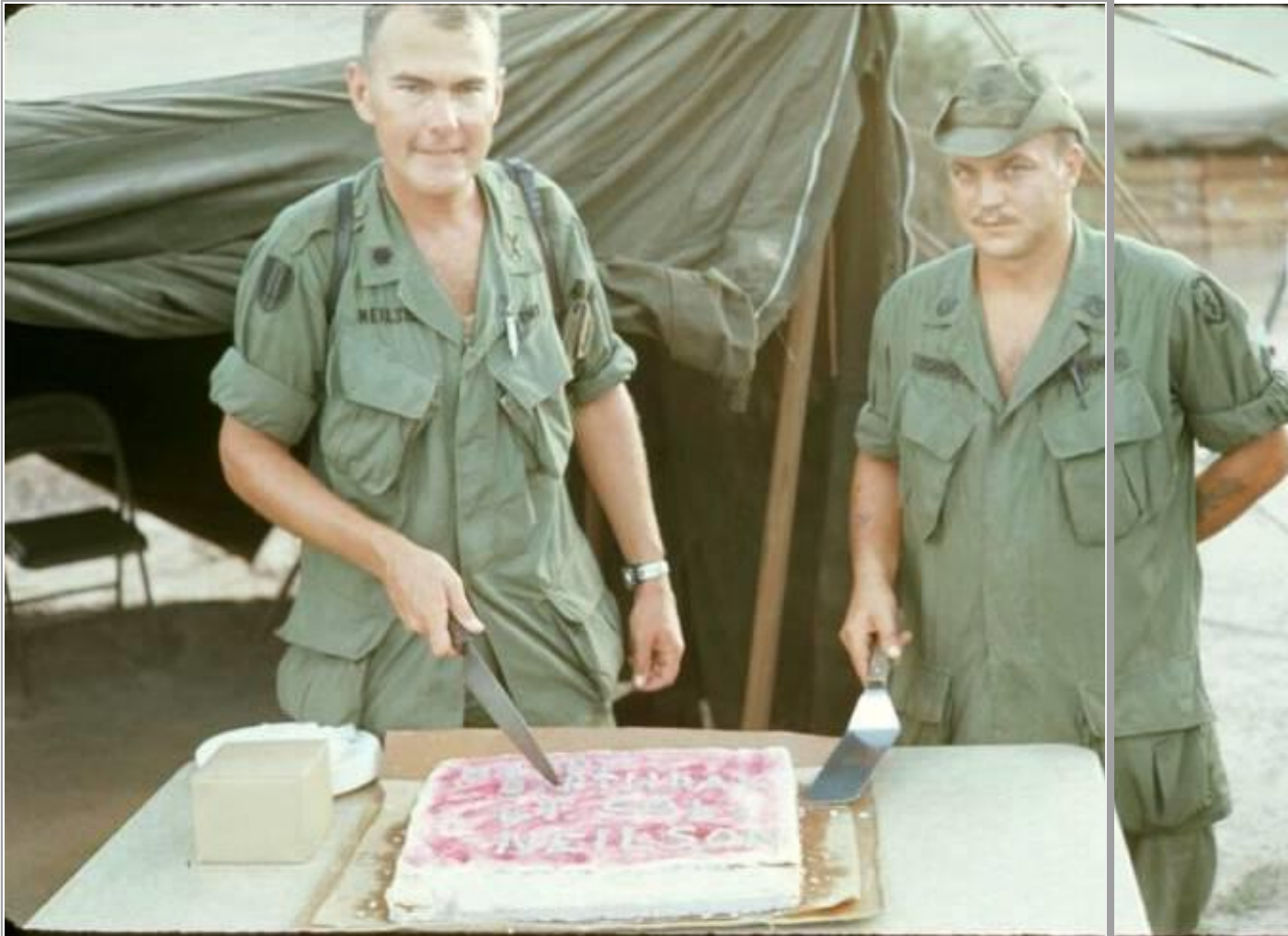
**C Co. Open & outpost road to FSB Grant.**

**No mail.**

**No rain - 4th day**



**Happy 37th Birthday Colonel!!**



**Col Neilson and Mess Sgt. Schmidt**





FSB Rawlins III Mess Tent

**31 Oct** - [field strength] 545. 7 & 8. Unquiet nite. [At] 2000 rec'd 3 rds of U/I [unidentified] arty. Suspected to be 105 from ARVN out of FSB Hull.  
Scts - Escort convoys to & from FSB Grant.  
A Co. & 164 - Open Rt 26; RIF'd north rubber.  
B Co. & RF Co. Show flag at Mo Cong; detained 1 person.  
C Co. Open & outpost road to FSB Grant. Found two mines.  
No mail. Wrote ML  
5th day no rain

**1 Nov** - [field strength] 542. 6 & 6. Quiet nite. Scts - Escort convoys to & from Grant.

A Co. & 164 - Open Rt 26; sweep south along stream 1<sup>st</sup> day of 2 day AP - departed 1800

B Co. - RIF'd north of Bragg.

C Co. Open & outpost rt to Grant.

Rec'd letter ML - wrote ML.

Signed passport picture

6th day no rain

**2 Nov** - [field strength] 545. 6 & 6. Quiet nite. Scts - Escort convoys to & from FSB Grant.

A Co. & 164 - Open Rt 26; sweep north thru rubber. Found old BC. 2nd day of 2 day AP.

B Co. - Stand down.

C Co. Open & outpost rt to Grant.

Rec'd letter ML - wrote ML.

Light rain in AM.

**3 Nov** - [field strength] 543. 4 & 7. Quiet night. Scts - Stand down to 1230. Open road to Bragg. Escorted convoy.

A Co. - Stand down. AP returned; neg results.

B Co. w/164 -Opened road. Swept N of Rt 26. Neg results.

C Co. RIF'd 0830-1200. Opened & outpost road. 1 convoy left MG 1300.

No mail

Light case - Ho Chi Minh revenge. Temp 101.3

1<sup>st</sup> day no rain.

**4 Nov** - [field strength] 553. 4 & 7. 66 Malaria. Quiet night. Scts - Stand down to 1230. Op'd road to Bragg & escorted convoy.

A Co. - Constructed FSB Rawlins in a one co, one btry configuration.

B Co. -Opened Rt 26. Moved to TNBC, prepare for night air assault.

C Co. Stand down until 1230.Opened & out posted road.

1 convoy.

No mail

Temp 99.2

BG Long [25<sup>th</sup> ID ADC(M)] very unhappy about charts. [No idea what charts]

2nd day no rain.

**5 Nov** - [field strength] 547. 4 & 6. Quiet night. Scts - Stand down to 1230.

Op'd road to Bragg & escorted convoy to Grant.

A Co. & 164 - Open Rt 26 to CP 25, then returned and worked on FSB

Rawlins.

B Co. - **Night CA** [combat [air] assault, one of the most dangerous missions for infantry. This was the first AM operation since we left SGN in July.] to Mo Cong.

Cordon & search w/ 2 RF Co's 7 1 CRIP. 31 Suspects (12 deserters, 7 Blacklist, 2 VC, 6 susp VC, 3 ID)

C Co. RIF 7 outpost road to Grant - 1 AP.

2 letters ML

3d day no rain.

From the 25<sup>th</sup> ID CG Journal, 5 November 1968:

"...don't leave 'monuments to defeat' (abandoned APC's, tanks, etc) ..."

*By 1968, the shoulders and ditches alongside Routes 22, 26, 13,4 and 243 were littered with the remains of USA and ARVN inoperable, burned, severely damaged, rusting, wheeled and tracked vehicle hulks. Prior to the CG's orders, neither I nor anyone else in the chain of command paid much attention to them. We had a war to fight and there were never enough troops, recovery vehicles, or time available to return these hulks to TNBC or CC. Consequently, only salvageable vehicles were considered worth of recovery and then on an 'as possible' basis at the time of occurrence.*

*To accomplish the CG's order required organization of a combat and support force; assembly of one or more VTR, LTR, or wreckers; tractor-trailer cabs and low boy trailers; and diversion of combat troops from their normal duties.*

*Once the order was passed, we went about it judiciously as is mentioned in later entries.*

**6 Nov** - [field strength] 543. 4 & 6. Quiet nite. Scts - Stand down to 1230.

Op'd road to Bragg ; convoy to & from Grant.

A Co. & 164 - Open Rt 26 to CP 25, returned to work on FSB Rawlins.

B Co. - Escort ammo destruction convoy out west gate 0800-1600. Destroyed

**16 T.**

**C Co. - RIF south of road, spotted 1 VC.**

**No mail - Visited district chief to discuss VCI.**

**4<sup>th</sup> day no rain**

**7 Nov - [field strength-no entry] 5 & 6. Quiet nite. Scts & C Co. - Same [as 6 November]**

**B Co. - Escorted 3 tks [tanks] to base of NBD mtn; blasted caves.**

**A Co. - Same [as 6 November]**

**Unsuccessful VCI opn. MAJ [Thonius] Robinson [Jr] arrived. [Relieved MAJ Donald Starnes as XO].**

**No mail**

**[List of personnel-related items]**

**A Co. - 159**

**B Co. - 160**

**C Co. - 174**

**Based on  $\pm$  from Nov-Dec will be even by 31 Dec**

**HQ Co. - Proj drops & adds bring to +4 by end of Dec.**

**SVC Co. - Proj drops & gains bring to +9 by 31 Dec.**

**Request Div orders by [*sic.* be] cut on 13 for transfer on (8 Nov) to line co's.**

**MOS not auth line co's will be used as 63 H, 52B, 76S as mech & mech helper;**

**64 A & B - APC Driver**

**5<sup>th</sup> day - no rain**

**8 Nov - [field strength] 564. 6 & 4. Quiet nite. Scts & C Co. - Same. Grant closed.**

**B Co. - Escort ammo destruction team.**

**A Co. - Open Rt 26. Recover 2 hulks. Engr blew trees. 164 RF got 3 BC, 2 wpns, 1 POW, booty vic rubber factory.**

**Letter ML & Shirley**

**6<sup>th</sup> day - no rain**

**9 Nov - [field strength] 564. 7 & 5. Quiet nite. A Co. (+Flame)(+1 plat B Co.)**

**- Open Road from Buell to CP Green. Closed 1730.**

**Scts - escort 10 veh convoy to & from FF One low boy hit mine, minor damage.**

**B Co. - escorted 2 TKS to CP White. Fired at mountain.**

**C Co. - Opened Rt 26.**

**Letter Mary Lou**

**7<sup>th</sup> day - no rain**

**10 Nov - [field strength] 580. [highest number recorded] 3 & 5. Quiet nite. (B 1-27 Arty replaced by C 1-27). C Co. (+Flame & 2 TKS) - Opened road to FF. TKS fired at NBD and returned.**

**Scts - Escorted 10 veh to FF.**

**A Co. - Escorted & secured Engr work party - flew flag [demonstrated force presence] north of Mo Cong.**

**B Co. - 1 plat escort ammo destruction.**

**C Co. (-) - Opened Rt 26.**

**No mail. Picked up passport**

**8<sup>th</sup> day - no rain**

**11 Nov - [field strength] 564. 67 malaria [no mention of vehicle status] A Co. - Escorted engineer work party on Mo Cong highway.**

**B Co. - Escorted convoy to and from FF. Moved to Bragg for cordon & search.**

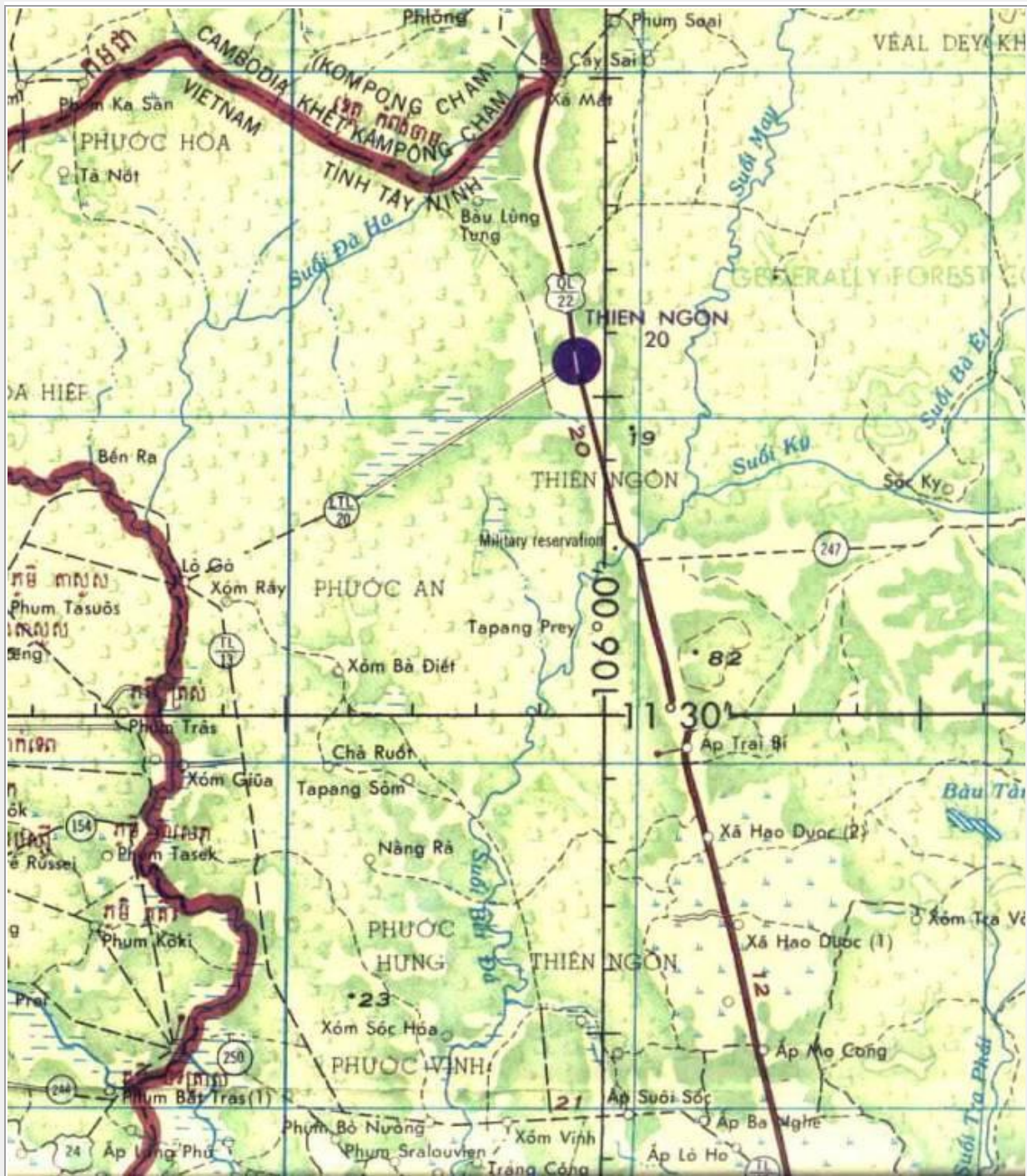
**C Co. - Opened road to FF. Returned to FSB Bragg.**

**Scts - escort convoy**

**Sent 2d box Hold Baggage**

**Farewell party - received statues & plaque.**





#### **Div Artillery After Action Report:**

*After the road was opened, Battery c (7/11) moved by road from Tay Ninh Base Camp to FSB Ord. Battery C's mission was to provide the artillery support while the engineers worked on improving the airstrip for the special Forces Camp at Thien Ngon vicinity XT0881*



**12 Nov** - [field strength-no entry] **Quiet nite. Move to Thien Nhom** [maybe Thien Ngon] (FSB Ord) (7.5 km S of Cambodia)

**A Co. - depart Rawlins 0630; escort engr to AVLB site; secure road; rollup with convoy.**

**B Co. - Cordon & search.** [Detained for questioning by RVN authorities] **43 suspects (28 Draft Dodgers, 3 VCI, 12 released. Moved to FSB Rawlins.**

**C Co. - depart Bragg; passed thru A Co. outpost & rollup.**

**D/3/22 - Air assault into AVLB site.**

**A/3/22 - air assault into Thien Ngon. Sweep & outpost.**

**Lead elements closed TN [meaning Thien Ngon] at 1400.**

**Dug in and set up.**

**Scts - Escort arty to jump [slang for temporary] FSB.**

**161 RF Co. - Airmobiled in & joined up.**

**From the 25<sup>th</sup> ID CG Journal, 12 Nov 68 at 1<sup>st</sup> BDE HQ;**

***"Operation to Thien Ngon going well. Reports one RF company moved north and was well received to include an honor guard for the Province chief..."***





**13 Nov** - [field strength-no entry] **Quiet nite. A Co. & CIDG - Opened road SW toward Cambodia.**

**C Co. - Opened road, RIF'd.**

**B Co. - Escorted convoy to & from.** [No indication destination]

**Scts - OPCON 3/22.**

**Change of Command at Rawlins at 1400 with LTC Albert C. Butler.**

**MG Richardson presented me LM** [Legion of Merit, a customary award to outgoing BN CO who hadn't otherwise screwed up.] **COL Fair changed flags; BG Long attended. Also COL Sumner, 25<sup>th</sup> ID Chief of Staff;** [LTC Clemons] **Riley** [ CO, 3/4 and an old friend]; **& [LTC] Alex Hunt** [CO, 3/22 a RVN friend and fellow veteran of the battle for Tay Ninh City.]

[LTC Butler was KIA on 22 March 1969. He died from injuries suffered when his Loach was shot down not far from Rawlins.]



LTC Cliff Neilson relinquishes his command to COL Fair. rr. MG Richardson



**LTC Cliff Neilson, COL Fair, LTC Al Butler,**

**Depart TN at 1700 on BDE CO ship. Saw MG Williamson prior to leaving.  
Arrived Camp Alpha at 1800, Stayed w/ MAJ Huntsinger, AG, CO, 178  
Replacement Co.**

**Arrived SGN Terminal 0715 - Depart 1140**





Homeward Bound.. Back to the World...