

2D BATTALION 27TH INFANTRY  
(THE WOLFHOUNDS)  
APO. US Forces, 96225

TLIBB-T

27 April 1966

SUBJECT: Special Summary of Action - Company A, 2d  
Battalion, 27th Infantry, 5 April 1966  
(Operation CIRCLE PINES)

TO: See Distribution

1. Introduction.

a. On the western fringes of the HO BO WOODS in VIETNAM, on the 5th day of April 1966, Company A, 2d Battalion, of the 27th Infantry "Wolfhounds" fought a battle far more important than the mere size of the elements involved might indicate to a student of conventional war. This was the first time the Viet Cong massed and risked a battalion in offensive combat against a maneuver element of any size of the 25th Infantry Division. Further, the attack itself was a classic example of the offensive tactics and techniques of a hard core Viet Cong unit. Clearly implied are the conditions under which the enemy is willing to risk decisive combat. Equally clear are the principles of war emphasized in the Viet Cong tactical battle of annihilation and his methods of implementing them. The Viet Cong obviously feel that in their base areas like the HO BO WOODS, where they can mass quickly units of at least battalion size, an infantry rifle company organized in a hasty defensive position offers a lucrative target against which to attempt to exploit Mao's axiom: "Fight only when victory is certain". The following principles of war were emphasized by the Viet Cong: OBJECTIVE, OFFENSIVE, MASS, MANEUVER, and SURPRISE. Their attack was well planned. It was professionally and aggressively executed.

b. That the Viet Cong failed to achieve their annihilation objective was due to the fighting qualities of the officers and men of Company A and the superb support of the 1st Battalion of the 8th Artillery and little else. The basic tactical deployment of the company was sound. One can not help but ask certain questions. Was the unit prepared? Within the specific set of circumstances imposed it was; as this special report will show. In fact the basic information herein will be used to support a nomination for the Valorous Unit Citation for Company A. Were the individual officers and men prepared? Again, they were and leadership

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Service Crosses, twenty-eight Silver Stars, and sixteen Bronze Stars have been made to recognize their valor. The splendid defense and aggressive reaction of the men against heavy odds turned what could have been the annihilation of a rifle company into a costly defeat for the enemy. Fierce hand to hand fighting took place and the usual fog of confusion of close-in combat existed. Mistakes were also made on both sides. From the point of view of the defense, there were few new lessons learned. Our current defensive doctrine and techniques are valid. Where this doctrine was violated, no matter for what reason, or how easily rationalized, the defense was weak. Where doctrine was followed, the defense was strong. Success and failure in battle are relative things, often difficult to evaluate objectively, and unavoidably tied to missions, combat power, resources, and emotions. Company A's defense was a tactical victory. Had Company A reacted differently, had the soldiers not fought in the highest traditions of infantrymen, had the "Wolfhounds" not been supported in superb fashion, their forward observer, his radio-telephone operator and the artillery liaison officer of the 1st Battalion of the 8th Artillery, the ending of the Company A story well could have been different. A stinging defeat rather than a hard fought victory could have resulted.

d. This paper summarizes the fragmentary and situation reports received during the action, the findings of an on the ground investigation shortly after enemy contact was broken, and encompasses the testimony of all key personnel and many individual soldiers who were at various key locations during the battle. Included are statements, however, which are necessarily opinions or estimates. Some events are clouded by the fog of battle. Some witnesses are dead, others seriously wounded, and their testimony not available at this time. For these reasons, this paper cannot be considered a final historical report on all aspects of the battle. The conclusions listed in paragraph 6, however, are based on careful study and evaluation of the events before, during, and after the attack. A list of key leaders is attached at Inclosure 2.

## 2. Facts bearing on the Action.

e. The initial mission of Company A on 4 April was that of a linear blocking force across the axis of advance of the 1st Battalion, 69th Armor sweeping south toward TRUNG LAP (XT 584199 - Map VIETNAM, 1:50,000). Company B, still out of supporting distance some 3500 meters west was involved in a similar mission in coordination with

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65 and then prepare for a village search operation in the vicinity of XT 5617 commencing at 1230 hours on 5 April. On the ground reconnaissance had been completed for the move and the majority of the bulk 81mm mortar ammunition had been relocated to the new assembly area. In fact, throughout the late afternoon the entire troop leading process of the battalion and companies had been directed at these future missions.

b. The 1st Battalion, 69th Armor completed passage of the Company A lines at approximately 1600 hours; however, the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry, to the north, found a number of caches that took additional time to investigate and extract. In late afternoon, the mechanized battalion made contact with a Viet Cong force of unknown strength approximately 4000 meters to the north and east of Company B. Two personnel carriers were knocked out, slowing this organization's progress even more. At approximately 1700 hours, when it became doubtful that the mechanized battalion would complete its sweep, the decision was made by brigade to abort future missions and to have Companies A and B establish defensive perimeters in the vicinity of their current positions. Battalion recommended that the companies be assembled in the vicinity of TRUNG LAP or that the units be brought within supporting distance of one another in a battalion perimeter or married up with elements of the mechanized battalion. As darkness fell, the units of the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry continued to push on to their assembly area utilizing the illumination provided by a flare ship. Per orders, Company A had established a new and hasty defensive perimeter approximately 1000 meters south of the base it had occupied the night before. Company B again had established a perimeter approximately 3500 meters west. It is significant to note that this was the first night Company A occupied the base in this area. The assigned missions prevented the two companies of the battalion from being within supporting distance of each other.

c. Captain Willard E. Harrison Jr., the Commander of Company A, established a defensive perimeter (XT 6022) as depicted in Inclosure 1 (Blue Flip). The defense took advantage of a series of existing trench lines apparently dug by the Viet Cong which formed a rectangular perimeter. The company command post was located approximately in the middle east portion of the perimeter (XT 607227) in a farm house. A large storage hole existed within the building, as did the usual covered bomb shelter. The company was required by battalion order to establish two ambushes. For SOP each consisted of one rifle squad, a light machine gun team, and a forward observer. The company commander decided that two platoons would each establish one ambush, and he further elected to locate the ambush sites close to his perimeter (XT 615228, XT 60222). In aid of the ambush

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patrol from the 1st Platoon. The Platoon Leader decided that the aid men could best accomplish his mission by remaining within the platoon defensive position. Normal 50% alert was maintained in the defensive positions. A stand-to was planned for 0515 hours 5 April.

d. The first sign of enemy activity in the Company A area occurred when the forward air controller flying in support of the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry received automatic weapons fire at 1900 hours from XT 597225, approximately 900 meters west of the company position. Battalion directed that the company check this area out. At 1920 hours, the company commander dispatched Staff Sergeant Vincent Napier's ambush patrol, which was prepared to move out, giving it the additional mission of sweeping the area from which the forward air controller received fire. At 1945 hours, while on this sweep, the patrol leader reported seeing three unarmed Viet Cong suspects. One of them was captured. The captured man had attempted to escape when he saw a maneuver element of the patrol approaching, but was caught when he ran into one of the patrol's security elements. (This suspect was later killed when he attempted to escape just prior to the main Viet Cong attack on the company position.) The patrol then returned the suspect to the company, gave a negative report on finding any automatic weapon position, and continued on to the preplanned ambush site. (Dotted position, Blue Flip)

e. The second action in the Company A area before the Viet Cong main attack was at approximately 2110 hours. Three Viet Cong were seen in front of the eastern portion of the perimeter through a starlight device and one was killed by a rifle.

f. At approximately 2120 hours, Sergeant Napier's ambush patrol in the north, shortly after their arrival in the vicinity of the ambush position, observed four Viet Cong come toward them from the rear. They took the Viet Cong under fire. A check of the area revealed no bodies or weapons. The patrol received permission from Captain Harrison to shift approximately 100 to 150 meters west of the original site. (XT 606225 Solid Color Position, Blue Flip).

g. Shortly after the eastern ambush patrol, led by Staff Sergeant John P. Morgan, Jr., heard the firing from the northern ambush patrol, they spotted six men moving quickly to the east. When these suspected Viet Cong moved out into the rice paddies, they were engaged by fire. Some appeared to drop. Sergeant Morgan took two other men forward to investigate, found nothing, and proceeded across the open field to the next woodline to the east in hopes of making contact again. As this group approached the woodline they heard sounds of a large number of men moving through the woods. Sergeant Morgan engaged this movement briefly with fire, and fearing an ambush of his small group, withdrew to the established patrol position. He then brought artillery fire on the suspected enemy position.

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h. The next significant actions in the Company A area occurred early the next morning, at approximately 0410 hours. They occurred only a few minutes before the coordinated Viet Cong main attack was initiated, and happened simultaneously at both ambush sites. (All the remaining events occurred virtually together on all flanks and are depicted by the Red Flip.)

(1) At 0410 hours, Sergeant Napier's ambush patrol in the north sighted an estimated 100 Viet Cong moving in a column of two's from the north directly toward their position. Another estimated 100 Viet Cong in a column of three's were observed moving toward the patrol on a trail from the northwest. Smaller size Viet Cong units were also seen moving to the east and west. The enemy troops appeared to be wearing fatigues and helmet liners. Sergeant Napier and his men were able to make accurate estimates of the number of Viet Cong due to the bright moonlight, and because the Viet Cong were moving in column formations with little interval between men. The patrol opened fire with its machineguns and all other weapons at the two large groups. The ambush was a complete surprise and Viet Cong began falling faster than the patrol leader could count. The Viet Cong made a hasty withdrawal into what cover was available and returned fire. During a slight lull in the contact, the patrol leader observed 16 bodies in the open field to his front. The patrol then attempted to withdraw to the company perimeter, but Viet Cong fire was intense and began coming from all directions. The patrol continued to fire alternately north and south by jumping from one side of a rice paddy dike to the other. Although the patrol carried approximately a triple basic load of ammunition (36 magazines for each M14E2 rifle, 300 rounds for each M16 rifle, six hand grenades for each man, 2000 rounds for the M60 machinegun), ammunition ran low. Sergeant Napier attempted to contact the company commander, but had no success. Almost immediately after the patrol initiated their action, a heavy volume of firing was heard to their rear from the entire perimeter. The Viet Cong finally broke contact with the patrol and Sergeant Napier then moved his patrol approximately 50 meters to the south and took cover from grazing fire in several holes near a house. He could not contact the company command post and thought perhaps the company had been annihilated. Later around 0540 hours, after the Viet Cong broke the main contact Sergeant Napier's patrol observed about 60 Viet Cong withdrawing into what appeared to be an assembly area. The limited amount of M16 rifle ammunition remaining and the belief that they were the sole survivors of the company made the patrol members reluctant to open fire. They did fire their M79s and throw hand grenades, however, and the patrol leader called an artillery fire mission on and around the target area. From the beginning and throughout the action, the patrol heard the Viet Cong wounded screaming and moaning in their sector. After the

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Viet Cong withdrew, the patrol was finally able to contact the company commander. Sergeant Napier was advised he could return or remain where he was. He remained in his position until daylight rather than run the risk of being mistaken for Viet Cong and to keep his men under cover because of the heavy volume of artillery fire. During the action, one man in the patrol was killed. There were no other casualties.

(2) At 0410 hours, Sergeant Morgan's patrol on the east observed approximately 70 Viet Cong suddenly appear from the brush into the open area to the patrol's rear and move toward the company perimeter. The Viet Cong were located between the patrol and friendly front lines so the patrol was ordered not to fire for fear of hitting their own men in the perimeter. The Viet Cong were moving in a file from the southeast. They wore mixed uniforms. They appeared to know where the company was located, but were oblivious of the patrol. The patrol radioed back the information, but as they made contact on the radio, the Viet Cong attacked the perimeter. Artillery and mortar fire were called into the area and the patrol heard the Viet Cong scream and moan in the vicinity of where the rounds were falling.

### 3. The Main Attack.

a. 1st Platoon, Commanded by First Lieutenant Jim H. Brogdon.

(1) The platoon occupied the northeast end half of the east oriented portion of the company perimeter (Blue Flip). Defensive positions occupied were a portion of the existing Viet Cong trench network. This platoon consisted of 40 men. A total of 23 were in the two squads occupying the trenches; Sergeant Morgan's reinforced squad made up the eastern ambush patrol approximately 275 meters to the front.

(2) Earlier in the evening at 2200 hours on 4 April, the platoon observed, with the starlight device, three men moving from south to north across the front. They were taken under fire. Possibly one Viet Cong was killed. The platoon leader, Lieutenant Brogdon, looking back at this incident, feels these Viet Cong were probably a reconnaissance element or guides.

(3) At approximately 0410 hours on 5 April, four Viet Cong were observed to the east. These Viet Cong appeared to be indicating where they wanted others to deploy. In a few moments, between 20 and 40 Viet Cong appeared. Perhaps they were later reinforced. The platoon opened fire just as the Viet Cong deployed as skirmishers. Friendly fire was accurate and heavy and, initially, the Viet Cong advance was stopped about 15 meters short of the trench line. The Viet Cong employed

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fire was concentrated on the platoon machinegun position and the platoon command post. Many mortar rounds were also fired by the Viet Cong. A few of the enemy reached the trench and fired down its length and threw hand grenades. The attack was directed against the flanks of the platoon. Platoon to squad and platoon to company communications were solely wire. The only platoon radio was with the ambush patrol. The wire communications immediately went out, apparently cut by the many mortar rounds, M79 rounds, and grenades fired by the Viet Cong. It is significant to note that during the early moments of the battle, the Viet Cong assault consisted almost exclusively of grenades and mortar fire. The Viet Cong then followed up with an all out charge. The enemy obviously knew the defensive system well. Their assault finally carried them into the trench itself where the battle turned into individual hand to hand combat. One Viet Cong was observed with a machete attacking a wounded US soldier. The attacker was shot and killed. Lieutenant Brogdon ordered what few men were left to withdraw from the trench and establish a new line within his assigned sector about 25 meters from the trench. When this order was given, Lieutenant Brogdon could only account for five men. Others later drifted into this new defensive line as they realized the line had shifted. The platoon continued to fire until the Viet Cong broke contact. A bugle was sounded in the north at 0530 hours and the Viet Cong withdrew. The platoon remained in their hasty defensive positions until ordered to withdraw further to the rear to occupy a portion of a new and smaller company perimeter. The platoon suffered four killed and 12 wounded. Ten men in the defensive position were not casualties; seven of these were in the trenches. The platoon leader, platoon sergeant and medic were in the platoon command post.

b. 2d Platoon, Commanded by Second Lieutenant Robert Duffie.

(1) The platoon defended the northwest and upper west portion of the company defensive perimeter (Blue Flip). The fortifications occupied again consisted of an existing Viet Cong trench network. Sergeant Napier's reinforced squad from this platoon was occupying an ambush position about 150 meters to the north. The platoon strength in the defensive was twenty-five.

(2) At approximately 0420 hours on 5 April, the platoon came under attack from the north and west. The first position hit was the right flank where it tied in with the 1st Platoon. Here they were heavily grenaded and their position was soon overrun by Viet Cong who moved down the trench to the east. The platoon then started evacuating the wounded to the platoon command post. Simultaneously with the initial attack from the north, more Viet Cong launched an attack from the west, moving across the open paddy walking quickly in an upright position. This group employed at least one machinegun, but for the most part, fired rifle grenades or threw hand grenades.

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The platoon returned fire with its weapons, except its remaining machinegun which malfunctioned after firing three or four rounds. Several attempts to correct this stoppage were unsuccessful. Later analysis indicates this machinegun was put out of action by enemy fire. Much Viet Cong shouting could be heard during the lulls in firing. Lieutenant Duffie lost contact with his squads on the left and right and his patrol. Radio communications were spotty and the company command post was hard to contact. After the initial intense fire fight, the platoon leader feared that the company had been badly chewed up and that the small element with him was among the few men that were left. Much ammunition had been fired and attempts to get artillery fire on the west were delayed because of targets on the north, east and south portions of the perimeter. Reports from the company command post concerning the situation in other areas of the company were nonexistent. Lieutenant Duffie did not ask for 4.2 mortar fire because he assumed this would be called by his company commander in response to his request for fire. The northern portion of the platoon defense had been reduced to one single unwounded rifleman. The platoon leader held his position until finally informed by the company commander that the company was withdrawing and establishing a new perimeter. The 2d Platoon was ordered to man the eastern portion. The troops manning the trench line on the west of the original perimeter were simply to do an about face. This was done at approximately 0530. The platoon suffered three killed, including one man who was guarding a prisoner in the 1st Platoon area, and eight wounded. Its boxhole strength within the company after the battle was 14 men.

c. 3d Platoon, Commanded by Second Lieutenant Thomas Blevins.

(1) The platoon occupied the lower east and south-east portion of the company perimeter (Blue Flip). The fortifications occupied by the troops consisted of the existing Viet Cong trench network. Its strength was 36 men.

(2) At approximately 0420 hours on 5 April, the platoon came under heavy fire from its left flank, at the coordination point with the 1st Platoon. A machinegun was located in this position, which along with the other weapons in the position, returned fire. A hail of mortar and grenade fire quickly rendered all of the troops on that flank casualties. The machinegun was kept in constant action. With all men around him wounded or dead and only 70 rounds of ammunition left, the gunner made his way to the 1st Platoon command post where he was killed shortly after reaching that position. After checking his squads following the initial assault, Lieutenant Blevins was severely wounded by a hail of rifle grenades in the vicinity of the nearby company command post. Lieutenant Blevins later died of wounds. He had attempted to report his platoon's status and get further instructions. The Platoon Sergeant, Staff Sergeant Luis Mejias, then took

radio and moved from the platoon command post location to the defensive trench, establishing physical contact, and directing the defense by moving from man to man. The other machinegun organic to the platoon kept constant fire on the Viet Cong attacking from the south, who were supported by heavy 60mm mortar fire against the company command post, (Red Flip, southern portion). The Viet Cong also employed a 57mm recoilless rifle against this position, possibly the same weapon used against the 1st Platoon. A Viet Cong machinegun engaged the platoon's machinegun. The 3d Squad Leader, Sergeant Richard F. Ritch Jr., called artillery fire to his east and south close-in to the platoon position. The Viet Cong mortars were finally silenced by artillery fire. Many men recall hearing the Viet Cong shouting orders, weeping, and arguing after the artillery fire. The platoon never left the trench and apparently never received the order to withdraw. Viet Cong attempted to get into the trench from the south by way of an unoccupied continuation of the existing trench network. Constant friendly fire down this trench system halted them. A whistle was blown at approximately 0525 hours, which was followed in a few minutes by a bugle to the south. The platoon readied itself for what it thought would be a last defense against a human wave attack. What little ammunition remained was distributed. The Viet Cong started to break contact, however, shortly after the bugle was sounded. Artillery and the platoon's machinegun fire continued causing more Viet Cong casualties during their withdrawal to the south. Communications with the company command post again were almost nonexistent. Communications between the platoon and squads was accomplished by personal liaison by the platoon sergeant. No radio or wire was used. The platoon suffered one killed and 13 wounded, two of whom later died of wounds. After the attack, 24 men were not casualties.

2. 81mm Mortar Section, Commanded by First Lieutenant Wilburn L. Whitten.

The 81mm Mortar Section was located in the southern portion of the company perimeter. Because of minimum range limitations, the mortars were unable to fire close defensive fires or barrage data. On one occasion, they fired in support of an ambush patrol. Because of earlier plans to move into a battalion perimeter that evening, most of the bulk mortar ammunition had been taken out by helicopter. For the same reason, the mortar pits were very hastily dug. The mortars could not be manned during the attack because of the intense grazing fire coming into the 3d Platoon position from the south. The section occupied positions to the rear of the 3d Platoon and prepared to engage the enemy as infantry with their small arms fire if the Viet Cong broke through. When the company withdrew into the new perimeter, the section took its mortars to the new location. No casualties were suffered.

e. Company, Battalion, and Brigade Command Posts.

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The company command post was located center east within the company perimeter (Blue Flip). The battalion and brigade command post were collocated in the vicinity of TRUNG LAP approximately 2000 meters to the southwest of the company perimeter. At approximately 0420 hours on 5 April, Captain Harrison, the company commander, reported to the battalion command post that he was being probed, had two men lightly wounded and requested illumination. Immediate approval was granted and the 4.2 inch mortars began firing the illumination mission. A flare ship was also requested by battalion and approved by brigade. The company was so informed. This report, as were all earlier contacts and all subsequent reports to the battalion command post, was relayed immediately to the brigade command post. At 0430 hours, the company commander reported the tempo of the enemy small arms and mortar fire increasing. Artillery was asked by battalion to turn the counter-mortar radar vector in support of the company. The company commander was advised to keep constant artillery falling around his perimeter. No estimate of the size of the enemy force could be given. At approximately 0435 hours, Captain Harrison reported that he apparently had many wounded, but no one was known to have been killed. Captain Harrison further reported that he and his artillery forward observer, Staff Sergeant John McNickol, were wounded, that being the reason for a momentary loss of contact on both the artillery fire direction and battalion command nets. He requested personnel carriers to evacuate his seriously wounded. Brigade approved the use of three personnel carriers available from the supporting artillery, and action was begun to assemble them. At 0500 hours, the company commander reported he was again under attack. The battalion commander in effect had no reserve other than artillery due to the disposition of the two companies out of supporting distance. Thus he recommended to the brigade commander that the brigade reserve be alerted and also requested that the Reconnaissance Platoon of the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry accompany the three personnel carriers for protection and an immediate reaction force. Battalion was unable to get an accurate estimate of the situation, the size of the enemy force, or how the defense was holding. At approximately 0515 hours, Captain Harrison reported he had many men wounded and some killed. At 0525 hours, Company B was ordered by battalion to be prepared to assist Company A on order. Brigade informed the battalion that the reconnaissance platoon would be ready to go at first light. At 0530 hours, the company commander reported that the main attack had ceased and that he was receiving only sporadic small arms and mortar fire. Captain Harrison also informed battalion that he was regrouping into a smaller perimeter and he needed the personnel carriers for medical evacuation, as a landing zone for aerial evacuation could not be secured at that time. At 0545 hours, a report was received

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from brigade that the flare ship was on station and a forward air controller was airborne. The company commander was then instructed to turn the company over to his executive officer, First Lieutenant James T. Geff, so that he could receive medical attention. At approximately 0550 hours, the forward air controller reported receiving fire from the area northeast of Company A's position. Battalion requested and received an artillery mission on this location. At approximately 0535 hours, battalion directed the company to keep firing artillery all around the perimeter and on likely avenues of escape for the Viet Cong. Also, several likely areas were selected and fire missions called by the battalion artillery liaison officer. At 0600 hours, the reconnaissance platoon and the three personnel carriers departed for the Company A area with the battalion S3 and five aid men. The battalion commander went airborne in an OH-23 at 0600 hours to guide the column in the growing light. The battalion surgeon was directed to establish an emergency aid station at the airstrip at TRUNG LAP. At 0650 hours, the reconnaissance platoon with the personnel carriers arrived in the Company A location. The reconnaissance platoon immediately conducted a sweep through the company position without Viet Cong contact and established a blocking position approximately 300 meters to the east of the company perimeter. The landing zone was secured by Company A at approximately 0630 hours and Dustoff medical evacuation commenced at 0700 hours, supplemented by other helicopters in support of brigade. Company A had nine killed and 45 wounded in the battle. Three men, including the 3d Platoon Leader, later died of wounds. The company was occupying the positions to which they had withdrawn after the main attack. Both patrols were still in the vicinity of their respective ambush sites. During this period, the wounded were treated and evacuated. The dead were placed in one of the personnel carriers. Battalion ordered the remaining men back to the vicinity of their original perimeter to police the battlefield of both US and Viet Cong bodies, equipment, and documents. Leaders researched and attempted to reconstruct the battle on the ground for the benefit of the brigade and battalion commanders. Airborne observers searched with negative results for any signs of the withdrawing Viet Cong force and artillery fire missions were fired on likely avenues of escape to the north and east. At 1050 hours, Company B, 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry arrived in the area and was attached upon arrival to the 2d Battalion, 27th Infantry. The mechanized company was instructed to sweep east and north in search of the Viet Cong. The search was conducted with negative contact. Large pools of blood and discarded bandages were found in many areas. Upon completion of the sweep, the mechanized company occupied a blocking position to the north in the vicinity of XT 604240. Company A reported all personnel accounted for and all machineguns on hand, but the status of other small arms was doubtful at the time and an accurate report could not be made. At approximately 1100 hours, Company B was airlifted to the area and occupied the original perimeter. Company B then

conducted a detailed search of the battle area covering approximately 1000 meters to the front of all positions. Company A was extracted by helicopter at approximately 1130 hours and returned to the base area at CU CHI. At 1200 hours, the reconnaissance platoon, 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry was detached on brigade order and returned to TRUNG LAP. The personnel carriers also returned carrying the US dead and Viet Cong and US equipment. Time prohibited Company B from completing the search detail. This company was airlifted to the base area commencing at 1400 hours. Company B, 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 5th Infantry secured the landing zone for the extraction of this battalion's Company B and then reverted to brigade control. The battalion commander and S3 returned to base area in an OH-23 after the last lift of Company B was airborne. At approximately 1500 hours, the battalion vehicular elements returned in a brigade controlled convoy to the base area.

#### 4. Comments on the Viet Cong.

a. Viet Cong Units. An analysis of captured documents reveals the enemy which conducted the attack against Company A probably was the 1st Battalion, 165 A (Main Force) Regiment. Prior to the action, Order of Battle information on this battalion indicated that it consisted of three companies with an estimated strength of 400. The unit was estimated armed with the following weapons and equipment:

	<u>NOMENCLATURE</u>	<u>QUANTITY</u>
(1)	60mm Mortars	5
(2)	81mm Mortars	3
(3)	50 cal Machineguns	2
(4)	50 cal Antiaircraft Guns	5
(5)	12.7mm Machineguns	4
(6)	30 cal Machineguns	4
(7)	Submachine Guns	10
(8)	57mm Recoilless Rifles	7
(9)	Grenade Launchers	3
(10)	PRC-10 Radios	3

The mixture of uniforms worn by the attacking force indicate perhaps the unit was reinforced for the attack with a local guerrilla force and/or elements of the 2d Battalion, 165 A Regiment which had reportedly operated in conjunction with the 1st Battalion, 165 A Regiment on other occasions.

b. Viet Cong Casualties. The search located 30 Viet Cong bodies. It is difficult to estimate the number of Viet Cong that were actually killed or seriously wounded. Many pools of blood, bloodstained bandages, and pieces of bodies were found in virtually all the areas around the perimeter. Unusually heavy Viet Cong casualties were indicated in the areas

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in front of the 1st Platoon position on the east and the killing zone of the 2d Platoon ambush patrol in the north. Significantly, no bodies were found in the vicinity of the ambush patrol, but tell-tale signs such as brains and internal organs indicated that many Viet Cong were serious casualties. Trails in the dirt showed where bodies had been dragged away. Artillery fire on likely Viet Cong withdrawal routes beyond the search area undoubtedly increased their casualties. In addition to the 30 VC bodies found, an estimate of 40 more KIA was made. We believe though, that VC casualties were two or three times that number.

c. Viet Cong Arms and Equipment. Spent shell piles indicated that machineguns were used in the Viet Cong attack on all sides of the perimeter. Linked ammunition and drum magazines demonstrated that both US and Chinese machineguns were probably used. Spent shell casings indicated that 57mm recoilless rifles were used in the attacks from the east and south. A pile of Chinese 60mm mortar ammunition verified the location of the mortar observed and destroyed by artillery fire during the battle. Two Viet Cong bodies lay nearby without weapons. One of these Viet Cong was laden with M79 ammunition and had a metal whistle on a chain lying next to him. Both had been killed by indirect fire. Magazines and ammunition recovered from Viet Cong dead indicated that they had a great deal of ammunition and were armed with M79s, M1 rifles, 7.62 weapons, .31 cal weapons, .30 cal carbines, BARs, and Russian rifles. Chinese hand grenade and rifle grenade duds were found in abundance on all sides of the perimeter. In addition to the 57mm recoilless rifles and 60mm mortars, Chinese rocket launchers were used. The Viet Cong were in mixed uniforms and web gear. Some were in fatigues-type uniforms, others in the peasant's "calico noir". Some wore helmets, others soft caps. Many documents and identification cards were recovered. The Viet Cong suffered additional casualties while extracting their load, wounded and weapons. Viet Cong machetes, entrenching tools, ponchos, hammocks, medical items, gas masks, sandals, clothing, and knives were among the items also recovered.

d. Viet Cong Control Measures. The Viet Cong apparently used guides in much the same way we do in a night attack. They move in a tight column to release points which have been marked earlier by advance scouts. At these release points the Viet Cong appeared to deploy under the direction of a guide who directed the movement by hand and arm signals. In several instances, trees were marked with white bandages in what appeared to be the location to mount a machinegun. Smoke and red hand fired flares were used in breaking contact, but the exact significance of these signals was not determined. A whistle was blown just a few minutes before bugles were sounded both in the north and south. The bugles obviously were a signal to break contact and withdraw. Both were heard at approximately 0500 hours.

## 5. Commanders Analysis.

a. The Viet Cong attack was the first major offensive operation conducted against any element of the 25th Inf Division. It was a deliberate, well planned, and coordinated battalion-size attack against an isolated company with the objective of annihilating that unit. The Viet Cong timetable seemed to call for them to break contact and withdraw prior to daylight, before available reaction maneuver forces could be deployed and the full effects of supporting weapons and tactical air could be brought to bear on those forces. The Viet Cong knew the approximate strength of the friendly unit and the relative locations of other units in the vicinity. They know the area and trench systems well and were familiar with the location of the Company A defensive positions, and apparently guessed the location of the company command post. The Viet Cong were not familiar with the location of the ambush patrols and probed earlier to determine their location. The shift of Sgt Napier's ambush patrol in the north 100 to 150 meters west after an early probe was a surprise to the Viet Cong and considerably blunted the attack from this direction before it got started. Probing action against the ambush patrol on the east did not readily identify that patrol's location; however, an opportunity for this patrol to inflict considerable damage on the Viet Cong attack force approaching from the southeast between the patrol and the defensive perimeter was never exploited. Communications from platoon to squad, platoon to platoon, company to ambush patrol, and company to battalion was poor resulting in a void of information. Platoon leaders were not informed as to the overall situation. Information as to what was happening throughout the company failed to reach the company commander. Consequently, once the battle was joined there was a general lack of responsiveness at company level. The platoons virtually fought separate battles in their own areas. This made difficult an analysis of the situation and orders by leaders at all levels. Further, it caused a void at battalion level which made it difficult for the battalion commander to make the necessary decisions which would influence battle. While nearly 700 artillery rounds were fired in support of the company's defense, the 4.2 inch mortars went virtually unused. 4.2 inch mortar illumination missions were fired and then ceased at the request of the company commander. The 81mm Mortar Section could not provide close-in defensive fires from any location within the perimeter, they were not dug in properly to maintain fire while under attack, and sufficient ammunition was not on hand to provide the volume of fire necessary to be effective in an all out defense. Most company size perimeters will be too small to be supported by 81mm mortars if they are within the perimeter. The trench line occupied by the defending forces was well known by the Viet Cong and they attacked the salients, the traditional weakest

points. The company did not take steps to dig firing pits into the trench system that would have provided an extra measure of defense against the Viet Cong firing down the trench line. A single rifle company cannot afford the loss of foxhole strength to provide reinforced squad-size ambush patrols. This is another reason why a company is not the ideal unit for an independent perimeter. The patrol requirement is one of the main reasons a company must be reinforced on such missions. In this case, this lack of foxhole strength was somewhat balanced by the springing of a devastating ambush to the north; however, the opportunity to spring an equally successful ambush in the east came and went without exploitation. As a general rule, a company should be sufficiently reinforced with one or two platoons to provide these necessary ambushes and a company reserve without biting into organic company strength when it is established in an isolated 360 degree perimeter. Generally, battalions rather than separate companies should operate in such areas. The determination by brigade that required the company to coil in a defensive perimeter was made after the company had been issued a warning order by battalion that it would move back into a battalion perimeter. The order to assume a perimeter defense in their present location was issued very late in the afternoon, at approximately 1700 hours, on 4 April, and allowed little time for proper reconnaissance and establishment of the best possible defense positions. The decision to place an independent company in a perimeter must be made in time for proper troop leading procedures to take place at all subordinate echelons. Timing will vary with each situation, however, a five or six hour reaction time should be allowed battalions. While the company fought the battle with more than its normal basic load of ammunition, additional bulk ammunition had been moved out to the vicinity of the new area in anticipation of the move the company would make. Reaction time did not permit its return. Battalion has established an SOP resupply package for night defense that heavily increases the number of Claymore mines, machinegun ammunition, and grenades on hand for the company. Items such as additional LAWs, flamethrowers, trip flares, radios, and 81mm mortar ammunition also will be delivered for night defense. All these items are to be re-packed and picked up again in the morning.

b. Brigade should always have a ready reaction force that has been designated by fragmentary order with a "be prepared" mission to assist or support units in the operational area on very short notice. The tenacity and combat experience of Company A resulted in a constant heavy volume of fire placed on Viet Cong assault elements all around the perimeter and prevented the company from being overrun by a determined, well armed force of superior strength. While the Viet Cong breached the line in several areas by systematically reducing the defenders, it is interesting to note that they were unable to exploit these penetrations. This probably was primarily a result of well directed

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artillery fire and the superior small arms fire that plugged the gaps. The company commander, in spite of the difficulties, remained calm and kept his command group well organized and functional. Many fragmentary orders were issued by direct contact with representatives from the platoons. Captain Harrison provided for alternates to assume the duties of calling for and adjusting fire in the event the forward observers became casualties, as they indeed did. This resulted in constant artillery support which probably tipped the scales.

6. Conclusions and Lessons Learned.

a. Evacuation of wounded during the attack must be delayed. There is little more that can be done for these casualties at the platoon or company command post that cannot be done in their firing positions. Every available man must be kept on the perimeter shooting. This includes individuals who are lightly wounded. In addition, evacuating the wounded tends to confuse men along the line who feel they missed getting the word about a withdrawal.

b. A night defense supplemental package brought in when the unit stops to defend and taken out in the early morning is a must. However, the decision must be made early enough so that this package can be brought in before darkness. This battalion has established an SOP package consisting of the following items:

- 20,000 rounds 5.56mm for M16 rifles.
- 6,000 rounds 7.62mm for M14E2 rifles.
- 12,000 rounds 7.62 MLB for M60 machineguns (2000 rounds per machinegun).
- 1 .50 caliber machine gun and 5,000 rounds of ammunition.
- 500 hand grenades.
- 400 40mm rounds for M79 grenade launchers.
- 50 rounds of 81mm HE per mortar.
- 25 Claymore mines.
- 30 LA's.
- 30 trip flares.
- 2 flame throwers.
- Extra radios.

c. Defensive fires must be well planned for all indirect fire weapons. One technique is to plan priority fires for the artillery to the front of one platoon, 4.2 inch mortar to another, and 81mm mortar for the remaining platoon. This should insure accurate and responsive fire in all sectors. The flexibility of massing or shifting any combination of these fires to support any one platoon is still a reality.

after any contact with the Viet Cong was proven valid. The ambush patrol in the north was shifted west and later caught the Viet Cong by surprise. The Viet Cong appeared to avoid the patrol's original location where contact had been made earlier.

e. The occupation of existing fortifications and trench networks dug by the Viet Cong invites trouble. They are familiar with them and know the weak spots well. When limited time requires that Viet Cong fortifications to be used as hasty shelters, hasty firing pits should be cut into the trench to lessen the vulnerability from fire down the trench lines. Claymore mines should be set up in the trenches to cover areas which cannot be physically occupied. Units cannot "hunker down" and stop digging after dark, but must take the calculated risk of the noise involved and continue their defensive preparations, covered by outposts.

f. The employment of a rifle company without reinforcements in an isolated defensive perimeter invites Viet Cong attacks. Its validity is suspect. Actually this may have potential as a good way to "bait" a sizeable Viet Cong force, but reaction forces must be predesignated by higher headquarters and have coordinated plans to respond immediately. The reaction force must be capable of being effectively deployed and fighting in the hours of darkness, during the first hour after engagement. It cannot wait until first light because the Viet Cong base their attack on the assumption that such a force will wait.

g. It is appropriate to emphasize another point here. The concept of inviting the elusive Viet Cong to attack the "bait" of a smaller unit in a good defensive position is not new. In the Indochina war the French tactics, and finally their strategy, degenerated into essentially the use of that doctrine against the Viet Minh. The concept became known as "The Illusion of Vinh Yinh", in which the French waited for a set piece Viet Minh attack against strong defensive positions. The French chose the place to fight, "hunkered down" and had all the tactical advantages of the defender. The initiative remained with the guerilla, however, who chose to give or refuse battle still on his own terms. In reality this technique was an overt confession of the French inability to apply the principle of the OFFENSIVE and find and fix the enemy by any other techniques. It failed to be decisive. After a few stinging defeats, the Viet Minh reaction generally consisted of either one of two courses of action:

(1) The Viet Minh would not take the "bait", refused combat, but instead invariably attacked the lines of communications to the strong point, and "nickle and dimed" the logisticians and their security elements to death. Often more French elements were involved in keeping the lines of communications open than were involved in the defensive perimeter itself. Today with helicopters, this line of communications problem is lessened

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somewhat, but the Viet Cong reaction could well be essentially the same, only more difficult for them to accomplish.

(2) The Viet Minh massed sufficient combat power to accomplish their objective and annihilate the defensive position. (The battle of Dien Bien Phu was an example of this on the strategic level.)

h. Personnel carriers attached to an isolated company defensive perimeter greatly enhances the unit's ability to react. The OEM machineguns augment the company's firepower. Further, a vehicle is available to move casualties, equipment or ammunition, as may be required.

i. Machinegun positions must be especially well prepared and protected. They become the prime targets of Viet Cong small arms and grenades.

j. Land marks such as buildings should be avoided as command post locations. They are usually well known by the enemy and easy to identify as targets for accurate fire.

k. Platoon sergeants and squad leaders must be familiar with the frequencies for the company and battalion command nets and the artillery fire direction net. In a matter of minutes, one of these leaders may be the platoon leader.

l. There exists a definite need for the radio communications from platoon to squad in the defense. Even the unreliable AN/PRC-6 is better than no communications. Extra AN/PRC-10 radios could be brought in for use by the squads during the night.

m. A company can employ all the Claymore mines it can get in the defense. They can be employed in depth with the majority being placed right next to the defensive foxholes. As mentioned above, they also would be useful to place in Viet Cong trenches leading into the position which cannot be covered adequately or occupied.

n. All patrol leaders should be given the battalion command net frequency in case the company command net ceases to function. Battalion can advise the patrol of the situation and provide indirect fire support, as may be required.

o. Squad leaders must be brutal in their insistence that positions are well prepared and improvements are continually made. When the situation demands, such improvements may be continued after dark covered by patrols and outposts. A calculated risk must be taken between the noise and lack of security involved, and the need of an adequate defensive position.

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p. It is unlikely that patrols will be able to withdraw back to friendly lines when the Viet Cong are conducting a major attack. Adequate ammunition must be on hand to sustain the patrols in such situations. These patrols become a ready reserve for the company commander and can be used as maneuver elements to ambush withdrawing Viet Cong units if alerted by the company command post. They also can be maneuvered into positions which would place the Viet Cong in a devastating cross fire.

q. Early probing action may be a prelude to a major attack and cannot be taken lightly, particularly, if Viet Cong are encountered at about the same time in several areas in the vicinity of the defensive perimeter.

r. 0400 hours appears to be a good "stand-to" time for defending units.

s. Time permitting, companies should prepare hasty supplementary positions. In any event, the company defense order should include the location of secondary positions that platoons will withdraw to in the event withdrawal becomes necessary.

t. The value of indirect fire cannot be overstated. Commanders should fire artillery and mortars on all suspected avenues of approach or escape and likely assembly areas during and after the attack.

u. The bayonet for the M16 rifle should be issued as soon as possible. One more attack by Viet Cong and, due to a shortage of ammunition, the bayonet would have become Company A's primary weapon.

v. Plans to attack the withdrawing enemy must be aggressively executed. Aggressive follow up by major units of a brigade task force to find and fix the enemy is a necessity. After a major action, the Viet Cong force can be assumed to be low on ammunition and faced with immense problems of reorganization, evacuating dead and wounded, and hiding from a fresh pursuing force. All other plans should be altered to take advantage of this unique opportunity. This appears to be an excellent time to employ armor and mechanized infantry in conjunction with widely scattered Eagle flights of reinforced platoon size with ready airmobile reaction forces on standby. This reaction force must be capable of attacking and fighting in the darkness that the Viet Cong invariably uses to cover his withdrawal. Tanks and personnel carriers with starlight driving devices, or even with lights on, should be considered.

w. In conjunction with the above, adequate time must be allowed for a detailed battlefield search in the general vicinity of the action. Valuable documents, weapons, and equipment can

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x. Consideration should be given to leaving a sizable stay behind force in an ambush position. Airlift extraction could be feined.

z. The Viet Cong employ unarmed grenadiers whose sole mission appears to be that of hurling grenades and recovering weapons. There exists a potential in utilizing 106mm recoilless rifle personnel in the same role for a defending US unit.

aa. Small pressure mines placed on the ground approximately 25 meters from friendly positions will assist in the night defense. They can be recovered in the morning without danger if no attack occurs.

7. Recommendation. That the contents of this summary be brought to the attention of all units and commanders and personnel as appropriate.



BOYD T. BASHORE  
Lt Col, Infantry  
Commanding

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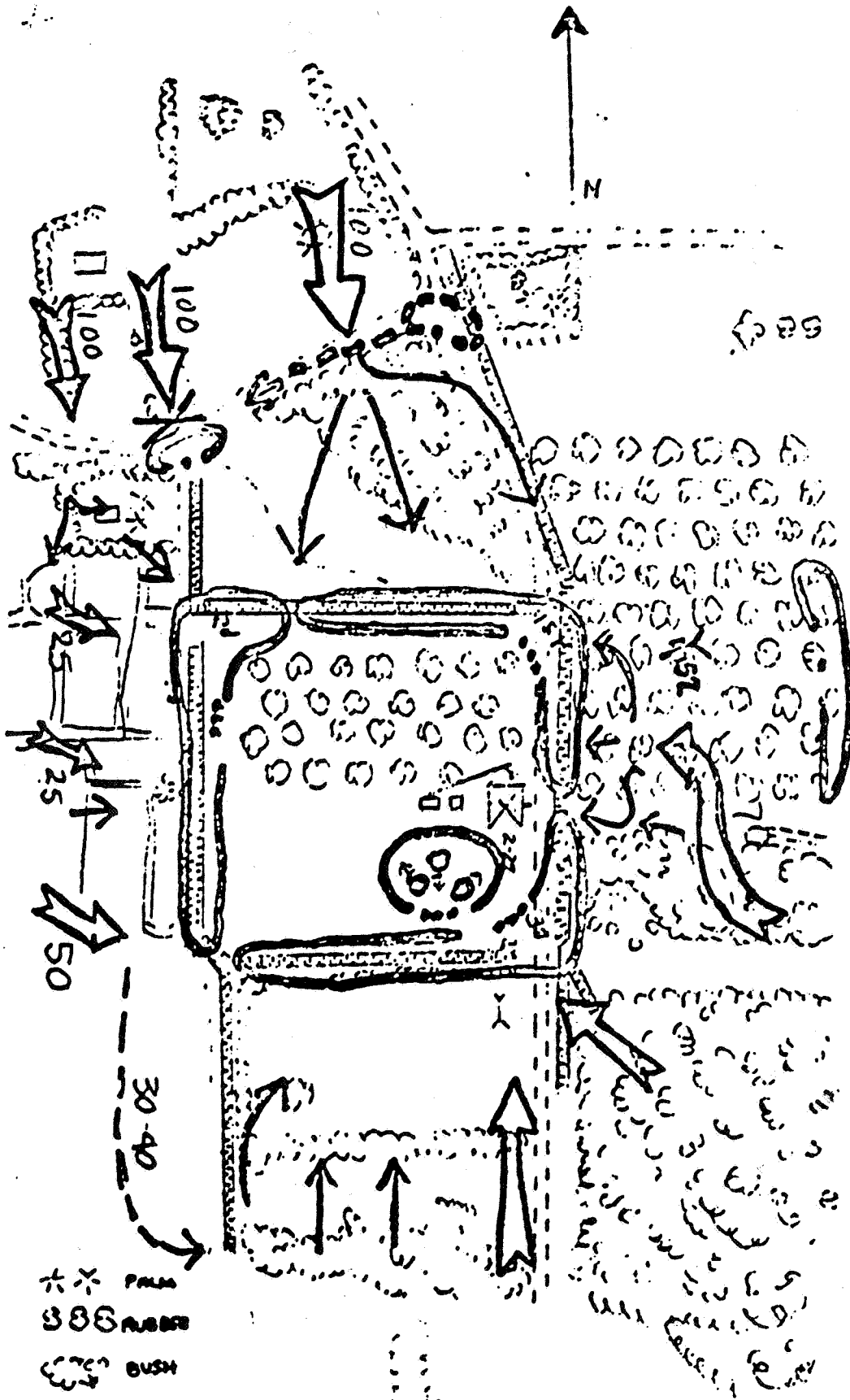
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KEY PERSONNEL

Company Headquarters

Captain Willard E. Harrison Jr.  
1st Lieutenant James T. Goff  
PSG Willard F. Walter  
SGT Harley B. Work Jr.  
SSG John McNichol  
PFC Keith R. Morris

SGT Charles E. Petersen  
PFC Woodrow Butler

SP5 Keith W. Kauffman

Position

Commanding Officer  
Executive Officer  
First Sergeant  
Commo Sergeant  
Artillery Forward Observer  
Artillery Radio-Telephone  
Operator  
4.2 Forward Observer  
4.2 Radio-Telephone  
Operator  
Senior Aid Man

1st Platoon

1st Lieutenant Jim H. Hrogdon  
SSG Robert T. Ferguson  
SGT John E. Harris  
SSG John P. Morgan  
SGT Chris J. Heil  
SSG James E. Hatcher Jr.

Platoon Leader  
Platoon Sergeant  
1st Squad Leader  
2d Squad Leader  
3d Squad Leader  
Weapons Squad Leader

2d Platoon

2d Lieutenant Robert Duffie  
PSG Johnny R. Holland  
SSG John Rivera  
SSG Vincent Napier  
SGT Rodman L. Barnes  
SSG Bernard L. Hoopli

Platoon Leader  
Platoon Sergeant  
1st Squad Leader  
2d Squad Leader  
3d Squad Leader  
Weapons Squad Leader

3d Platoon

2d Lieutenant Thomas Blevins  
SSG Luis Mejias  
SSG Ignacio Durand  
SSG Margarito Davila  
SGT Richard F. Ritch Jr.  
SP4 Russell J. Webb

Platoon Leader  
Platoon Sergeant  
1st Squad Leader  
2d Squad Leader  
3d Squad Leader  
Weapons Squad Leader

Weapons Platoon

1st Lieutenant Wilburn L. Whitten  
MSG Jimmy L. Baxter  
SSG William Dudley  
SSG Harry A. Smith

Platoon Leader  
Platoon Sergeant  
81 Section Leader  
106 Section Leader

Inclosure 2 to Special Summary of Action, A/2/27, 5 Apr 66

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