

RICHARD THOMAS BUSENLEHNER**Class 20-66**

RICHARD THOMAS BUSENLEHNER
is honored on Panel 30E, Row 38 of
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Full Name: RICHARD THOMAS
BUSENLEHNER
Wall Name: RICHARD T BUSENLEHNER
Date of Birth: 5/24/1946
Date of Casualty: 11/20/1967
Home of Record: ROWENA
County of Record: RUNNELS COUNTY
State: TX
Branch of Service: ARMY
Rank: 1LT
Casualty Country: SOUTH VIETNAM
Casualty Province: KONTUM



1Lt Busenlehner was killed in action while serving as a Forward Observer with an Infantry Rifle Company from the 173rd Airborne Brigade. He was from Battery A, 3rd Battalion, 319th Artillery.

Richard is buried at St Boniface Cemetery in Rowena, Texas

Just Remembering Richie...

Richie and I first met as candidates attending artillery Officers Candidate School at Ft Sill, Oklahoma in February of 1966. He was an energetic nineteen-year-old so full of energy he couldn't help but draw attention from the upper classmen and the TAC (tactical) officers. I was a Special Forces buck sergeant and also drew unwanted attention from the same group of "Redbirds" and TACs which made Richie and I kindred spirits from the very beginning of our friendship.

All the extra attention Richie and I was receiving placed a huge burden on us and it showed during classes. Richie was offered a two week set back after having barely failed a very difficult section of instruction by tenths of a point. He became discouraged and was going to quit OCS, but we talked and he decided to gut it out. He ended up graduating as one of the top officers in his class 20-66 and very well liked by his peers.

One of the traditions at the artillery OCS was for an airborne qualified candidate underclassman to polish the master parachutist wings embedded in the cement at

the base of the flagpole in front of the Mess Hall. To be selected for the detail was a great honor among the airborne candidates because it came with a tremendous amount of abuse from the “leg” candidates. Richie witnessed the extreme harassment on a number of occasions and told me the courage, pride and determination shown by the airborne candidates performing that detail was one of the main reasons he went to Jump School in the spring of 1967—and then volunteered to serve with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Vietnam.

There were three Medal of Honor and fifteen Distinguished Service Cross recipients from the Battle for Dak To. Richie is not a Medal of Honor winner, but he was awarded the Silver Star and a couple Purple Hearts. Richie is what makes the term “American Paratrooper” a title to be proud of. It is because of the “Richies” who served as paratroopers in all our wars since WWII, humping jungles, mountains and deserts without ever saying— I quit—that allows for the present day paratrooper fresh out of Jump School to walk with pride wearing his silver wings for the first time. The “Combat Richies” have paid the price for that first walk—today’s paratroopers must keep that tradition going...

Here’s a small portion of 1st Lieutenant Richard Thomas Busenlehner’s combat story and what a proud story it is.

Richie was assigned as the forward observer with “A” Company 2/503rd Infantry as soon as he arrived in-country as a 2nd Lieutenant early in 1967. I had served as the executive officer at Duc-Co Special Forces Camp and was wounded. I decided to stay in-country and get some artillery time. Because I couldn’t hump the jungle with my leg wound, I was assigned as the S-2 (Intelligence) officer/air observer for the 3/319th Artillery. Richie and I met briefly when his company was being deployed for the below mission. He was happy and very proud to be serving with a combat airborne outfit.

173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEPARATE)

APO San Francisco 96250

Subject: Combat Operations After Action Report - Battle of The Slopes, Hill 1338

Task Organization: Companies A and C, 2nd Battalion; Company B, (Reserve) 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade

Date of Operations: 18 - 22 June 1967.

Location: YB 988153, ZB 001171, Map Series L7015, Sheet 6538 III.

Sources, Excerpts:

SKY SOLDIERS, BATTLES OF DAK-TO

Copyright 1988 By Lawrence D. Okendo.

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DAK TO, America's Sky Soldiers in South Vietnam's Central Highlands

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BATTLE OF THE SLOPES

Background Information:

Arriving early June in Dak-To proper, the Sky Soldiers of the 2/503rd Airborne Infantry were briefed. Intelligence reported an unknown enemy force had attacked U.S. and CIDG installations in the Dak-To area with mortar and rocket fire during the period of June 17-21, 1967. The enemy was estimated to be within the 2/503rd AO.

Mission: Search and Destroy:

The 2/503rd Infantry was to conduct search and destroy operations against possible enemy forces and installations south of the Dak-To Special Forces Camp. The concept was to deploy the A/2/503rd and C/2/503rd Infantry by helicopter and assault the area on 18th and 20th of June, respectively. B/2/503rd Infantry was to remain as the reaction force, and rotate with the line units when instructed.

From 18th, through 21st, June, both Companies had negative contact, and on 211700H (June 21st, at 5 p.m.), A Company received orders to return overland to Dak-To proper (Base Camp). The Commander of A Company chose a route that would allow him to close not later than 221500H.

Many are the facts of war that darkens the path of history. The Battle of the Slopes (dubbed by the Sky Soldiers) in Dak-To, Kontum Province on June 22, 1967, is no exception. John L. Leppelman of C/2/503rd made this report, "We moved through the hills of Dak-To, not keeping track of time. It was an endless search for Charlie and occasionally taking sniper fire with no head on contact" These hills were actually mountains, steep, muddy and leech infested. We were usually under triple canopy jungles which made it appear dark and dreary."

Intelligence information indicated that the enemy situation prior to the operation were elements of the 24th NVA Regiment, 304th VC Battalion, 200th VC artillery Battalion and H-15 LF Battalion. The enemy had the capability to attack in up to regimental strength, to defend and reinforce with above mentioned elements, and to withdraw at the time and place of his choosing.

The Sky Soldiers arrived in the Dak-To area with little or no knowledge of the North Vietnamese Regular Army or their capabilities. In early June there were solid indications that the B-3 front was moving the bulk of its regiments from Laos and Cambodia into the Central Highlands under the control of the 1st NVA Division. These were well trained and seasoned soldiers.

On June 21, A and C Company made their laager site in one common perimeter on a ridge extending perpendicular to Dak-To proper about 2,000 meter away. As they were setting up their positions, both Companies sent out their clearing and reconnaissance patrols in front and around their respective areas. The patrols were an insurance that the area was clear of enemy activity prior to the Sky Soldiers digging in for the night. Shortly after the patrols returned, SP4 Cook of C/2/503rd accidentally strayed outside the safety of the perimeter and was cut down by friendly fire.

Some of the tragedies of war are at times unexplainable and much less justifiable. Some of the tragedies are leadership foul-ups, troops being jumpy from prior actions, or troops being tired and weary. There are many other factors that can be a major cause for such accidents. The well trained Sky Soldiers kept accidents to the minimum.

The morning of June 22, the Commanders got together for their briefing of

respective AO's and final instructions for the mission ahead. C Company was to continue their search and destroy mission and A Company was to return to base camp by overland. Captain Milton commanding A Company had selected his route so that his Company could close at Dak-To base camp NLT 1500 hours. The night before, the men were told they'd be returning to Dak To via the same trail they'd been monitoring for the past few days. It was gospel among the grunts to avoid repeat use of trails. The crafty enemy frequently booby-trapped them or set up ambushes along their length. Actually, Captain Milton had little choice in his Company's route of march. The ridge finger they were on had such steep sides, covered with the typical dense jungle growth that any other route would have taken several days to traverse. He gave his Officers and NCOs their final instructions prior to moving out.

Milton assigned Lieutenant Judd's 2d Platoon to the point position. Next came 3d Platoon led by Lieutenant Hood. Milton's CP group would follow, and behind them would come Weapons Platoon. Lieutenant Sexton's 1st Platoon was given the task of spreading the CS crystals over the LZ and laager site before falling in at the column's rear.

At 0625 Lieutenant Judd started off. As the tail end of his platoon disappeared downhill into the jungle, Hood started his platoon forward. The Weapons Platoon members, all eighteen of them, squatted along the trail waiting their turn to move. Lieutenant Sexton's platoon had donned their gas masks and was spreading the tear gas around the LZ.

As the Companies moved out from their night laager site, SP4 John L. Leppelman became the point man for C/2/503rd. As his Squad moved out, he reported, "As we moved and wound our way through A Company's positions we greeted our buddies with idle guff and chatter, many of whom we went to jump school with or came to Nam (Vietnam) with.

We continued our search and destroy mission from ridge to ridge, while A Company moved down the slope towards base camp at Dak-To, some 2,000 meters away. A few hours into our mission the point element started taking sniper fire and within a 20 minute period we had 3 WIA's. One was serious, he got hit through the neck. The area was triple canopy jungles and the lower ground area was heavy brush and foliage, just too thick to cut out an LZ so we had to transport him (the WIA) on a make shift stretcher. We made the stretcher by cutting two poles long enough to carry a person then rolling both poles around the edge of a poncho till it was wide enough for a person. We continued to move on our AO, then suddenly we got a radio call from A Company that they were in heavy contact with an entrenched NVA force. Shortly after we got another call from Colonel James Steverson, Commander of the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, to move out to assist A Company."

A Company's Point Squad moved down near a well used trail, shortly after they walked into five or six NVA soldiers crossing the trail, the startled NVA opened fire. Contact was established with an estimated 5-6 NVA at 0658 hours.

The area was steep with single to triple canopy jungles, thick bamboo, and heavy low foliage. The sun was just breaking through the tops of the jungles sending flowing eloquent rays of light down to the jungle floor. The peacefulness of the jungle turned into a chorus of automatic weapons firing, the sound sending vibrations

throughout the Dak-To mountains.

Captain Milton radioed Judd. The young lieutenant reported that his point squad had walked smack into ten to fifteen NVA coming toward them on the same trail. The NVA had opened up first, hitting some of Judd's men. He didn't know how many, or how badly. Judd had put his remaining men into a defensive perimeter.

After getting off the radio with Judd, Milton radioed the battalion TOC. He reported the contact to Capt Ken Smith.

Colonel Partain and his executive officer, Maj. H. Glenn Watson, were also present in the TOC. While Partain and Smith plotted the coordinates in order to bring in supporting artillery fire, Watson stayed on the radio with Milton.

Major Watson was not overly concerned. Alpha seemed to have the situation under control. He advised Captain Milton to "develop the fight and keep us informed."

A Company's Point Squad was in the middle of a firefight, and the startled NVA's fire was ineffective at the moment, Capt. Milton ordered the 2nd Platoon to assist. As the remainder of the 2nd Platoon moved down to assist, they in turn came under heavy fire from the front and both flanks.

After a brief period, and sizing up the situation, Capt. Milton ordered the 2nd Platoon to withdraw, requesting heavy artillery fire to cover their movement back up the ridge. The artillery fire initiated, gave only minimum results, since the enemy was at close proximity with the Sky Soldiers. The 3rd Platoon was ordered to link up with the 2nd Platoon and assist them to move up ridge to a more defensible area.

Then both elements began moving back up hill approximately seventy five (75) meters and forming a common perimeter along the ridgeline, with 2nd Platoon on the west and 3rd Platoon on the east.

At 0810 hours the elements of the 2nd and 3rd Platoon came under attack from the north by an estimated reinforced NVA Platoon. The attack was repulsed, but renewed with increased intensity. As the attack continued for the next half hour.

Captain Milton reported to Battalion that his two lead elements were in heavy contact.

Based on the information he had, Partain called in an air strike. In order to bring in the jets, or fast movers, the artillery had to be shifted while the planes were in the area. Not everyone thought air strikes should be used. Because air strikes were less accurate than artillery, the NVA knew that the closer they moved to an allied unit, the safer they were.

Major Watson knew this, too. When the order for use of the fast movers came to him, he thought it was a mistake. "Negative," he responded to the order to shift the artillery.

General Deane, who had arrived in the area, came up on the Battalion net. "Shift the artillery," Deane ordered, overriding Watson.

From 0820 to 0825 the jets dropped their bombs along the east side of the ridge. At 0835 Huey gunships arrived on the scene. To help mark their Platoons' perimeter for the close-in support from the gunships' weapons systems, Lieutenants Judd and Hood had their men toss out smoke grenades, or "pop smoke" in the grunts' jargon. Another reality about fighting in the highlands became apparent. The thick jungle dispersed the smoke so widely that the gunships couldn't get an accurate fix on the Paratroopers' location.

On the ground the effects were disastrous. The rising columns of smoke told the NVA right where the Americans were. Specialist Patterson noticed the increase in small-arms fire immediately. Seconds later NVA mortar rounds began crashing into the perimeter, tearing American flesh. Amid the renewed cries of "Medic!"

Paratroopers were yelling, "No more smoke. No more smoke." But it was too late.

The NVA now had an accurate fix on their positions.

Even while the gunships were firing blindly into the jungle around them, the NVA were massing for another ground attack. At 0850 Lieutenant Judd radioed back to Milton, "Six, we're bracing for an all-out attack. We're laid out well. About a hundred gooks are getting ready to hit us."

Before Milton could respond the roar of M16 fire filled the handset. He was starting to wonder if the two platoons would make it. They had been in contact for almost two hours.

The attack was repulsed with heavy casualties to the Sky Soldiers, despite the fact that the Sky Soldiers inflicted heavy casualties on the NVA's. The NVA's kept moving through their own dead and wounded in a frenzied attack.

Air, artillery and gun-ships strikes continued throughout the firefight, to include napalm to the north side of the perimeter. At 0900 hours Captain Milton committed his 1st Platoon to relieve the pressure on the besieged 2nd and 3rd Platoons, at the same time Capt. Milton had his Weapons Platoon assist in evacuating the wounded back up the hill to his CP (command post).

The 1st Platoon had to assault through the NVA's lines to get to the embattled 2nd and 3rd Platoons perimeter. The Weapons Platoon carrying party was unable to reach the battle area. By this time the NVA had the area surrounded and continued their attack on the perimeter despite heavy losses to themselves.

As the battle progressed with A Company's Rifle Platoons being surrounded with no resupply of ammunition or ground support, Capt. Milton reported that his units were in a desperate situation requiring immediate assistance.

General Deane had arrived at the Brigade TOC by this time. Based on reports from Milton and from Partain's aerial observation, General Deane surmised that Alpha Company had not fallen into a prepared ambush but had stumbled into a moving NVA column of indeterminate size. Deane figured the main body of the NVA unit would continue its movement while holding Alpha at bay. He looked over his maps, identifying likely routes of movement, and then barked off the coordinates to the artillery liaison officer. The latter relayed those figures to 3/319th's fire direction center. The 105's poured howitzer shells into those areas, hoping to catch the fleeing NVA.

Colonel Partain reported his findings to General Deane. When Deane learned that Partain had had two choppers shot out from underneath him, he gave Partain his own chopper and crew and sent him back into the air. Before Partain departed, he ordered his remaining company, Bravo, to vacate its base security positions and chopper into an LZ north of where Alpha's three Platoons were fighting for their lives. The Commander of C Company was reporting heavy movements to their front and flanks, and were carrying dead and wounded with them, were thought to be moving too slow. Battalion ordered C Company to ignore the movements to his front and flanks and to proceed rapidly to the assistance of A Company.

Col. Steverson had alerted Bravo Company 2/503rd who was the Battalion reserve unit, back at Dak-To proper. They were making preparations and planning for their movement, since the contact area was not approachable by helicopter, nor were there any good landing zones close up to the embattled area.

At approximately 1000 hours, the forward elements of Alpha in contact with the NVA, reported they were in heavy contact and their elements were down to fifteen effective. All Platoon Leaders were killed, all Platoon Sergeants were wounded, some several times.

The 2nd Platoon Sergeant and ranking survivor directed that the wounded and the effective be moved back to the ridge, towards the Company's CP. Before action could be initiated on the request, radio contact was broken, and at 1034 hours Captain Milton reported that he had lost radio contact with his forward elements. At the same time he requested that Battalion terminate the air strikes that were pounding the western approaches to the forward positions with napalm and rockets and to use artillery instead. At this time Captain Milton's CP was not under fire but all available personnel were helping to evacuate the wounded.

Company B 2/503rd Airborne Infantry was inserted into a one ship LZ. The process of this insertion was complicated by a fire in the high kunai grass (caused by smoke grenade). The lead elements (2nd Platoon B/2/503rd) moved out of the LZ towards the battle area about 300 meters south. They received small arms fire with no casualties. Other elements of Bravo Company landed, they moved to join their 2nd Platoon which was now directing artillery fire against the NVA's.

Members of A Company reported to the CO that heavy movements were noted on the northwest portion of the perimeter. At 1030 and 1100 hours Capt. Milton made this report to Battalion and requested supporting fire in that area. He then dispatched a guide element back up the ridge to the old laager site to assist C Company 2/503rd back into A Company's perimeter. There was intermittent radio contact with the forward element of A Company and shortly after 1100 hours radio contact was permanently lost. While trying to make radio contact with his forward element, a group of survivors, led by the 2nd Platoon Sergeant reached the Company's CP. The disposition of A Company 2/503rd was now about thirty-five wounded and thirty effective, a hasty perimeter was made around the wounded. Then at 1140 hours Capt. Milton decided to move the Company further up the ridge to a better defensible position. With heavy artillery cover fire, he moved all his wounded and personnel back to a more secure position.

The new position was assaulted from the northwest at 1220 hour and again on 1245 hours, then continued with sporadic small arms fire. As some defended others were feverishly cutting out an LZ as the situation permitted, Captain Milton was wounded during this action. A medical and ammunition resupply was made into the partially completed LZ.

As Captain Willoughby's Bravo Company 2/503rd completed their insertion into their LZ the Company was ready to move out at 1205 hours and at 1240 hours they made contact with an estimated NVA Platoon, small-arms fire erupted around them before they'd covered much ground. Calling artillery support on the enemy, Willoughby also detected the NVA moving around his left, or east, flank and formed a defensive perimeter.

Air strikes were called in, at 1335 to 1440 hours the A-1E Skyraiders pounded the suspected enemy area with 500 pound bombs, CBU (Cluster bomb units), napalm and strafing runs were directed against the NVA.

At about the same time the air strikes began for Bravo, Charlie Company reached Alpha's earlier LZ. The CS crystals sown by Sexton's platoon had a disastrous effect on Leonard's Paratroopers. They donned their gas masks, but most found the mask's filters had become wet in all the downpours and were no good. Soon, half the Company were on their knees, retching and with snot running from their noses and tears pouring from their eyes.

Company C finally made it to the old laager site where the B Company party met them, then led them back to the besieged perimeter of A Company 2/503rd.

Company C 2/503rd was burdened with 2 KIA from the night before and this made their progress to assist A Company more difficult. The link up with A and C Companies were effected at 1420 hours, and immediate attention was directed towards the completion of the LZ.

A team from Company C was sent out to the battle area to locate WIA and to gain information on the enemy's situation. Their retrieval attempt was met with heavy sniper fire from the trees and surrounding area. C Company secured the area and got all WIA and the remainder of A Company 2/503rd extracted to the Brigade main base camp, and the extraction was completed at 1850 hours.

Company C 2/503rd laagered on the ridge in A Company's perimeter with one Platoon placed on ambush. And B Company laagered in their area with one Platoon in ambush. Throughout the night artillery was directed against potential NVA routes of withdrawal.

On June 23, 1967 both B and C companies 2/503rd linked up to clear the battle field, police the area for all members of their units, WIAs, KIAs, and MIAs. They discovered a horrendous situation committed by the NVA, over half the KIAs (43 personnel) had suffered head wounds inflicted at close range, indicating that the NVA had executed the wounded during the night. One MIA who was recovered alive had survived the ordeal. The coup de grace had merely stunned him, however his head was split open exposing the skull. The Sky Soldiers that were never in a firefight were sick and horrified.

Search and destroy missions conducted on June 24th through 28th, by B and C Company, the Recon Platoon 2/503rd and augmented by E/17th Calvary, produced substantial evidence of the NVA losses. Much NVA equipment was captured and U.S. equipment recovered. Intelligence findings produced documents and three NVA POW's captured by E/17th Calvary. The enemy unit was identified as the K-6 Battalion, subordinate to B-3 Front (this unit was formerly the 6th NVA Battalion, 24th NVA Regiment and detached to the B-3 Front in August 1966).

Final results of the 2/503rd Infantry action were as follows:

U.S. Losses 76 KIA, 23 WIA, 0 MIA.

GVN losses: 1 ARVN interpreter/advisor KIA, 2 CIDG KIA.

Enemy Losses: 106 NVA KIA (Body count), 407 NVA KIA (POSS), 3 POW.

“A” Company 2/503rd Infantry did not exist anymore except on paper. 1st LT Busenlehner was one of the few survivors who could still function after the Battle of the Slopes. Because I was the artillery battalion’s intelligence officer, I was detailed to de-brief Richie, so I scrounged up a few beers and Richie and I went to my tent. I will not share here all that was said, but it was very bad, especially the part where Milton’s headquarters group spent the night listening to the NVA murder our wounded paratroopers. Situations like that and the decisions made at the time can cause extreme guilt for the survivors. My friend Richie became a very troubled soul. I was not with Richie during the battle but I sat on top of our command bunker and watched the battle unfold on the jungle slope only a few thousand meters away and listened to the battle over the command radio channels along with many others in the headquarters and from just that and watching the helicopters bring in the dead to Dak-To—plus Richie’s first-hand account—I had a few problems of my own for years afterwards.

I recommended to the artillery battalion commander 1st LT Busenlehner be replaced as a forward observer and assigned to one of the batteries. The BNCO was sympathetic, but short of junior lieutenants. He promised as soon as he got replacements Richie would come off the line.

“A” Company 2/503rd was quickly refilled with replacements and put back on the line with 1LT Busenlehner being one of the few—less than a dozen—of the original company. Four months later after humping the jungles continuously around Dak-To, Richie’s company again met the NVA in force.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEPARATE)

APO San Francisco 96250

6 December 1967

Subject: Combat After Action Report - Battles of Dak To, Area of FSB 16

Task Organization: Companies A, B, C, D, 2/503d Inf, attached 173d Engineer Platoon

Date of Operations: 11 Nov 67 - 15 Nov 67

Location: Vicinity YB 818152, YB 803149, Dak To District, Kontum Province

Reporting Officer: Brigadier General Leo H. Schweiter

Supporting Forces: D/2/503d Inf, 3/319th Artillery; employed in a direct support role. 335th AHC (Cowboys) provided Assault lift, Resupply and Helicopter Gunship direct support, TAC Air on call.

Intelligence: Battalion size enemy forces were suspected in the immediate area.

Mission: The 2nd Battalion, 503d Infantry were to conduct Search and Destroy operations against enemy installations of force located near the Dak To Special Forces Camp.

Concept of Operation: Elements of the TAC CP, B and D Company, 2/503d Inf, an 81mm Mortar section and attached 173d Engineer Platoon, were to be Air Assaulted onto a hilltop, 3 miles from the Cambodian border at YB 818152 and establish Fire Base 16 from which to conduct Search and Destroy operations.

Execution: On 11 November, Elements of 2/503d, TAC CP, B and D Companies, an 81mm Mortar section and an attached 173d Engineer Platoon, Air Assaulted onto a hilltop 3 miles from the Cambodian border. They had negative enemy contact. On 12 November the remainder of the 2/503d Inf Combat Elements, A and C Companies and the 4.2 Mortar Platoon were airlifted in. B and C Companies, with the Engineer Platoon moved to a western knoll at YB 815151 and prepared to receive A Battery of the 3/319th Artillery. D Company and the TAC CP remained at YB 818152. A Co moved out on Search & Destroy operation to clear the ridge west of B and C Companies.

At approximately 0930 hrs 12 Nov, as A Company's Recon Squad commenced to ascend the ridge at YB 812149, the Scout Dog alerted SGT Lance D. Peeples. The Squad Leader ordered the dog to be released, as this was being done they received heavy automatic and small arms fire from approximately 20 meters to their left flank. The Recon Squad dispersed and took cover. SGT Peeples called LT Mathew Harrison in the lead Platoon for assistance, LT Harrison brought up his Platoon deploying them on the left flank of the ridge where the enemy fire was coming from. Linking up with the Recon Squad who was deployed in the center of the ridge, LT Harrison then had the Recon Squad move forward cautiously in an attempt to get to the high ground. They proceeded forward for only a short distance and came under heavy fire from the right flank with SGT Peeples being wounded. Simultaneous to this action, CPT Michael J. Kiley, A Co Commander, brought the 2nd Platoon up on the right hand side to link up with the Recon Squad, and the 3rd Platoon up in the rear to complete the Company perimeter. The Weapons Platoon and the Co CP formed an inner perimeter; the Recon Squad pulled back five to ten meters as the 1st and 2nd Platoons laid down a heavy base of fire, enemy fire slackened and became sporadic.

After A Company's counter-fire, CPT Kiley then had 3rd Platoon move forward through the Company and attempt to push forward on the left hand side of the ridge. They had only progressed a few meters beyond the perimeter when they were subjected to Recoiless Rifle fire, grenades, automatic and small arms fire. At the same time A Co's entire forward perimeter came under the same fire as the NVA apparently had bunkers in depth stretched across the ridge line, two men from 3rd Platoon were killed by Recoiless Rifle fire. The 3rd Platoon pulled back on orders with LT Joseph Sheridan going forward to carry back several of the wounded. During this time, B Co had sent its 2nd Platoon forward from its location at the western knoll at YB 815151 to help secure and extract A Co's wounded. PSG Jackie Siggers with a security force went back down the ridge to guide them in. 1SGT Troy L Dickens then directed them to secure the wounded and fill in the perimeter where 3rd Platoon had left. As A Company consolidated, they detected movement on both flanks down off the ridge, as the NVA were apparently attempting to encircle them. Using fire and maneuver, CPT Kiley moved A Company and the attached Platoon back down the ridge approximately 150 meters to YB 814149 out of close range of the bunkers and at a site more suitable for an LZ. At this time, 1112 hrs, Indirect fire and Air strikes were directed on suspected enemy locations.

As A Co was withdrawing and consolidating at their new location, the 1st Platoon of B Co, back on the hill at YB 815151, opened fire on some NVA who had crawled

through the thick bamboo to within 20 meters of their perimeter. CPT James Rogan, B Co Commander initially had his men check fire to ensure that he wasn't firing onto his own people, since some of the NVA had gotten in between the A and B Co elements.

The NVA pushed to within 15 meters of B Co's perimeter using automatic, small arms and B-40 rockets. C Co reinforced the 1st and 3rd Platoons of B Co, as the firefight continued for about 45 minutes with an estimated platoon of NVA pressing the attack. B and C Company fired their 81mm mortars and 90mm Recoiless Rifle in repulsing the enemy. One B Co M-60 machine gun was destroyed by enemy rocket fire.

The NVA fired 60mm mortars into the perimeter during the fight. Light sniper fire continued to be directed at A, B and C Companies throughout the early afternoon as Artillery, Mortar and supporting Air strikes were adjusted in on suspected enemy locations. At approximately 1430 hrs all contact was broken and B Co per instructions from Battalion moved out to link up with A Co. The two Co's attempted to cut an LZ but the vegetation proved too difficult, they had one chain saw, a few axes and some machetes. At 1730 hrs the 2nd Platoon of B Co returned with the wounded to C Co's location at the western knoll, YB 815151, where the wounded were dusted off. The total casualties for 12 Nov were A Co, 3 KIA, 21 WIA (evacuated) 3 WIA not needing Dustoff, B Co, 1 KIA, 11 WIA, C Co, 8 WIA and D Co, 1 WIA.

In the late afternoon C Co swept the battlefield where they and B Co had come under attack at YB 814151. They found 4 NVA (BC), 3 AK-47s, 1 RPD LMG, 1 SKS, 1 Chicom Recoiless Rifle, 10 hand grenades, one gas mask and assorted small arms rounds. At 1555 hrs, B Co captured an NVA who had been separated from his unit and was going for water, (location of capture at YB 813149). He was brought back to C Co's location along with the wounded to be extracted. CPT Kaufman, C Co's Commanding Officer, learned from the NVA captive that he was a member of one of two NVA Companies involved in the day's contact. He belonged to the 4th Bn, 174th NVA Regiment. A and B Companies had water and ammunition dropped into them at 1930 hrs. There was no other contact that night.

At 0430 hrs 13 Nov, A and B Company who were laagered together at YB 814149, about 200 meters west of where C and D were constructing FSB 16, received 12 incoming mortar rounds, however they all landed outside of the perimeter and produced no casualties. C Company also reported incoming rounds at this time however they fell short of the perimeter. A and C Co's sent out clearing patrols from their locations in the early morning. C Co CP found 4 additional NVA bodies at YB 813149 from B and C Co's contact on the 12th (total of 8 NVA KIA (BC) from this contact. A Co CP had negative findings. At 0830 hrs, A and B Company returned to FSB 16 (YB815151) to resupply for a 3 day operation. At 0819 hrs Nov 13, an Air Strike with 500lb bombs and Napalm was conducted at YB 803150 another strike was conducted at 1100 hours at YB 808151 and YB 815155 and a third strike at 1130 hrs at YB 833140. Also throughout the morning a heavy Artillery and Mortar preparation was fired at YB 808151 and on the approaching ridge lines. The high ground to the west had been well covered with Artillery and Air strikes.

The concept of the operation for 13 November was to move two Companies north

out of FSB 16, down the valley and up the next ridge. The Companies were then to turn westward and follow the ridgeline which led to the Hill at YB 812149, which A Company had been approaching on 12 November thus hitting the NVA from a different direction.

Riflemen moved out with full rucksacks and 400 rnds+ of ammunition. Grenadiers carried 30 HE rounds and 40 Shotgun rounds. Twelve hundred rounds+ were carried for each M-60 Machine Gun. All men carried at least 2 frag grenades and each carried 1 smoke grenade any color except red (red is used to mark enemy positions). Each man carried 1 trip flare and there were 12 Claymores per Platoon. B Co's Weapons Platoon remained at FSB 16 but the 2nd Platoon carried a 90mm Recoiless Rifle with 20 rounds of Canister and 2 rounds of High Explosive. From FSB 16, two 50 Cal Machine Guns and several M-60s were available to support by direct fire. In addition FSB 16 had five 81mm Mortars and a 4.2 mortar platoon (4 guns)- the range was too close for A/3/319th to support, however they did attempt to support by direct fire later in the day. TAC Air, 175mm guns, 8" Howitzers, 155 SP artillery and 105mm artillery were on call.

B Company moved out at 1300 hrs with 3 Platoons in column, the Platoons moving in two files. The order of march was 2nd Platoon, CP group, 3rd Platoon and 1st Platoon. As the terrain permitted, flank security was put out including a MG team on each side of the column. A Co then moved out behind B providing rear security. B Company moved north across the valley until they hit the next ridgeline, then they turned westward and moved 300 meters along the top of the ridgeline. The lead Platoon ran into a small area where 5 gal cans of CS powder had been dumped and 5 Cluster Bomb Units which had not gone off vic YB 812153. The CS was US manufacture, the Bn CO instructed B Co to mask and to pour out the powder to prevent the NVA from using it, the time was approximately 1500 hrs. The Company continued to move up to the ridge. About 150 meters past the CS cans, CPT Rogan, B Co Commander, halted the Co to confirm his location, select a laager site, and to allow A Company to close. The area was found not suitable for a two Company laager site because of the narrowness of the ridge and the high ground to the west. CPT Rogan instructed LT Phillip Bodine, 2nd Platoon leader, to move his Platoon with the Scout Dog 200 meters westward up the ridge to locate a better laager site. LT Bodine complied and found a good laager site. As he was checking out the site his point man spotted 2 bunkers slightly down the northern slope of the ridge. LT Bodine notified CPT Rogan of his find and that he was checking the area. At this time A Company closed on the rear of B Co. As the point man moved down towards the bunker, 2 sniper rounds were fired. LT Bodine radioed back that he had received a couple rounds of sniper fire from the NW and that he was going to attempt to get him, the time was 1557 hrs. Hearing this report CPT Rogan began to move the rest of B Company forward instructing A Company to keep closed on B Company's rear. LT Bodine then called and requested permission to fire the 90mm Recoiless Rifle at the bunkers. CPT Rogan granted permission and told him to secure the right flank and that he was sending the 3rd Platoon to secure the left. The 1st platoon would cover the rear and A Co would move closer to the 1st platoon, so as not to present an opening for the NVA to cut off and separate the two units.

When PFC Charles A Marshall fired the 90mm canister round at the NVA bunker,

heavy hostile fire broke loose. SP4 Jimmy Tice, the assistant gunner reloaded the 90mm and yelled at SP4 Robert L Ross to check the back blast area, SP4 Ross fell off the rucksack that he was sitting on, shot through the head. The heavy fire wounded LT Bodine twice and killed his RTO. There was no further radio transmission from 2nd Platoon, both radios had been damaged. Before Marshall could fire the 90mm again incoming Chicom grenades exploded around them. The 90mm crew turned their gun in the direction of incoming fire and discharged their last canister round. The assistant gunner only carried two rounds and the rest of the 90mm ammunition was scattered throughout the Platoon. His ammunition expended PFC Marshall crawled back and secured SP4 Ross's M-16 and ammunition, PFC Marshall laid behind Ross's body and began firing, when AK-47 fire began hitting near him from the rear he turned around and continued firing. The situation had become very confusing to PFC Marshall and the men around him did not know what was happening.

SP4 Wayne Murray and his assistant Machine Gunner began to lay a heavy base of fire from the left towards the NVA position. LT Bodine yelled for everyone to get into a tight perimeter, Marshall, Tice and the others around them, crawled back into some logs. SP4 Tice saw they had left the 90mm, Marshall crawled back out and dragged it back into their position. The 90mm had been damaged by small arms fire. The firing continued to grow even heavier as the NVA worked up to within 10 to 15 meters of the log pile which was now in a crossfire. PFC Willie J. Simmons spotted one NVA, fired and missed, he then threw a grenade and when he raised to fire again he was shot between the eyes. Murray was hit in the chest and died while Marshall tried to administer first aid.

Meanwhile a B-40 Rocket exploded nearby, the NVA began to move up closer, evidently thinking that the Rocket had wiped the Paratroopers out. When the NVA exposed themselves, LT Bodine, SP4 Tice and PFC Marshall opened fire, killing several and pushing the others back. By this time CPT Rogan had moved his CP group just 20 meters to the right rear of their position and the arrival of the 3rd Platoon on the left took some of the pressure off, LT Bodine yelled for the wounded to move back.

The terrain that the 2nd Platoon was fighting in was thick bamboo and scrub brush, with occasional open spots where most of the casualties were taken. There were tall trees encircling the hilltop. Visibility was restricted to about 5 meters and firing was at point-blank range. Since the B Co Commander was unable to contact his 2nd Platoon on the radio, he yelled forward for them to get on the horn. The Platoon responded by sending back a runner. The firing now was extremely heavy and it was very difficult to assess the situation, since there had not been continuous communications. The 2nd Platoon was taking heavy losses and the NVA were beginning to move up the right flank of B Co's position. LT Bodine moved back to the CO's position to receive further instructions even though he had been wounded twice earlier. CPT Rogan asked him if he could pull back bringing his dead and wounded. LT Bodine answered yes and the 3rd Platoon leader, LT McDevitt on the left concurred the same for his Platoon.

CPT Rogan then ordered both Platoons to withdraw at his command and alerted the 1st Platoon that they would be passing through them and for 1st platoon to cover the

withdrawal. A Co's Commander was notified to prepare a perimeter for B Co to withdraw into.

By this time the NVA had moved up to B Company's right flank. They killed the Commanding Officer, two RTO's, Senior Medic and wounded LT Bodine again. Having instructed his lead Platoons to withdraw, CPT Rogan then ordered the CP group to withdraw taking their wounded. The Artillery Forward Observer had become separated from the CO at this time.

CPT Rogan grabbed one of the radios in order to control the withdrawal and moved back 10 meters. It then became evident that neither the 2nd nor the 3rd Platoons could withdraw because of the close contact with the NVA. The fighting was at point-blank range, the 2nd Platoon could not recover its wounded. SSG Williams had taken command of the 2nd Platoon but for all intents and purposes it was out of action. The CPT confirmed that the 3rd Platoon could not extract itself and that most of the 2nd Platoon were either dead or wounded. Seeing that he was unable to withdraw, CPT Rogan ordered the 1st Platoon to counterattack to the right to restore the flank and secure the 2nd Platoons wounded and dead. The CPT instructed A Company to close on the rear, to send one Platoon forward to reinforce the 1st Platoon of B Company and to secure the eastern end of the perimeter with its remaining two Platoons. In addition, A Co was to send their Artillery FO, LT Busenlehner to B Co's Commanding Officer's location.

A Company linked up at approximately 1655 hrs. B Co's 1st Platoon counterattack had helped restore the perimeter and recover many of the wounded and dead. A Co gave a big assist as their 2d Platoon under LT Thomas Remington moved through to help bolster the 1st and 3rd Platoon of B Co. In the course of the counterattack, LT Paul Gillenwater, B Co 1st platoon leader and his RT0, PFC 4 Jones, found themselves out in front of the perimeter but were able to get back without injury. While still on the radio, CPT Rogan requested the BN TOC to place blocking fires 500 meters west and north of his position to prevent enemy reinforcement.

The Company Commanders' main concern at this time was to establish a firm perimeter and establish effective Artillery fires. A Co's Artillery FO had joined CPT Rogan and had begun walking 4.2 mortar fires in towards the perimeter. The wounded and dead were drawn in. No Air or Gunships were in support at this time, the fighting being too close and Artillery and Air could only help indirectly. The fighting had become man-to-man with bursts of automatic weapons fire at point-blank range. The bamboo was so thick that some of the Paratroopers thought that their M-16 rnds weren't penetrating. To explain the closeness of the fighting, the next day on the outer edge of the perimeter, 6 US bodies were found on the eastern side of a log and 4 NVA bodies on the western side. Two other NVA bodies lay to the left of the log, one an NVA officer still holding an M-16 he had grabbed from the other side of the log.

As darkness approached the NVA continued to keep up a heavy volume of fire attempting to cut off or penetrate a section of the perimeter. At 1730 hrs CPT Rogan requested an emergency ammunition resupply. Two LOC ships arrived at 1845 hrs. A bomb crater near the center of the two Co's perimeter was selected as the Drop Zone. It was dark by this time but the sky was clear and the moon full. The B Co Commander guided the first ship in with a flashlight and even though the ship

received several hits while it hovered, it dropped the ammunition on target. The second ship left its load at FSB 16 and escorted the damaged helicopter back to Dak To. B Co then requested medical evacuation by basket and hoist for 8 of their seriously wounded. A MEDEVAC arrived at 2000 hrs but was driven off by automatic weapons fire as soon as he hovered with two of the crew being wounded. CPT Rogan then cancelled the Dustoff request since the area was not secure. No flare ships were requested since this would give away and silhouette the US positions, SNOOPY came on station for an hour and a half working the ridge lines running north and west. The Companies marked their position with HC white smoke which was clearly visible at night, SPOOKY, a FAC and Fighters were on call throughout the night.

While the NVA continued probing during the night, A and B Companies attempted to recover their wounded, at 0500 hrs SSG Funderburk, SP4 Stokes and several others dragged the last WIA inside the perimeter under enemy fire. The entire effort to recover the WIA/KIA was carried out under the most dangerous conditions. At one point an NVA soldier was found rifling the body of one of the wounded and killed. Grenade and small arms fire was swapped between the NVA and US, with contact not being broken until 14 Nov, 0630 hrs.

At FSB 16, in the evening of the 13th, at 1608, 2015, and 2115 hrs, C Company had several small skirmishes with NVA forces up to a squad with negative casualties or results.

At 0800 hours 14 November, A and B Companies withdrew, eastward 400 meters taking their WIA and KIAS with them. At the vicinity of YB 813154 they set up a new perimeter around a large bomb crater and Dusted off their casualties.

The total casualties for the contact of the 13th and 14th were B Company 21 KIA, 17 WIA, A Company 3 WIA.

Throughout the morning Air Strikes, Artillery and Mortar fire were adjusted in on the NVA positions. At 1300 hrs, D Company from FSB 16, joined up with A and B Companies. The 3 Companies swept up the ridge with A Company on the left, B Co in the center, and C Co on the right; through the battle area and several hundred meters beyond, with negative enemy contact. The 3 Companies laagered for the night at YB 808151, the location where A and B Companies had spent the night before. Results of the sweep were 34 NVA KIA (BC), 20 small arms, 2 82mm mortars minus one tube and numerous blood trails. All of the US MIAs were found dead, the 90mm Recoilless Rifle and other US equipment were recovered.

On the morning of 15 Nov, A and B Companies continued a search of the hill vicinity YB 803149 and the approaching ridge lines where the contacts of the 12th and 13th occurred while D Company secured the LZ and the Companies equipment. A Company engaged two groups of 3 NVA at different times and locations, killing one, wounding two and capturing one, D Company also captured one NVA. A Company found an estimated 13 NVA KIA (BC) from air and artillery and 1 NVA KIA (BC) from small arms fire as a result of their 12 Nov contact. The 3 Companies laagered together on the hill.

Things were getting very hot at Dak-To in November of 1967. Serving as the artillery

S-2, along with my experience patrolling with Special Forces in the same area, I decided to try and pull together for the command everything we knew about the area. I contacted my Special Forces buddies in Kontum and Dak-To and gathered every INSUM (Intelligence Summary) I could find where contact with the enemy had been made for the past two years and then using color coded push-pins, I posted every contact on a 1:50,000 map—the results were astonishing. Lines appeared on the map coming from Cambodia and Laos into Vietnam showing obvious enemy routes and base areas. My battalion commander took my map board to brigade HQ and I was told the information was used during the battle for Dak-To. Just the thought my work might have saved some lives still makes me feel good.

Richie visited me while I was working on the map and I showed him the activity in the area his battalion was going to—Hill 875. I told Richie to be careful and travel water and ammo heavy. He laughed and told me this time he had gotten lucky—“A” Company was going to be the reserve company during the assault on the hill.

Read on.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE (SEPARATE)
APO San Francisco 96250
6 December 1967

Subject: Combat After Action Report - Battles of Dak To, Hill 875 Assault
Task Organization: Companies A, C, and D, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade

Date of Operations: 19 November - 23 November 1967.

Location: YB796134, Map Series L7014, Sheet 6538 III, DAK TO District, KONTUM Province

Reporting Officer: Brigadier General Leo H. Schweiter.

Task Organization:

A/2/503d Infantry

1 Scout Dog Team, Medical Team, Artillery Forward Observer Team,
4.2 Mortar Forward Observer, Engineer Team

C/2/503d Infantry

1 Scout Dog Team, Medical Team, Artillery Forward Observer Team,
4.2 Mortar Forward Observer, Engineer Team

D/2/503d Infantry

1 Scout Dog Team, Medical Team, Artillery Forward Observer Team,
4.2 Mortar Forward Observer, Engineer Team

OPCON Elements:

Engineer Platoon, 173d Engineer Company, 19 November - 20-1300 November.

MIKE Special Forces Company #26, 19 November - 20-1300 November.

MIKE Special Forces Company #23, 21-1500 November - 23-2400 November.

Companies A and D/1/12th Infantry, (4th Inf Div), 21-1500 November - 22-1000 November.

Supporting Forces:

Artillery

3/319th Artillery (DS) 173d Abn Bde, 105mm Howitzers(6),Towed

C/6/14th Artillery (GS) 8" 175mm Howitzer

A/5/16th Artillery (GS) 155mm How (SP)

B/5/16th Artillery (GS) 155mm How (SP)

D/5/16th Artillery (GS) 155mm/175mm Howitzer

A/3/18th Artillery (GS) 8"/175mm Howitzer

B/2/19th Artillery (GS) 105mm Howitzer,Towed

C/2/19th Artillery (GS) 105mm Howitzer,Towed

A/4/42nd Artillery (GS) 105mm Howitzer,Towed

B/1/92nd Artillery (GS) 155mm Howitzer,Towed

Air Support:

Transportation; The Brigade Aviation Officer handled all of the 2/503d Infantry's requirements for troop and cargo transportation with the exception of DUSTOFFs. The resupply pilots and crews were particularly valorous in their support during the battle on Hill 875.

Dust Off's; All DUSTOFFs were handled through the Administration/Intelligence (S2) Net and performance was outstanding.

Air Strikes/FACs: Supporting Air Strikes including Sky Spots and ARC Lights were coordinated through Brigade S3 Air.

Special Purpose Flights (Intelligence): The 2/503d Infantry received prompt and adequate support for SNOOPY, RED HAZE, VR and SLAR missions through the Brigade S2 Air.

Armor: B/1/69th Armor gave excellent cooperation and support throughout the contact.

Chemical: The 2/503d Infantry had three defoliation missions flown during November on which they received excellent cooperation and prompt action by the Brigade Chemical Officer.

Engineer: The 173d Engineer Company provided excellent support especially in clearing operations. They were indispensable in clearing thick bamboo clumps and in removing large trees.

Intelligence: The Intelligence Annex to OPORD 25-67 Operation MACARTHUR. Headquarters. 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate) dated 0900 05 November 1967 gave the most current enemy locations available for use by friendly forces prior to conduct of Operation MACARTHUR. These enemy locations were general in nature and there were no confirmed enemy locations within the Battalion area of operation at the beginning of the operation.

Mission: The 2/503d Infantry had been alerted to assault Hill 875 after the 26th MIKE Special Forces Company (OPCON to the 2/503d Infantry) had made contact with a large NVA force on its slopes the previous day of 18 November 1967.

Concept of Operation: The attack was to be made with 2 Companies abreast, D Company on the left and C Company on the right, with the trail running up the mountain acting as the boundary between the attacking Companies. The Companies were to attack with two Platoons forward and one Platoon in reserve. A Company, was to be held in reserve and was to ensure security of the rear flank of the other two Companies and secure the area at the bottom of the hill.

Execution: At 0730 hrs 19 November, the ambush elements from A, C and D Companies closed their unit's night laager site vicinity YB 798138. CPT Harold J. Kaufman, Senior Company Commanding Officer issued the battle order while Artillery and Air preparation was being fired on Hill 875. The 26th MIKE Special Forces Company reached its blocking position at YB 797127 at 0822 hrs. At 0943 hrs the Air Strikes were complete and the three Companies began moving. The assault was made with two Companies abreast D Company on the left and C Company on the right, with the trail running up the mountain acting as a boundary between the attacking companies. The Companies were to assault with two Platoons forward and one Platoon held in reserve. D Company had its 3rd Platoon on the left, 2nd Platoon on the right, CP behind the 2nd Platoon and the 1st and Weapons Platoon following in reserve. C Company had its 3rd Platoon on the left 2nd Platoon on the right, CP behind the 3rd Platoon and the 1st Platoon following in reserve. A Company was to be in reserve and to secure the rear.

The weather was clear and warm and the ridge slope gradual, approximately 100 meters wide, dropping off sharply to the east and more gradually to the west. The vegetation was fairly thick with bamboo, scrub brush and tall trees growing up the hill.

C and D Companies started out in two columns each. As they reached the base of the hill they deployed into two Platoons abreast with two Squad files in each Platoon. They advanced slowly through the tangled and gnarled vegetation which had been mashed down by the bomb strikes. In the centermost file of the two Companies was the 2nd Squad, 2nd Platoon of D Company, SP4 Kenneth Jacobson was the point man. SP4 Charlie Hinton about 5 meters behind him and SGT Frederick Shipman, the Squad leader, behind Hinton. As they approached the military crest of the hill, Jacobson received 3 small arms rounds and was killed instantly. The time was 1030 hrs. SP4 Hinton and SGT Shipman moved up closer to Jacobson and called for a Medic. As the Medic, SP4 Farley, came up he was hit by small arms fire and died a few minutes later. SP4 Hinton and SGT Shipman still did not know where the fire was coming from. It wasn't until the NVA started throwing grenades that SGT Shipman and his men could identify where the initial fire had come from. After the initial bursts of fire, rucksacks were dropped and the Platoons began closing up and deploying on line. As they approached SGT Shipman's squad, which had been slightly forward, enemy fire increased rapidly with recoilless rifle, automatic weapons fire and rifle grenades coming from the NVA positions. Over on the right flank as C Company's 2nd Platoon closed up and moved forward, one of their point men, SP4 Quinn, was hit by small arms fire. As the Medic, SP4 Haggerty moved up to assist he was killed by small arms fire. As the enemy fire lulled, they moved forward 5-6 meters on line, then the enemy fire exploded again. After returning fire and pausing for indirect fires to be brought in, the 2nd Platoon moved forward approximately 20-30 meters using fire and movement. During the next two hours they took most their casualties from frag wounds, the exploding recoilless rifle rounds and hand grenades. Meanwhile, the 3rd Platoon of C Company, which was near the trail dropped their rucksacks and moved forward alongside of D Company, receiving mostly sniper fire along the way. As they reached D Company's location, they too came under heavy recoilless rifle and B-40 rocket fire. At this time, C and D

Companies marked their positions with smoke as FACs adjusted in Artillery and Air Strikes. The Paratroopers returned fire on enemy positions, after approximately 30 mins the Companies began moving again utilizing fire and movement.

Just five meters in front of SGT Shipman's position was a bunker from which the contact had originated. 1SGT Deeb, SSG Page and others from D Company took the first bunkers throwing 4-5 hand grenades through the port. SSG Johnson's, 1st Squad 2nd Platoon of D Company came across a dead NVA in a V-trench to the left of the bunkers. The 2nd Platoon advanced past the bunker and the trench, only to have an NVA throw several grenades at them from the bunker they had just blown, the bunker apparently had a tunnel leading to it from higher on the hill. The 2nd Platoon reported killing several NVA in the position and still they continued to receive resistance from the bunker. The Platoons advanced slowly for 15-20 meters not knowing exactly where to fire since the enemy had its positions well concealed in the thick broken bamboo and brush. Heavy recoilless rifle fire, grenades and small arms fire brought the assault to a stand-still in some places. Over on the left side, D Company reported advancing to within 15-20 meters of what appeared to be the main bunker system. Over on the right-hand side they were only able to close to within 15-20 meters. During this assault, LT Smith 3rd Platoon Leader of C Company was cut down by automatic weapons fire and later died. Also a couple of artillery rounds fell short on D Company on the left, injuring PSG E6 James Beam, SP4 Frank Carmody and one or two others. It was about this time that A Company got hit from the rear.

Captain Kaufman seeing that the assault was bogging down and realizing that the rear was being attacked, ordered his men back and formed a perimeter. They did so over about 30 meters of the ground they had just covered, drawing their wounded with them. SP4 Witold Leszuzynski was WIA as he covered LT Peter Lantz who brought LT Smith back into the perimeter before he died. Over on the left hand side, 3rd Platoon of D Company also got the word to withdraw and did so. The 2nd Platoon however didn't get the word and continued fighting, before long they realized that there was no one on their flanks. D Company's 3rd Platoon had pulled back approximately 30 meters when they received word that the 2nd Platoon was pinned down. They moved back up the hill to help with the 1st Platoon covering. D Company began a rapid and broken withdrawal, but many of the men were not quite sure of the situation. Captain Kaufman, C Company Commander drew and fired his pistol in the air several times to regain control. Captain Kaufman only had his men pull back into the perimeter rather than withdraw, as he didn't want to lose the high ground that they had gained. The front edge of the perimeter was only 20 meters from the NVA bunker and trench where the battle started. The men began to dig in with knives, steel pots or anything else they could work with.

A Company had left the laager site that morning (right on the heels of C and D Companies) in the march order of 2nd, 3rd, CP, Weapons and 1st Platoon. They moved approximately 500 meters in 45 minutes. As they moved up the hill the 2nd Platoon broke off to the right keeping in sight of C Company and the 3rd Platoon went off to the left keeping D Company in sight. The CP, Weapons and the 1st Platoon remained in the middle. When the contact with C and D Companies occurred, A Company halted. As the action developed, Captain Kiley ordered the

Weapons Platoon to start constructing an LZ, at a point approximately 100 meters from where C and D Companies were engaged. The 1st Platoon secured the LZ from the rear by putting OP's out 30-50 meters to the flanks and rear and by positioning the remainder of the men on line 15 meters back. The 2nd and 3rd Platoons secured the flanks. As C and D Companies slowly advanced, the two A Company Platoons moved with them as best they could. The LZ construction was going slowly; an LZ kit was requested at 1300 hrs and dropped in at 1400 hrs. Shortly afterwards, the LZ received several mortar rounds.

The rear OP was located 30-40 meters back along the trail that the Companies had moved down earlier. It was manned by SP4 James Kelley the Team Leader who was armed with an M-16, SP4 John Steer, a rifleman, PFC Carlos Lazada a machine-gunner and PFC Anthony Romano the assistant machine-gunner. A little after 1400 hrs SP4 Kelley was sitting on the right side of the trail behind a tree with PFC Romano, SP4 Steer and PFC Lazada, smoking and waiting. Romano mentioned not to fire at the first enemy that approached but to let them get close. SP4 Kelley, began to hear twigs breaking in front of him so he leaned around the tree and aimed uphill. Suddenly as firing broke out on the left (possibly mortar fire), PFC Lazada yelled "Here they come Kelley" and began to fire in long sweeping bursts down the hill into a group of about 15 advancing NVA. Lazada's initial bursts into the advancing NVA caught them by complete surprise and at such a close range that the M-60 machine gun tore the column to pieces. The NVA were caught by complete surprise and were unaware of the presence of the rear Observation Point. Diagram #1

As soon as the firing broke out members of the 1st Platoon, SGT Jeffery Hilleshiem, PFC James Howard (RTO), PFC James Spellers and SP4 Eugene Bookman, dashed forward to aid the OP's who were rapidly being pinned down by the advancing NVA. SGT Hilleshiem was hit while running forward and PFC Romano, assistant machine gunner ran to help him, bringing him back to the LZ. PFC Lazada knelt behind a log and continued firing long sweeping bursts into the advancing NVA while SP4 Kelley and SP4 Steer fired their M-16's from the right side of the trail. The sudden heavy fire from the rear had momentarily slowed the NVA attack and alerted the rest of the Company. SP4 Kelley called for Lazada to fall back. Lazada responded by running across the trail firing and getting behind a log on the right side of the trail and continuing to fire into the onrushing NVA with steady streams of fire. Kelley continued to yell as he fell back and just after he shot a well camouflaged

Posted by: Donald E. Zlotnik, Major (Ret.)
Relationship: We fought a battle together.
Monday, December 14, 2009

A brave young paratrooper

Dick Busenehner was a proud young paratrooper and Field Artillery Forward Observer with an Infantry Rifle Company in the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

Dick and I went through Officer Candidate School at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, and jump school at Ft. Benning Georgia (jump school in the spring of 1967). Dick was held over for one week in jump school as he hurt his leg in a dramatic accident on his fourth of five qualifying jumps. After staying an additional week to complete the final qualifying parachute jump, Dick went on leave to home and then to RVN and a rifle company in the 173rd Airborne Brigade as the Field Artillery Forward Observer.

I went to Jungle School in Panama and, while on orders to go to the 101st Abn. Div. in RVN immediately upon completion of Jungle School, had my orders changed to go to a newly formed artillery battalion at Ft. Irwin, California. The battalion would deploy to RVN after becoming fully manned and trained. Dick and I corresponded for months. I sent him several "care" packages.

The last letter I sent him from the states included a set of 1st Lieutenant "silver bars" insignia. He wanted to be able to wear them when his rifle company came back in from the field to a base camp for a stand down. He had been promoted and had no insignia (Dick was in the field the entire time until his death). I did send the insignia and my battalion deployed shortly thereafter, via ship, to RVN.

In the letter, and previous to this, we had agreed to try and get together if possible, once I was in country.

On arrival in RVN in December 1967, we convoyed the 175mm howitzers of the battalion and my battery to the fire base at AnKhe (having one howitzer destroyed by a command detonated land mine on the road march to the fire base). I tried to call the company in the 173 Abn Bde that Dick was assigned to (each company had a rear detachment for administrative/logistic purposes in a rear base camp while the remainder of the rifle company was deployed in operations.) I was never able to get through.

Within a few weeks after arriving in RVN our stateside mail finally caught up with us. Among my mail was the letter with the insignia I had sent to Dick from Ft. Irwin, CA. It had been returned from the APO in RVN to my unit at Ft. Irwin stamped "Returned to sender, verified deceased". Dick had been killed.

I corresponded with his parents, until I lost their address as I was sent to be a Forward Observer with a rifle company in the 327th Infantry Battalion, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division just prior to Tet, 1968.

I still have that returned envelope and often think of you Dick. And it saddens me

greatly whenever I think of his smiling face that last day I saw him at Ft. Benning. A brave and honorable young man, one among the thousands of tragically lost in that war. Dick we miss you.

Posted by: Terry R. Creque
Relationship: Friend
June 15, 2008

FA OCS Class 20-66

Richie was a good and loyal friend. He was one of the most likeable guys I have ever known and true to his word. Rowena, Texas his home. I often think of him and our younger days. God bless you Richie.

Posted by: Paul Lewis
Relationship: OCS Classmate
February 29, 2008

Obituary

Born in San Angelo, Texas to the union of Cecilia Thomas Glass and Joseph Edward Busenlehner.

Entered the Army after high school in 1965, then volunteered and was accepted for Officer Candidate School, Artillery Branch and graduated with the Class of 20-66 and was commissioned a 2LT, completed Basic Officer School and then volunteered for parachute training at Fort Benning and received his parachute wings. Volunteered for service in Vietnam as a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Started his tour in Vietnam on May 25, 1967 and was assigned to A Battery, 319th Artillery, 3rd Battalion. He was assigned to be a Forward Observer and would operate with infantry companies to coordinate and assist to call in artillery strikes.

He participated in the only U. S. Combat Parachute Jump in the Vietnam War. He was involved in some major battles in the early days of the Vietnam war. He was assigned to operate with A Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Airborne Regiment. He was involved in the Battle of the Slopes in June 1967, Hill 1338 where he was awarded his first Purple Heart and Bronze Star for Valor. In November, 1967, he was in the worst fighting in the history of the 173rd Airborne Brigade at the Battle of Dak To, Hill 875. After 7 days of brutal combat, Lt Busenlehner was killed on November 20, 1967. The battle cost 285 Americans their lives, 985 wounded and 18 missing in action.

He was the recipient of the Silver Star, Bronze Star with V device and oak leaf cluster, Purple Heart with Oak leaf cluster, Air Medal and the Good Conduct Medal.