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14th Military History
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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
14TH MILITARY HISTORY DETACHMENT
1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96490

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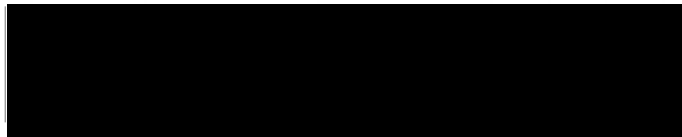
25 March 1969

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Interview/Lessons Learned 2-69.

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OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF MILITARY HISTORY
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20315

1. Name and Type of Organization: B Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).
2. Name and Inclusive Dates of Operation: "Battle of the Angel's Wing," 090300 to 090600 March 1969.
3. Location: Sheet 6230 IV: Duc Hue, Vietnam, Cambodia, 1:50,000, vicinity of coordinates XT345147, XT343156, and XT349154.
4. Command Headquarters: 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).
5. Persons Interviewed:
 - a. LTC Raymond Maladowitz, [REDACTED], Deputy Bde Cdr, 1st Bde.
 - b. LTC Jerry J. Burcham, [REDACTED], Bn Co, 2/5 Cav.
 - c. Maj Donn G. Miller, [REDACTED], Bde S3, 1st Bde.
 - d. Maj Gerald L. Sewell, [REDACTED], Bn S3, 2/5 Cav.
 - e. Cpt Robert H. Wood, [REDACTED], Bde Asst S3, 1st Bde.
 - f. Cpt David L. Parker, [REDACTED], Co CO, B/2/5 Cav.
 - g. 1Lt Paul Smith, [REDACTED], FDO A Btry, 1/77 Arty.
 - h. 1Lt Edward G. Bitzer Jr, [REDACTED], FO B Co, A Btry, 1/77 Arty.
 - i. 1Lt Barry A Bobek, [REDACTED], 3d Plat Ldr, B/2/5 Cav.
 - j. [REDACTED] Robert S. Hallman, [REDACTED], Bn S4, 2/5 Cav.
 - k. SFC Albert Martinez, [REDACTED], 1 Plat Sgt, B/2/5 Cav.
 - l. SGT James R. Edberg, [REDACTED], 2 Plat Sqd Ldr, B/2/5 Cav.
 - m. SGT Emmet L. Gilbert, [REDACTED], 1 Plat Sqd Ldr, B/2/5 Cav.
 - n. SP4 Mark S. Seedorf, [REDACTED], Co RTO, B/2/5 Cav.
 - o. SP4 Eduardo Cardenas, [REDACTED], 1 Plat Sqd Ldr, B/2/5 Cav.
 - p. SP4 Lee D. Alexander, [REDACTED], 1 Plat M69 Gunner, B/2/5 Cav.
 - q. SP4 Vincent Martino, [REDACTED], 1 Plat Point Man, B/2/5 Cav.
 - r. PFC Charles A. Mac Dougal, [REDACTED], 2 Plat Asst Gunner, B/2/5 Cav.
 - s. PFC Andrew Valentine, [REDACTED], 1 Plat Point Man, B/2/5 Cav.
 - t. PFC Vincent DiMonaco, [REDACTED], 2 Plat RTO, B/2/5 Cav.
 - u. PFC Marcin Williams, [REDACTED], 2 Plat Asst Gunner, B/2/5 Cav.
 - v. PFC Harold J. Close, [REDACTED], 2 Plat RTO, B/2/5 Cav.



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6. Interviewers: Captain Donald M. McKay, Jr., 096914, G3 Operations; 1 Lieutenant Robin B. Bartlett, OF111398, 14th Military History Detachment, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile).

7. Participating Units: B Co, 2d Bn, 5th Cavalry; 1st Plat from A Co, 2d Bn, 5th Cavalry; C Co, 2d Bn, 5th Cavalry; A Co, 1st Bn, 8th Cavalry.

8. Supporting Forces: A Btry, 1st Bn, 77th Artillery (105); B Btry, 1st Bn, 30th Artillery (155); USAF; A Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry; A Btry, 20th Artillery (ARA).

9. Intelligence: Enemy infiltrating in large units from Cambodia through the Angel's Wing into the NAVAJO WARHORSE AO, east and south-east towards Saigon, in preparation for 1st and post Tet major offensive operations.

10. Mission: Consistent with the overall mission of the 1st Cav Div to function as a screening/covering force for the IIFV/III Corps defense of the Saigon - Bien Hoa Complex, the Div's 1st Bde had been directed to deploy two battalions in the western Hau Nghia - southwestern Tay Ninh area (AO NAVAJO WARHORSE) in response to the threat posed by major elements of the 9th VC Div. In a role analogous to that of a GCP, the two battalions (2/5 and 1/8 Cav) had the mission of detecting, delaying/disorganizing, and to the extent possible, defeating enemy forces moving east from their Cambodian base areas. The Brigade Commander's concept dictated an aggressively mobile posture, with small, semi-independent units deployed as far west of the Vam Co Dong River as practical so as to provide the early warning required for timely commitment of reserves. Reflecting this concept, Co B, 2/5 Cav had been positioned in the vicinity of a known infiltration route out of the southern tip of the Angel's Wing and had the mission of detecting and attacking enemy forces utilizing that route. Inherent within that mission was the requirement for Co B to be mobile, particularly during the hours of darkness, and, consistent with normal security precautions, to employ semi-independent patrols and ambushes to facilitate extensive area coverage.

11. The Battlefield: The terrain of this uninhabited area was flat, open, dry rice paddy, with intermittent irrigation ditches. The vegetation was sparse, with occasional, widely-separated clusters of small trees. Mobility was excellent: The moon provided approximately 70% illumination during the night of 8-9 March, affording good visibility, and the weather was generally clear, dry and warm although a low ground haze did persist throughout the early hours of darkness. The battlefield was exactly 2.7 kilometers from the Cambodian border, 7 kilometers west of the Vam Co Dong River and 3 kilometers from the nearest inhabited area (AP Gieng Gang XT3715).

12. Concept of Operation and Execution (Narrative):

On 7 November 1968, the 1st Cavalry Division terminated Operation Jeb Stuart III and Commanche Falls in NICTZ and redeployed south to III CTZ. The division was moved in anticipation of a major NVA offensive across the Cambodian border against US Bases and major Vietnamese cities during the

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Tet Lunar New Year Holiday. Through successive anticipatory moves, the division was strategically deployed along the border between Vietnam and Cambodia from the Delta to the demarcation line between II and III CFZ. Deployed eastward in depth, strong pointing the AO with fire bases, the division set about to accomplish its threefold mission: Screen Saigon from enemy attack, prevent infiltration from Cambodia and destroy enemy forces in northwest III Corps.

One of the most difficult areas of operation was given to 1st Brigade control. The AO was termed NAVAJO WARHORSE: on one side six US Battalions were deployed and on the other several secure, built up NVA divisions. The AO became the focus of division attention as contact after contact was met by the 1st Brigade. The NAVAJO WARHORSE AO became the heart of the division's operations in THOAN THANG II and III.

On 9 March 1969, a major engagement was fought in that AO by B Company, 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, which typifies many of the tactical concepts for which THE FIRST TEAM is well noted and highly appraised. It is a "classic" example of the flexibility of the Airmobile concepts of reinforcement, support and the courage and determination of SKYTROOPERS faced with a dangerous mission.

Four days prior to the contact, the general trend of activity experienced by the companies of the 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry began to increase. More and more small groups of enemy were sighted by the friendly units. Ambushes increased frequency of contact and numbers of enemy killed. On the morning of 8 March, D Company, 2/5 Cavalry engaged an estimated 100 to 150 NVA of the 272 Regiment, 9th VC Division north of Phuoc Luu (XT3424). Intelligence gained from this and other contacts of the 2/5 Cav was disseminated to the companies and SKYTROOPERS of the Battalion. They were to expect contact, especially at night with well armed, fresh, aggressive NVA troops coming out of Cambodia.

In preparation for future major contacts, LTC Burcham, Battalion Com-

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mander for the 2/5 Cavalry, discussed the enemy situation with COL Kingston, 1st Brigade Commander and COL John Gibney, G3. From this conference on 8 March, it was determined to continue to employ tactics of night movement and enemy deception supplemented by the use of ground radar and quick reaction support from Artillery, USAF and ARA. More specifically, LTC Burcham told his company commanders to employ night roving ambushes and to change their company location after they had received log. This deceptive move was to be accomplished at night to prevent enemy observation of the friendly unit's position. Troops were to dig in after dark while the night roving ambushes moved 600 meters from their company FOB's, set up for a period of time and then move again - not more than a total distance of 1500 meters from the company perimeter. Companies were to orient themselves on a north / south axis at least 3km from Cambodia with ambushes roving out at 30 degree angles north and south of west, towards the Cambodian border - setting up twice during the night. This tactic, it was felt, would provide the best screen and that the ambush platoons could quickly be reinforced by artillery, ARA, company organic weapons and night combat assaults if necessary.

In order to facilitate night movement, the companies reconned their overnight and ambush positions during the day. The trails and avenues of approach were noted as well as land marks and prominent terrain features on which they could guide during the hours of darkness. The tactic necessitated a great deal of company movement as well as many reconnaissance patrols, but the terrain in the NAVAJO WARHORSE AO is flat, clear and foot movement rapid. Most companies could complete their reconnaissance and be set up to receive log in the early afternoon. After hot chow was flown into them, there was sufficient time for the men to rest from the previous night's ambush and to prepare for the forthcoming one. Finally, the roving ambush platoons were cautioned to make full use of starlight scopes and be positive that they could annihilate the enemy

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force before giving away their position by springing the trap. If possible, they were to call in pre-planned Artillery defensive targets first, and likewise the company was not to use its organic 82mm mortar unless absolutely necessary as the friendly position would then be compromised.

On the night of 8 March 1969, B Company, 2/5 Cavalry followed these instructions and utilized these tactics. At dusk, the company moved from its log location (XT349149) towards its night position. The Company FOB was established at XT349154 and the 1st and 2d Platoons prepared to leave for their night ambushes while the 3d Platoon, Mortar Platoon and CP group began digging in. At approximately 2200hrs the two roving ambushes left the FOB: the 1st Platoon, under the command of 1Lt Jesse B. Stevenson, 05352082, followed a west-northwest azimuth for approximately 700 meters while the 2d Platoon, under the command of 1Lt Johnny L. Powell, 05345253, moved 600 meters on a south-southwest azimuth to its first ambush location XT345147. The two platoons reached these locations within an hour and deployed into a pre-arranged formation. (See Tabs B and C). Both Platoons deployed with 27 men each.

Only the essentials were taken. Each man carried his individual weapons and 15 to 20 full magazines of ammunition for M-16's (270 to 360 rounds/man), at least 2 hand grenades, 1 smoke grenade, 3 heat tablets and one trip flare. In addition, each squad carried two or three claymore mines (9 total), an M60 machine gun with 800 to 900 rounds of ammunition and an M79 grenade launcher with 70 rounds of ammunition (3 M60's, 3M79's per platoon total). The platoon was additionally equipped with 2 LAW's and 2 PRC-25 radio's and 1 Starlight Scope. Each man carried a poncho liner and wore his steel helmet.

The company FOB, in its defensive position was radar equipped and also had 1 strobe light, 1 81mm mortar with 20 rounds of illumination, 10 rounds of white phosphorus, and 60 rounds of high explosive. A 90mm recoilless rifle was employed to the northwest with 6 beehive and 6 high explosive rounds available. Unfortunately, neither radar nor 90mm recoilless rifle proved operable later on.

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The first platoon chose as it's first ambush location a previously used Platoon FOB on the edge of a tree square. They oriented themselves in chest high foxholes to the north and west in a "U" formation (See Map - Tab B). The platoon occupied five of the eight foxholes in the FOB, with the open end of their perimeter facing towards the company FOB (southeast). It was felt by the platoon leader that an enemy threat would come from the north and west and that it would be better to have four or five men per foxhole than to spread themselves thinner and cover 360°. In this way, several of the men could get some rest and good security could still be maintained. Between foxholes #3 and #4 there was a large, 3 foot ant hill, which was used as a CP and CP by the platoon leader. There was excellent visibility to the west for approximately 800 meters and fair visibility to the north. A rice paddy dike enclosed the northern and western sides of the position and provided excellent cover to the position. The percentage of moon illumination on that night was 70; weather conditions were cool with a strong wind from the west and a heavy ground haze which lasted until 2400.

The company and individual platoon moves therefore were unobserved by the enemy as the moon did not rise until 2300 and their movements were additionally shaded by a haze. Once the haze lifted and the moon rose, visibility was excellent: a man could have been seen standing as far as 500 meters away.

The 2d Platoon also reached their first ambush location by 2200 hrs, and set up in a 360° perimeter with machineguns pointing north, west and southeast. Claymores were deployed to the south, southeast, north and along a nearby drainage ditch (2 1/2' deep x 6' wide) to the north, south and west (See Map - Tab C). Visibility was extremely good and a rice paddy dike provided cover to the west and north - the expected avenue of enemy approach.

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Both platoons radioed to the company commander that they were set up in their first ambush position and would move again at 090200 hrs. to their second position. At this time the 1st Platoon radio performance was poor and contact was made only with difficulty.

The platoons waited in an ambush posture for two hours, changing reliefs and maintaining constant observation through their starlight scopes. Vigilance paid off and at 0037 hrs the 2d Platoon Leader, 1Lt Powell radioed to Cpt Parker, B Co CO, that he had spotted 6 individuals approaching their position from the west. Lt Powell requested that artillery be fired on a preplanned defensive target located to the west of their ambush position. A Battery, 1/77 Artillery responded with 40 HE rounds. The five man NVA group ran from the artillery concentration straight for the platoon's position. When they came to within 25 meters of the friendly location they were engaged with M-16's and hand grenades for about one minute. A trip flare was also thrown to provide illumination and assessment of the contact by the ambush platoon. The 2d platoon was unable to give an enemy assessment, but stated that they felt that some of the enemy were killed and some had evaded to the southwest of their position.

Cpt Parker immediately informed LTC Burcham, the Battalion Commander, and Maj Sewell, the Battalion S3, of the situation on the ground and stated that his 2d platoon's location had been compromised, but that he had decided not to move the position so that he could get a first light check of the contact area.

At approximately 0245, PFC MacDougal, observing through the starlight scope to the southwest from the "ant hill" at the 1st Platoon location, saw at a range of about 600 meters 5 individuals who came out of a tree line and began to move to the west. Lt Stevenson, the 1st Platoon Leader was awakened and also observed the five individuals. On closer examination however, he noticed heavy movement in the tree line behind the 5 NVA soldiers. After a

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short time it became apparent that a considerable enemy force was approaching their position. Lt Stevenson called Cpt Parkor and informed him of the situation; at this time he stated that he had observed a point element of five men followed by at least 200 more soldiers, in column formation, moving west. By 0255 the point was approximately 200 meters to the south west of his ambush position. Lt. Stevenson requested that Blue Max (ARA) be scrambled and that Artillery be called in on a defensive target for the interim period. Cpt Parker relayed this information to the Battalion, while Lt Bitzer, FO for B Company, relayed the call for fire to A Battery, 1/77 Artillery. The battalion, in turn, relayed the request for ARA to Brigade. Moments later, word returned that ARA had been refused because the unit was not yet in contact.

By 0305, the enemy force, still in column formation, had moved to the road (TL 6A) at coordinates XT343154 which was 200 meters from the 1st Platoon location and 500 meters from the FOB. At the road, the enemy sent out a point element to recon both sides and establish security positions for crossing. At approximately 0306, A Battery, 1/77 Artillery responded and the first 105 HE rounds began to land inbetween the 1st Platoon location and the enemy force. 50 to 60 rounds were fired from 0306 to 0320 hrs under the direction of Lt. Bitzer. The FO shifted the fires, walking them in towards the FOB and the now deploying enemy force. He made an attempt to put a semi-circle of fire from west to east around the 1st Platoon and brought the fires to within 250 meters of the 1st Platoon's location. At approximately 0315 enemy mortar rounds began to fall on the 2d and 1st Platoon's locations, and Lt Bitzer made a bold correction, attempting to knock out the enemy tube.

By 0315 ARA was again requested. Blue Max was on station by 0320 requesting that the friendly positions mark their locations. At the same time a request for a flare ship and Smokey was put in and approved. The Battalion Commander and the S³, experiencing poor communications with the company, and

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sensing the gravity of the situation, went airborne to better analyze and communicate with the ground forces. Initially, Cpt Parker and LTC Burcham experienced problems in employing ARA and Spooky due to the inability of the two engaged platoons to adequately mark their locations. Tube Artillery had to shut off once ARA was on station and was therefore ineffective in the ensuing contact. The Company Commander lost communications with the 1st Platoon, which was the most engaged - fighting at least 2 and probably 3 Companies. Another initial problem experienced by Cpt Parker was determining the exact location of the 2d Platoon, as they were not directly south of the FOB as originally thought. Spooky dropped flares for illumination, but experienced difficulty in seeing the battlefield due to his altitude and because the ground ~~base~~ reflected the light.

Spooky initially attempted to engage battlefield targets, but the Battalion Commander shifted him to anti-aircraft targets endangering ARA. LTC Burcham and Maj Sewell stated that the C&C ship was a necessity for control of ARA and Spooky and the decision was made to employ ARA for close-in support rather than depend on tube artillery as shifts from one target to another took longer with tube artillery. TAC Air was also considered, but was decided against initially by the Battalion Commander due to the difficulty in identifying friendly locations.

By 0320, the 1st Platoon was receiving heavy 82mm and 60mm mortar fire as well as RPG, B-40, automatic and small arms fire. The first rounds landing on the platoon's position injured several men seriously and destroyed one radio. Lt. Stevenson and SFC Martinez, the 1st Platoon Sergeant, noticed from the protection of the ant hill and foxhole #3 that the enemy force had begun to deploy from the road towards their position. An estimated three companies deployed to the south, southeast and east and began to deliver accurate and

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heavy RPG, B-40, machinegun and small arms fire from within 250 meters. The enemy, using fire and maneuver and covered by heavy fire support, began to move closer to the 1st platoon's location. Two NVA, for some unknown reason ran straight towards foxhole #3 from the west. They were engaged by the men of that foxhole and one was killed, the other wounded. The intensity of fire on both sides increased. Communications were poor and Lt Stevenson vainly attempted to inform his company commander of his situation. In turn, Cpt Parker attempted to instruct the 1st Platoon to mark their location so that ARA could provide close-in defensive support. After a particularly heavy barrage of B-40 and RPG fire, communications were lost with the besieged platoon for the rest of the contact.

One B-40 rocket hit #2 foxhole directly, killed the platoon leader and destroyed the remaining radio. Assuming command, SFC Martinez called to the members of his platoon to conserve their ammunition. He told them to fire only at those individuals who breached the perimeter. The enemy, it was determined, launched two mass assaults against the platoon's PCE. Each assault was accompanied by heavy mortar, RPG, B-40, machinegun and small arms support. NVA radios were heard throughout the battle area. The 1st Platoon countered by blowing their Claymores and firing accurate, well aimed shots at the advancing hordes of soldiers, conservatively estimated at between 200 and 300 men. B-40 fire became more accurate and heavier. Members of the platoon reported that if they attempted to fire with their M-16's, they would receive a B-40 rocket in return. Although ARA and Spooky were now working on station, they were ^{little} unable to provide/support to the platoon, as they could not accurately determine the friendly position. SFC Martinez told his men to mark their positions by throwing trip flares. He was informed by SGT Gilbert, a squad leader, that the trips were 3 feet outside their foxholes but that the fire was so intense they could

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not be reached. The men, sensing the necessity of ARA support, squirted insect repellent on the ground and lit it, but the volume of fire they received in return was so intense the the effort had to be abandoned.

As the enemy companies moved closer to the 1st platoon element, they deployed a squad to the north setting up a new B-40 rocket and .51 caliber machinegun position. By 0415 the platoon had suffered 4 killed and almost all were wounded at least once. SFC Martinez observed that one B-40 position near the bomb crater to the south was capable of delivering accurate fire towards foxhole #3 and the ant hill. He decided to make an attempt to evacuate his position and move 50 meters to the northwest into an open field. As he and three others left their position and crossed the rice paddy dike to the west, they received .51 caliber fire from the south. Two men were killed and SFC Martinez was severely wounded. The remaining individual, SP4 Lee Alexander, pulled the dead and wounded to the safety of the field by himself, and delivered first aid to SFC Martinez.

The men in foxhole #1, viewing the movement of SFC Martinez and realizing that foxholes #2 and #3 were now empty, moved to cover the gaps in their "U" shaped formation. Two individuals moved into Foxhole #2, one to the junction of the rice paddy dikes and one to the field where SFC Martines had been drug. SP4 Vincent Martino moved to the rice paddy dike and observed an enemy .51 caliber machinegun position and B-40 rocket position to the north-east. He also received heavy fire when he was spotted on the dike, but by hopping around he was able to deliver accurate fire on the two positions and neutralize them.

In foxholes #4 and #5, the 1st platoon members encountered a different situation. The advancing enemy had moved into the foxholes on the eastern portion of the perimeter. A berm between their foxholes and the enemy position prohibited fire to be returned at the enemy. The men resorted to hand grenades,

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just as the enemy mounted a machine gun on the berm. The enemy position was destroyed.

The fight raged from 0315 until 0545 at the first platoon position. Throughout the contact the 1st platoon returned fire and conserved ammunition as best as possible. The enemy launched two wave assaults against the position and were driven back in both cases. Each assault, it was accurately estimated, mounted at least 150 to 200 men. The platoon successfully defended itself against three companies and refused to run or leave their dead and wounded. The platoon also reported that the enemy seemed to be "hopped up" on drugs or opium. Frequently they would stand and walk towards the position to be cut down by the M-16's. Or the enemy soldiers would run crazily and wildly in different directions - across the battlefield - yelling and laughing.

The enemy succeeded in occupying positions within 20 meters of the 1st platoon and many were killed within 10 feet. When the contact ended, those members of the 1st platoon not killed or seriously wounded had between one and two magazines of ammunition left. They had suffered 6 KIA, 17 WIA, 2 lightly wounded not medevaced and 2 not wounded. They had expended all claymores, M60, and M79 ammunition. The platoon members, Company Commander and Battalion Commander made conservative estimates that at least 150 to 200 NVA had been killed and that the position had been assaulted by at least three companies.

The second platoon, under the command of Lt Powell, experienced a similarly vicious contact. Having exposed their position at 0040, the platoon maintained 100% alert for 2 hrs. They listened intently to the 1st Platoon Leader's conversations with Opt Parker and were aware of the size of the approaching enemy force at 0250. Likewise, they observed the enemy movement towards the road and subsequent deployment towards the 1st Platoon. Minutes later, when

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mortar rounds came crashing in the vicinity, Lt Powell decided that his position was no longer tenable and gave the order to pick up what the men could carry and run to the drainage ditch. Six men were killed in the initial enemy mortar concentration. The drainage and rice paddy dike offered some protection from the flying schrapnel, and the platoon hastily and effectively reorganized facing east and west. The rapid redeployment caused several problems. The Claymore detonators were left behind and although the mines were still in place, they could not be detonated. Secondly, in the hasty move the men left behind their trip flares which later could have assisted in marking locations.

The platoon continued to receive a heavy bombardment from 82mm and 60mm mortars and like the 1st platoon also received RPG, B-40, automatic weapons and small arms for the next two hours. The platoon did have a protected position however and it's fire power on line, oriented in both directions. By firing their LAWS, they were able to neutralize one B-40 position and one .51 caliber position during the ensuing assault by an estimated Company size force. Several assaults were made by the enemy, attempting to overrun the US position. SGT James R. Edberg, a squad leader in the platoon stated that the assault was not of the same magnitude that hit the 1st platoon; it was not a wave assault.

The massed enemy forces poured fire into the friendly position from 30 to 50 meters away, using fire and maneuver in attempting to get closer to the friendly position. SGT Edberg instructed his men to conserve ammunition, fire single, well aimed shots - only at those NVA who attempted to close with their position. The platoon utilized it's M79's, M60's and hand grenades to best advantage - firing at bunched troops and automatic weapons positions. One M60 was hit and destroyed by an incoming mortar round and the platoon was forced to orient one gun to the west and one to the east. SGT Edberg crawled the length of the ditch as did the Platoon Sergeant, SSG ^{Jack} John Parick, encouraging

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the men, calming their fears and attending to casualties. The platoon medic, and platoon leader were seriously wounded by a B-40 round at approximately 0400, and the platoon RTO, PFC Harold J Close and SSG Pabick were forced to divert their efforts to the direction of ARA and the marking of their position. The platoon had good communications with the ARA pilots and the Cobras made pass after pass, providing close-in support to the hard hit platoon. The platoon members first lit heat tabs to mark their position. One trip flare was thrown but it failed to go off; finally, the troopers pulled off their shirts, sprayed them with insect repellent and ignited them. Each time a flaming shirt left the cover of the ditch, a B-40 round screamed in on the man who threw it. The Platoon Sergeant was seriously wounded in such an action. When all shirts were gone, the troopers resorted to firing a burst of tracer bullets oriented to the west. In this way, ARA was able to fire it's minigun in north/south passes as close as 10 meters from the friendly unit.

At approximately 0400, the Battalion S3, Maj Sewell, attempted to get 155mm Artillery blocking fires from B Battery, 1/30 Artillery at LZ Tracy, but experienced difficulty in getting approval for the mission. The 155 fires came in approximately one hour after requested and was positioned by the Artillery. LNO from the C&C helicopter to further annihilate the now fleeing NVA force.

The Company Commander, Battalion Commander, Battalion S3, Brigade Commander and Brigade S3 all felt that support from all resources was adequate and timely. The Battalion Commander stated that he had ample resources and that none had to wait while others were being employed. He indicated that while one section of ARA broke station, another section replaced it without delay. Also two Spooky ships were utilized and that when one had expended it's flares another was on station to replace it.

As dawn approached, the contact slowed and B Company watched the NVA

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pull off the wounded bodies. The 2d platoon members hesitated to fire on the bearers of the wounded because they were down to three or four magazines per man, but when they did, they observed that more NVA soldiers behind the wounded simply scooped them up and continued to evade.

The 2d platoon members felt that the enemy deployment was advantageous to them as fire from the element on the east passed over the heads and slammed into the enemy element to the west. The enemy, in effect was firing at one-another. At 0440 the first platoon from A Company, 2/5 Cav was notified to prepare for a night combat assault and at 0617 the 1st Platoon was lifted into the 2d platoon's location to reinforce and relieve the pressure on the friendly unit. (XT349147) The 1st Platoon of A Company met with no resistance and linked up with the 2d Platoon at 0629. It was decided at that time to utilize the Combat assault lift birds which had brought in the 1st Platoon of A Company to evacuate the wounded and dead from the 2d Platoon. The 2d Platoon suffered 5 KIA, 16 WIA, 2 Lightly WIA not medevaced, and 4 not wounded. By 0658 the wounded members of the 2d platoon were on their way to medical care at Cu Chi. A conservative estimate of Enemy losses in the platoon area is placed at 100 KIA.

Similarly, C Company 2/5 Cavalry was informed at 0415 hrs to move as soon as possible, on foot, to the 1st Platoon location and to relieve enemy pressure. Their overnight location was approximately 1800 meters from B Company and by 0530, they were within 400 meters of the besieged position. They were guided into position by Cpt Parker who gave directions by radio as he looked at the strobe light which was carried by the front element of C Company. Cpt Parker guided them into the exact position as if he were adjusting artillery. By 0600 the Company had linked up with the 1st Platoon and had secured the FOB. At 0622, eight medevac ships were requested for the 1st Platoon. Within three minutes the medevac birds were on station and the wounded were evacuated to Cu Chi for treatment.

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To effect the police of the battle area and to pursue the enemy force, A Company, 1/8 Cavalry was combat assaulted into XT334149 (southwest of the 1st Platoon's location), at 0820 from XT353124, their overnight location. The company swept the area of contact and moved in a westerly direction in pursuit of the enemy force. Both C Company, 2/5 Cavalry and A Company, 1/8 Cavalry found evidence which indicated that the two platoons had engaged a reinforced Battalion. Heavy blood trails, bloody bandages, pieces of bodies and NVA equipment were strewn for hundreds of meters. Among the items found were: 32 NVA KIA, 1 NVA WIA PW, 2 AK47's, many AK47 magazines, and hundreds of loose AK rounds, 1 box 7.60 Anti-aircraft ammunition, several gas masks, 15 chicom hand grenades, and 1/2" of documents. In addition, Major Sewell, after an examination of the area reported 8/50 caliber firing positions at: XT335154, 327150, 329154, 335154, 339149, 341149 and 328147. Based on this evidence, observation of the battle from the C&C ship and from the reports by ARA and Spooky pilots, the enemy strength was placed at a reinforced Battalion. Scout ships were also called in to make a first light check of the contact area. They reported finding numerous bunkers at 334150. Apache Red worked the area, making close-in passes and reconnaissance by fire. At XT332153 they found tunnel entrances. C Company, 2/5 Cavalry checked this area and found 6 bunkers with overhead cover, armor piercing .50 caliber rounds, and empty boxes for the ammunition.

At 0955 hours, B Company, 2/5 Cavalry received a read out on the wounded PW who stated that he was from the 1st Bn, 272 Regiment, 9th VC Division. The PW stated that his battalion's mission was not to infiltrate, but rather to make contact with a US base suspected to be further north of B Company's location. They were to engage and destroy this base.

At 0900, airstrikes were requested by the 1st Brigade and 10 F-100 jet fighters responded (See Tab E for expenditures). Many secondary explosions were observed east of the contact area as a result of these airstrikes.

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13. Conclusions/Commanders' Analysis:

- a. That B Company, 2/5 Cavalry successfully defended itself against a reinforced enemy Battalion.
- b. That 200 enemy KIA is a conservative estimate.
- c. That close ARA support was a key factor to the success of the battle.
- d. That the enemy did not know the disposition and location of the U. S. unit and was attempting to pass through that location to hit an objective further north. It is assumed that the 6 man enemy reconnaissance element which made contact with the 2d Platoon shortly after midnight was checking out the location where the US company had received log earlier in the day. It is also assumed that at least part of the enemy reconnaissance element returned to its parent unit, informed the battalion of the US location, and that plans were made to engage the 2d Platoon with at least a company while the main body moved north toward its objective. It is assumed that the main body consisted of at least 2 and possibly 3 companies and that they did not know of the 1st Platoon's location - to the north, nor the exact size of the US unit.
- e. That the fighting spirit of the SKYTROOPER, his determination to live, and his concern for the lives of fellow troopers was the key factor in the success of this contact.
- f. That leadership exercised by those at the lowest level was exemplary. The fact that none of the friendly positions were overrun and that in both platoons the platoon leader and platoon sergeant were out of action brings great credit to these young leaders, and their ability to take command and perform with outstanding success.

g. B Company, 2/5 Cavalry was returned to LZ Terri for the night of 10 March, but was back in the field the following day with replacements from within the battalion. Although the Company suffered almost complete loss of two platoons, they were not placed combat ineffective.

h. When the decision was made to deploy forces west of the Vam Co Dong River in the Angel's Wing area, it was done in full realization of the risks involved. Commanders at all levels were cognizant of the enemy's two great advantages: The security afforded by the near proximity of the Cambodian border; and his ability to mass forces at a time and place of his own choosing against one or more of the necessarily dispersed friendly elements. To offset completely these enemy advantages would have required the positioning of units at a considerable distance from the border, probably east of the Vam Co Dong River itself, and/or the substitution of a series of fixed, hardened, well defended strongpoints for the mobile posture actually employed. To have opted for either or both of these alternatives, however, would have been to negate accomplishment of the mission. Giving up space west of the Vam Co Dong River would have brought some measure of security but at the cost of the early warning needed to marshal a force large enough to defeat the enemy before he could have bypassed these positions at will. In the light of these considerations, the most effective

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course of action was the employment of mobile, semi-independent, small units capable of detecting the infiltration of major enemy forces and delaying these until they could be attacked and destroyed by the application of massed fires. In this engagement on 8-9 March, B/2/5 Cavalry fulfilled this role completely, notwithstanding its own, relatively high casualties. It positioned itself on what proved to be an infiltration route, detected a major enemy force, attacked same, fixing it in position until heavy fires could be brought to bear. It is uncertain as to whether the enemy battalion was attempting a major move east of the Vam Co Dong River or as the PW indicated, moving to destroy a US unit or installation. However, in neither case was that objective attained, and the damage to the 1st Battalion, 272d Regiment must have been severe.

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14. Lessons Learned:

a. The results of this engagement, specifically the higher than normal casualty rate for B/2/5 Cavalry, naturally caused a reevaluation of the concept of operations in the KAVAJO WARHORSE AO. As indicated above, that reassessment fully indorsed the concept of a "forward" deployment, in a small unit, mobile posture of the elements of 1/8 and 2/5 Cavalry. However, approval of the general concept does not, in this case, imply approval of the specific positioning of companies on the night of 8-9 March. One of the salient lessons of this action is the fact that the term "forward" deployment is a highly relative one, with its application determined by the specific circumstances prevailing. While endorsing the deployment of B/2/5 Cavalry (and the other companies) west of the Vam Co Dong River, this report acknowledges that an increase of only two or three kilometers of "stand-off" distance between B Co's position and the border would have been appropriate. With hindsight, it appears that the cost in terms of "early warning Time", as discussed above, would have been compensated for adequately by the advantages of maneuver room for commitment of airborne reserves and for unrestricted application of pursuing fires. In short, commitment of small, semi-independent units within a certain minimum distance of the Cambodian border (a distance varying according to circumstances, but usually not less than five kilometers) is a risky venture, justified only in special circumstances after careful evaluation.

b. When maneuvering independently on the Vietnam battlefield, the US company or platoon normally secures itself by assuming a purely defensive posture: by coiling into a perimeter on the most defensible terrain available, digging in, registering defensive concentrations and firing them occasionally during the night as a precautionary measure, and by limiting its "ambushes" to local-security range and/or the dictated concept of operation, as was the case in this engagement; then the unit must find its security in deception and mobility. Clearly, the CO of B Co understood this. His company had been in the field, on the move, for the eight days preceding the engagement, positioning itself in a different location each night, moving away from its obviously compromised log (aerial resupply) position, reconnoitering night positions during daylight but copying them only after dark, and by registering deceptive defensive concentrations as well as the actual ones. All of this is highly commendable and undoubtedly accounts for the fact that this was a friendly-initiated action, with B Co achieving surprise and the enemy receiving the initial, and apparently, very damaging fires. If, after this initial deliverance of their organic and supporting fires, the 1st and 2d platoons had retained their mobility, had disengaged and fallen back even as much as two, or three hundred meters (possibly on the main company position), then the same gains might well have been achieved

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at much less the cost. Conversely, by losing their mobility and allowing themselves to be fixed in non-hardened, virtually indefensible positions, by a superior force, these platoons invited the high casualties which resulted and, in fact, risked the disaster of being overrun. Patently, this is easier said than done, particularly on flat, open terrain on a moonlight night, when bullets are flying and instinct calls for hugging the earth. However, easy or difficult, it is an undisputable fact that the unit which allows itself to be fixed in an unprepared position by a superior force is in deep trouble. This danger needs constant emphasis, and techniques to avoid it need to be developed, rehearsed and employed.

c. In this action, the normal situation prevailed in that the infantry commander had a number of types of fire support to call upon. Unfortunately, in this action as in many others, all of these fire support resources were not necessarily complementary, at least, not at the same time. Consequently, the Battalion Commander had to pick and choose, selecting one at the expense of suppressing others. The record indicates that he chose wisely, with the result that the total fire support rendered was very effective. However enough problems, mainly of control and coordination, did arise as to warrant some concern and corrective action. These problems were not major ones, but do indicate the need to update SOPs for "packaging" the total fire support available for spelling out in detail the authority and responsibility of each person involved in that process.

d. The fact that a significant number of things unaccountable "went wrong" at most inappropriate times does not warrant the label of a "lesson learned" since even the best of outfits, such as this one, this phenomenon has occurred often in the past and unfortunately, will presumably do so in the future. Obviously there is no real excuse for supporting gunships not having the right frequency, or a unit carrying an inoperable recoilless rifle in the field and not carrying adequate devices for night marking of positions, or having them readily available, and for supporting aircraft to be discovered as "not mission ready" only when they are assumed to be lifting off; just as obviously, there is no simple remedy for these problems either. However, commanders and staff officers need to expect them and to anticipate them by longer lead times, and alternate solutions even while they are working to preclude them.

e. Emergency ammunition resupply is a key point. Ammunition should be packaged, ready for use, and easily broken down for rapid distribution to individuals rather than packaged in bulk. It should be stored in the rear, easily attained when needed and be packaged in such a manner that it may be delivered by all modes of resupply.

f. Consideration should be given to ready reaction forces which are readily available to reinforce a hotly contested battle. Rehearsal and practice of important factors is a must, including night combat assaults, securing an attained objective, conducting medical evacuation and immediate reaction to notification.

g. A C&C ship is of utmost necessity in any major contact. Without it, a commander is unable to accurately make decisions affecting ground forces. The commander's appearance at the battlefield is also a significant morale factor to engaged troops.

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h. Responsive tube artillery is a necessity in any contact. The artillery must be capable of firing open sheaf or point type targets and rapidly shifting from one to another and the situation warrents. FO's must be able to call for and adjust these types of fires.

i. Communications and timely, accurate reports are of utmost importance. If key decisions are made without accurate intelligence of the situation, disasters may result. Much is lost in reporting when commanders talk to commanders or S3's talk to S3's, as duty personnel are normally not recording these transmissions.

j. Radio nets must be minimized for units in contact and consideration should be given to a contact net for artillery if appropriate communications is available.

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