

BATTLE REPORT - May 27 1969

Charlie Company – 1st Bn, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Div. (Red Warriors)



RED WARRIOR MISSION STATEMENT FOR VIETNAM

“To close with the enemy by means of fire and maneuver in order to destroy or capture him, or to repel his assault by fire, close combat and counterattack.”

Compiled 2015 – amended 9/12/15

FOREWARD

When first gathering materials for this report, it began as an unclear story as to what tactically happened that day. While Battalion radio logs were available, there was a large 2 hr 25 minute gap from first contact at 1130 until later in the afternoon. This was likely due to the company turning their radio frequencies directly to artillery and air support. But as men came forward to tell their story, we began to piece together the sequence of events that took place on the ground.

While we know that radio logs often are inaccurate and items were often entered after the fact, they continue to be the best-documented source for the overall ‘big picture’ of May 27, 1969. Thus, this report first uses the battalion radio logs to build the initial framework of the battle, and then to fill-in the gaps we use eyewitness accounts. Please keep in mind that after 43 years men’s memories recall things differently and it’s not uncommon that we encounter different versions of the very same event or situation. Knowing this variable, we never the less submit this report as an honest and sincere attempt to tell the story of May 27.

“There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.”
Aldous Huxley - Philosopher

Compiled by Jim Daniels – SGT - 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company June 5, 1969 – June 1970

For those who were there that day, we seek your valuable input to tell this story. Please contact us and we will add your recollections where appropriate.

The Battle at (ZA 112766) Map Sheet 6537-II LZ Nichole (Nicole) Map Sheet 6537-I
Charlie Co., 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, Republic of Vietnam

This Report made possible by the contributions and eyewitness accounts from the following soldiers:

SGT Lyle Bowes, 2 nd PLT	SP4 Jack Leninger, Bravo Co.	LT Richard Orndoff, Acting CMDR
LT Larry Boyd, CMDR Delta Co.	SGT Richard Makruski, 1 st PLT	SGT Greg Robillard, 3 rd PLT
SP4 Butch Cooper - 4/42 Artillery	PFC William (Willy) Masel, 1 st PLT	CPT. Richard Wandke – CMDR C, Co.
SP4 Bill Kahl, 2 nd PLT	SP4 Mike McCardle, 3 rd PLT	
LT Dennis Larkin, 2 nd PLT LDR	LT Warren Nikkola, 1st PLT LDR	

PRELUDE

MAY 23rd and MAY 24th



The Battalion moved from up in the high, triple canopy, mountainous jungle terrain around Fire Base LZ Mile High west of Kontum down to Fire Base LZ Nichole (Often spelled Nicole) south/southwest of Kontum as part of "Operation Putnam Tiger". The terrain in this area was still jungle, but was more open with rolling hills. The move was made in response to intelligence reports of heavy enemy activity in that area. Delta Company provided Fire Base Security while in the field Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie Companies moved out to began their missions.

MAY 27th OVERVIEW

At approximately 1130 on May 27th, Charlie Co. (88 men) initiated contact with what was at first thought to be 7 NVA soldiers at location ZA125767. That contact progressed into a battle with a much larger NVA unit. Later information indicated that it was a reinforced Company of the K6th Bn. 24th NVA Regt. During this battle **Capt. Richard Wandke** (Charlie Co. Commander) was wounded several times. **LT. Dick Orndoff** (Bn. S3 Air) was CA'ed (Combat Assaulted) in and took over as Charlie Company Commander during the ongoing firefight. Records indicate that Charlie Co. sustained 6 KIA's (Killed in Action) and 44 WIA's (Wounded in Action). Additionally **LTC Carter** (Bn. Commander) and **Specialist Ken Seward** (Senior Bn. Medic) both from Headquarters Company (HHC) were also killed. In all, 8 Red Warriors die in the battle. Enemy KIA's were confirmed at 40. **LTC Carter** is the highest-ranking Red Warrior officer killed during the battalion's period in Vietnam.

DEDICATION

We dedicate this report to the memories of the eight soldiers who lost their lives in this battle, to the 40 men who were wounded, and to all those who fought bravely that day.

KILLED IN ACTION:



PFC Gary Fassel



SSG James Francis



CPL Keith Gibson



PFC Garey Grubbs



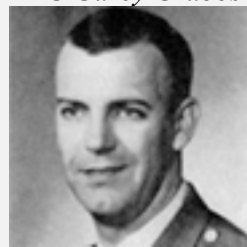
PFC Matthew Lozano



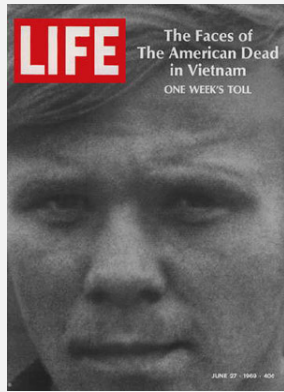
*SP4 Harold
Warmsley*



*SP5 Kenneth
Seward
Medic*



*LTC Robert Carter
BN CDR*



Those who died as a result of this battle are immortalized in the famous **LIFE Magazine** of June 27, 1969 "*The Faces of The American Dead in Vietnam – One Week's Toll*"

A web link to portions of the Life Magazine page is:
http://www.redwarriors.us/NEWS_LifeMag.htm

MAPS

The area of this battle covers two Map sections. They can be viewed and downloaded from the **Red Warrior Website Map page** @ http://www.redwarriors.us/NEWS_Maps_Main.htm

Map Sheet 6537-II @ < http://www.redwarriors.us/MAPS/Maps_Main/6537-2.jpg>

LZ Nichole (Nicole)

Map Sheet 6537-I @ <http://www.redwarriors.us/MAPS/Maps_Main/6537-1.jpg>

BATTALION AND CHARLIE COMPANY OFFICERS ON MAY 27



LTC Robert
Carter.
BN CMDR



MAJ Ben Owen
BN S3



CPT Richard
Wandke
C CO CMDR



LT Warren
Nikkola
1st Platoon LDR



LT Dennis
Larkin
2nd Platoon LDR



LT Jack
Nussbaum, 3rd
Platoon LDR



LT Dick Orndoff
Relief
C CO CMDR

BATTALION RADIO LOG - Call Signs May 1969

To download complete May 27 Radio Log go to:

http://www.redwarriors.us/_Charlie_BattleReport/May27_69_RADIO%20LOG.pdf

To download complete May 28 log, go to:

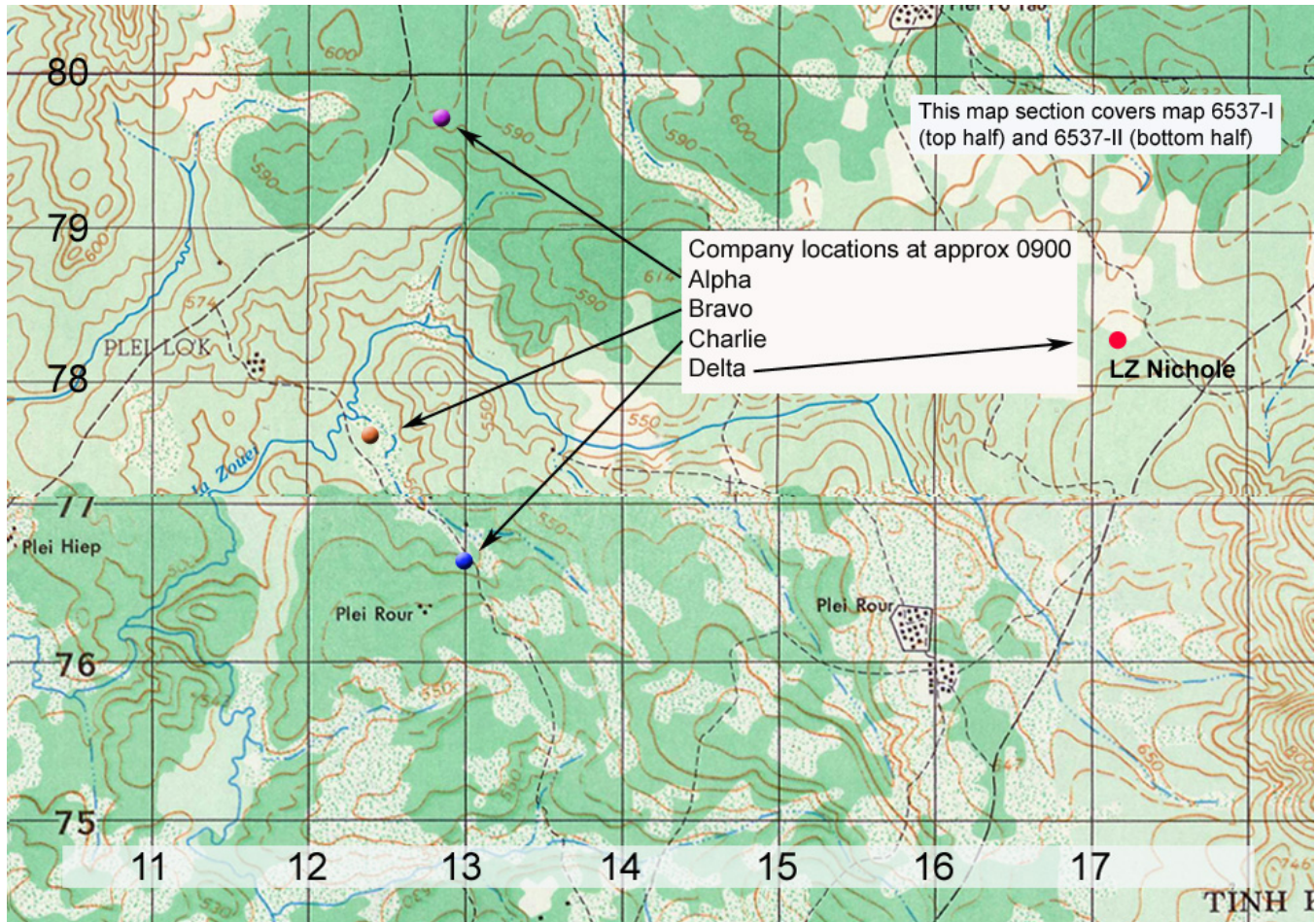
http://www.redwarriors.us/_Delta_BattleReportElements/Radio%20Logs/RadioLog28May.pdf

A Co = 96	B Co = 39	C Co = 18	D Co = 20	Recon = 92	BN = 60
BN Commander LTC Carter = 8 1					

Cider	Forward Air Controllers (FAC) flying a small one man fixed wing spotter aircraft
Spads	A1E Sky Raiders, WWII era type fixed wing prop driven fighter -bomber aircraft
Scorpion	Cobra model helicopter gun ships
Bikini	Huey model helicopter (slicks)
Black Jack	Huey model helicopter (slick)

THE DAY BEGINS – May 27, 1969

The Morning of May 27 starts out as routine. Delta Company is stationed in LZ Nichole (Nicole) and conducting morning sweeps around the LZ. Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie are in the field and moving out from their night locations. By approximately 0900 the units are at the locations shown on the map below. Charlie Company has a contingent of 88 men.



At 0800 Bravo Company (39) finds the first indications of the enemy. For the next half hour they continue to find traces of the NVA.

0800	39	60	At grid 130775 found fresh diggings on bunkers, also found a steel pot, further readout follows	SFG Kbde
0805	39	60	Wants guns over if possible	SFDSS
0820	39	60	Also found a GI gas mask and some kind of spoon and AK Bayonet.	SFDSS
0835	39	60	Also found 1 ChiCom grenade and Dink shirt, believed to have found southern end of contact area. Will move on to my objective and send an element back to check it out.	SFRFbe

A short time later Charlie Company also finds an NVA uncompleted two-week old complex.

0852	18	60	At 132767 found 8 fighters, 4 sleepers, 1 latrine, 1 mess with 4 stoves. Appeared to be VC. Approx 2 weeks old, set up in a triangle, not finished	SFRF bde
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At 0935 and at 1000 Bravo Company finds additional indications of NVA presence in the area. They report that they have found bunkers, some old equipment and ammo.

0935	39	60	At grid 124776 found 12 bunkers. 4x4x3 neg OHC. Neg recent use. Also at this location found 1 gook gas mask the old type with canvas mask cover and plastic eye-piece overs.	SFRF
0945	18	60	All the 18 element have closed and they are SP'ing at this time	SFRF
1000	39	60	At same location found some more bunkers 4x4x4 with 2' OHC. 1 82mm round, a song book and 3 old gook ruck sacks. There are 18 bunkers and 2 kitchens.	SFRF

By 1045 Charlie Company has moved almost 600 meters to the WSW and are located at 125764. They swing northward and the company column stops movement. They're now stretched out over several hundred meters. The company point element is 1st platoon, followed by the CP group, then 2nd platoon, with 3rd platoon pulling up the rear. While the company is stopped, 4 man recons are sent out from each platoon to perform cloverleaf sweeps.

SGT Greg Robillard is 3rd squad leader of third Platoon, describes the terrain that morning.



Sgt. Greg Robillard
3rd Platoon

"...we had moved for approximately 4 hours when we took a 'hump break'.

Each of the three platoons sent out a four man recon team to do a cloverleaf search, a few hundred meters outside the company...the area was relatively flat with a few tree lines and lots of tall elephant grass."

At 1105, one of Charlie's eastern most recon teams reports the finding of a recently used trail with an ominous unknown symbol. They continue their sweep of the area.

1105	18	60	At 125758 found a trail 1' wide running N to S. Recent use 1 week. Also a marking of 2 sticks in a "V" shape with 3 sticks across the wide end.	SFRF
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FIRST CONTACT

At 1130, the recon from 1st Platoon report that they had found a blue line (Stream). The recon is east of the first platoon element, about 100 to 200 meters away. Squad leader Sgt. Greg Robillard of 3rd platoon is monitoring radio traffic and remembers the initial report of seeing the NVA.

SGT Greg Robillard – Third Platoon, 3rd Squad Leader

"They had found blue line to their immediate front. The odd thing was this stream was not on our maps and we were running low on water. They were asked if it was big enough to fill our canteens in, and they replied 'yes', but not at this time as there are seven November Victor Alphas (NVA) in the blue line. Captain Wandke inquired as to what they were doing and they responded that the NVA were taking a bath and playing 'grab-ass'."

SP4 Mike McCardle, an RTO in 3rd Platoon's 1st Squad, was also monitoring radio traffic.



SP4 Mike McCardle
3rd PLT

"I was the RTO for 3-1 (3rd platoon, 1st squad) and was listening to the chatter ... 1st platoon's patrol reported spotting NVA in the river bathing and requested an OK to fire them up."

Captain Wandke then gives the order to engage the enemy.



CPT Richard Wandke
Commander C Co.

"I told them to open fire.

Then they reported that there were a lot of them, so I moved the first Platoon into the area. When the first platoon reached the area they called and said there are too many of them. I told the second platoon to move into contact and told the third platoon to stay with our gear."

Radio logs capture the initial report of contact AT 1130.

1130	18	60	Made Contact, 7 dinks moving to the west, think we got one, we initiated contact. Neg friendly casualties.	SFRFbde
1135	18	60	Grid of contact 125767 just received some more small arms fire, going out after them at this time. Using black hawk 30	SFRFbde

When the first return fire occurred, 1st Platoon leader LT Warren Nikkola tells his men to "Saddle up!" They drop their rucks and instinctively move east towards the sounds of fire so as to assist their recon team, which is some distance away.



LT Warren Nikkola,
1st PLT Leader

"Return fire was immediate. The volume of enemy fire was building. I told SSG Francis to get the rest of the platoon ready to go forward. - We were going after our patrol. It wasn't hard to figure out where they were as the rate of fire kept increasing."

Both RTO McCardle and SGT Robillard, are monitoring their radio. Both vividly remember those initial moments. To Robillard the radio silence of 1st Platoon's recon element indicated ominous trouble.

SGT Greg Robillard – Third Platoon, 3rd Squad Leader

“...we heard a few M-16s open fire, followed by a tremendous return fire from AK’s - an attempt was made to get to the first platoon team but there were no radio transmissions to or from them again.”

SP4 Mike McCardle, RTO 1st Squad, 3rd Platoon

“I recall the first shots - the rest of the NVA unit was not far from the river, and they wheeled about and launched a savage counterattack. - It quickly became evident that we had about half of the world's supply of dinks on our hands and that we were in trouble.”

One can deduce that the “Dinks” had nearby security for their men who were bathing, and that they had responded immediately to the shots fired by 1st platoon’s recon element. Little did anyone know that they had walked into the outer elements of an entire NVA regiment. The NVA were on three sides of the 4-man team.

First Platoon Leader LT Nikkola recalls that from the get-go, they had to shoot their way forward, but they eventually got close to their troubled patrol, then worked hard to form a tiny teardrop shaped perimeter. The recon element was not much more than a thin line in front of the platoon perimeter.

LT Warren Nikkola - First Platoon Leader

“We tried hard to form a some sort of a perimeter but the incoming fire made any movement down right hairy! – ...the intensity of the enemy fire was unbelievable – B40’s and automatic fire The enemy seemed to be well dug in – we had little to no cover, hiding behind trees, roots, etc..”

Within a few minutes Captain Wandke and his RTO, SP4 Harold Warmesley, have moved forward and are now embedded within 1st Platoon’s small perimeter.

PFC William (Willy) Masel, in country for 8 weeks, and also member of 1st platoon, recalls those first terrifying moments as he moved forward.



PFC William Masel
1st PLT

“...we took off heading toward the sounds of AK’s, and then M16’s. As we came to an opening and down a small hill, there was an explosion to my right. It was only seconds later that I saw my hand covered in blood. One piece (Shrapnel) must have just hit a vein and it bled a lot, but was hardly worth the bandage. I took off toward the platoon, we were held back by a sniper. A round fired at us, just missed, and we dropped down behind a log. For some reason our medic jumped up over the log and a shot rang out and he fell. Another medic came to his aid, and another shot hit him in the wrist. I fired a few HE rounds with my M-79 in the direction of the sniper.”

The Intensity of fire escalates as indicated by radio log activity. 3rd platoon is given the mission to form a perimeter of defense, but they too are taking some fire and also find themselves pinned down.

To the north, Bravo Company, under the command of Captain Phillip Patrick, halts movement when they hear the distant firing. First platoon member, SP4 Jack Leninger, recalls the moment.



SP4 Jack Leninger
Bravo Company

“Suddenly small-arms fire exploded about a click away; someone was in contact. We didn’t know who. This time everyone (patrols) was pulled in, and we formed a perimeter. – I thought for sure we were going to move out and help whoever was in contact, but we just sat, listening to the firefight.”

Quote Source: *“Time Heals No wounds”* – by Jack Leninger – published 1993 Ballantine Books

Just 20 minutes from when first shots were fired, a brigade radio entry at 1150 indicates that Charlie Company has 2 WIA.

1155	18	60	Receiving B-40 and small arms fire. Believe to have 2 WIA friendlies, further read out follows	SFRFbe
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In hindsight we know that there are many more casualties, including KIA’s. Sgt. Rich Makruski, 1st platoon, first squad leader, sees fatalities very early on.



Sgt Rich Makruski
1st PLT

“When I heard fire we began to run forward and I remember seeing members of my squad already hit. (KIA’s Keith Gibson and Gary Fassel) I remember jumping over (a body) on the path moving forward.

I, and some other soldiers behind me, hit the ground when the small arms fire became intense. I can’t remember ever getting a clear view of where the fire was coming from.

I always figured the NVA’s were dug in pretty well and strategically placed because the fire was coming from everywhere.”

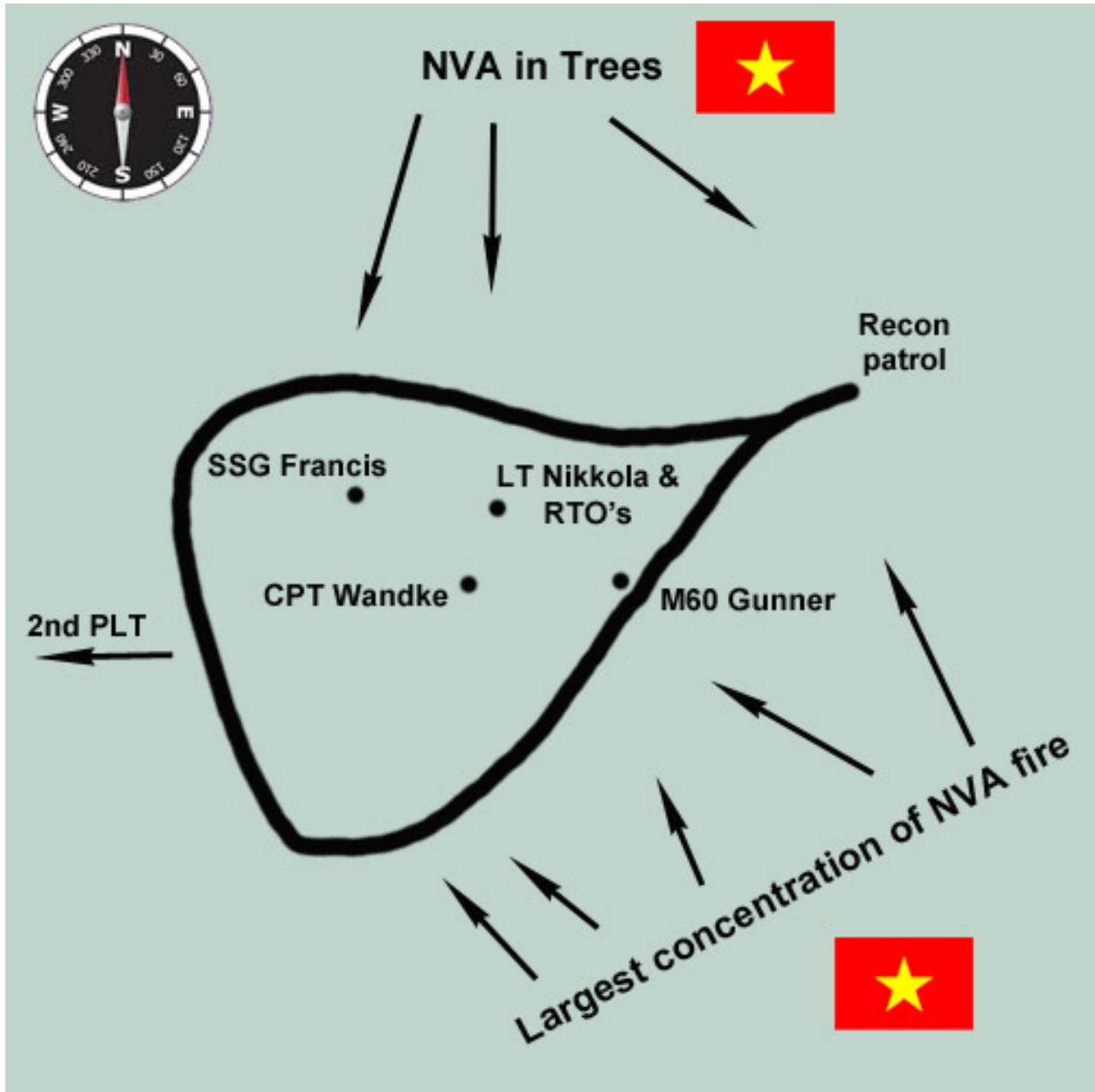
SSG Francis is already wounded, and pinned down so that no one could reach him.

SGT Rich Makruski – 1st Squad, 1st Platoon

“I was in the small perimeter and Sgt. Francis was close by and hit. He couldn’t be reached, but guys he knew were talking to him. When he went silent, I figured he had passed”

NOTE: At thirty minutes after first contact, the 1155 radio log entry becomes the last to brigade until 1420. It is reasoned that this is because frequencies were switched to direct radio communication with artillery and air support. We now rely on testimonials to determine the sequence of events.

Nikkola would later draw a diagram of how he remembered the tight platoon perimeter. He's aware he has already lost an M-60 gunner, and the status of the recon squad is uncertain.



Map not drawn to any scale, orientation approximate.

At LZ Nichole, Delta Company Commander LT Larry Boyd instinctively knows that if help is sent to Charlie Company, it will be his unit.



Lt Larry Boyd
CO Delta Co.

"It was becoming evident that Charlie Company was probably going to need some help and I assumed that Delta Company would likely be sent in to reinforce Charlie Company. I reported in to Lt. Col. Carter and asked if he needed us to go in to help Charlie Co. He said not at this point, but to get Delta Company ready and to be standing by if he decided to send us in."

As the early afternoon begins, Charlie Company casualties mount, including CPT Wandke and 1st Platoon leader Nikkola.

LT Warren Nikkola - First Platoon Leader

"- a rocket went off over my head. Capt Wandke, his RTO and I took some shrapnel to the back, legs and arms."

CPT Richard Wandke Company Commander

"At 1200 hours an RPG round hit a tree behind me and I was wounded on the thigh and calf of both legs. Nearby I heard a soldier ask for 'MEDIC !' and I crawled to him. He was in bad shape, but I put my hand on his chest and said 'Soldier you are going to be OK, this company will not run and I will make sure you get home.' He said 'Sir, it is you, thanks.' and then he died.

From 1130 to 1400 we used artillery and gunships and our weapons to fight the enemy. "

Also around noon, 2nd Platoon Leader LT Dennis Larkin receives orders to move his platoon towards the 1st platoon's position, some 75-100 meters away. Within moments of beginning that maneuver, 2nd platoon begins receiving heavy fire.



*Lt Dennis Larkin
2nd PLT Leader*

"Around 1200 hours the CO radio's for me to bring the 2nd platoon to his location. We got about 50 meters when we were hit by a B40 rocket. A few men were wounded we also received sniper fire from our right flank. As one of my men was trying to find the sniper – he was hit and received a sucking chest wound. Since we were receiving enemy fire from the front and right, I put my men into a wedge formation with my 'guns' on the right side. We moved out and did some "recon by fire" a few times."

TACTICAL SUMMARY 1200 HOURS – 30 minutes after first shots fired

As battle intensity grew, the tactical situation finds the Company being split roughly into two segments. First and second platoons are loosely linked and find themselves situated in terrain consisting of a combination of trees and elephant grass. First Platoon appears to be very close to their recon that had initially spotted the 7 Dinks at the blue line. Captain Wandke's CP is with First Platoon. Third platoon is under the leadership of LT Jack Nussbaum, who is temporarily filling in for LT Robert Power, who had just left for R&R. Nussbaum has been in the field only a few days. Third platoon is located some 50 – 100 meters south of 2nd platoon and pinned down in tall elephant grass.

At this point, Third platoon's Sgt Greg Robillard describes the scene from his position.

SGT Greg Robillard – Third Platoon, 3rd Squad Leader

“On the far side of the stream was a tree line which housed a large number of NVA who started unloading on the company with AK's, RPK machine guns and B-40 rocket propelled grenades. The company was spread out over a large area and it seemed like shooting was happening on all sides. The most difficult problem was you really didn't know where the rest of the company was located and who was moving out to your front. (elephant grass) The NVA actually had snipers climbing trees that were very accurate in hitting anyone who was exposed.”

Many accounts describe the difficulty of spotting the enemy because of the elephant grass, which is also briefly mentioned in Rich Makruski's account.

SGT Rich Makruski - 1st Platoon

“I can't describe the amount of gunfire. Lieutenant Nikkola was behind me and was trying to take charge and telling everyone to move forward and form a perimeter. That was impossible for me. One of my most vivid memories was watching the tall grass a few feet in front of me being cut down by gunfire. I really didn't know what I was shooting at but I remembered the idea of laying down a field of fire so I went through maybe five or six magazines. We were getting hit by small arms fire and a lot of B40 rockets. These rockets would explode above our heads and rain down shrapnel. A lot of guys had small entry wounds in their backs. We did create a makeshift perimeter but there was little else we could do. We were basically lying in tall grass with little cover. I don't remember where we got them, but there were morphine shots. I was crawling around and giving them to the wounded. The tough part was when people were going in and out of consciousness.”

Bravo Company, just 1000 meters to the north, is also experiencing enemy activity. At 1330 they report having “*dinks in the open*” and are calling in artillery. At 1340 Bravo reports “*Dinks are coming from the south to north.*” These no doubt are NVA elements fleeing 4/42nd artillery zeroing in around the firefight. Bravo's contact is likely a contributing factor that they are unable to immediately come to the aid of Charlie Company.

Artillery is now heavily pounding the area around Charlie Company's position. Gunships are on site by 1335.

1335	60	Bde	2 nd set of gun ships making their run	SFRFbde
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Wandke is wounded a 2nd time, along with his RTO Warmesley and LT Nikkola.

LT Warren Nikkola - First Platoon Leader

“... another rocket went off right above my head. Capt. Wandke got a nasty gash on his right shoulder and we all got pretty well nailed with shrapnel. A couple of times I drifted in and out of consciousness, but shortly everything cleared up.”

To the north, artillery and gun ships are also supporting Bravo Company's situation.

1355	39	60	Dinks are 15 meters across an open field in the wood line at approx. grid 124774. They are proceeding to cross the open field when the gun ships came on station. They ducked back in the woods. My 8 element still has movement over there. Believe when gunships clear out they will try to cross the field and we will eliminate them.	SFRFbde
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As mentioned earlier, within the first 30 minutes of contact LT Larkin's Second Platoon is moving towards the first platoon as fast as they can, but they too are taking fire. They continue to move cautiously forward until LT Larkin is finally with Captain Wandke. Larkin is then ordered to move back to where he came from, now tasked with clearing an LZ to the west.

LT Dennis Larkin 2nd Platoon Leader

"When my platoon was close enough to the CP group and the 1st platoon, I set up a small perimeter with a skirmish line going to the CP. I met with Cpt. Wandke, he was sitting against a tree - he was wounded at that time.

The Captain told me to have my platoon clear an LZ about 100 meters to the west. So we went back and found an area for the LZ. At some time one of our guys got caught between our skirmish line and the gooks. They exchanged machine gun fire with my gunner while the kid crawled back to our lines. Our gunner had five rounds left in his 60 when it ended."

Second platoon has begun the process of first finding, and then clearing an LZ near their position.

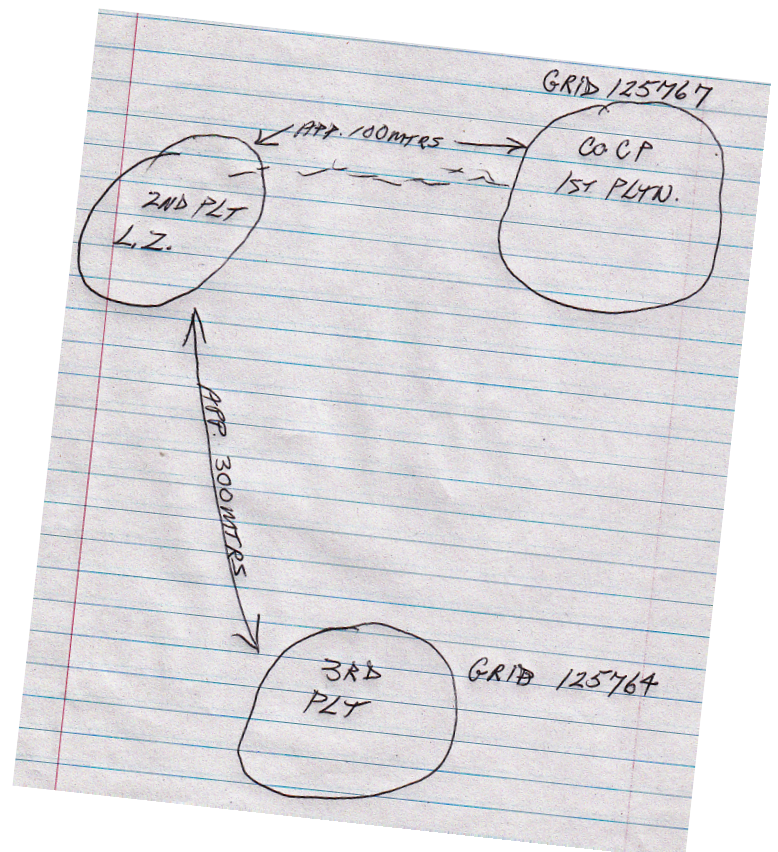
Years later LT Larkin drew this rough sketch of how he remembered platoon positions. The LZ is near his 2nd platoon.

SGT Greg Robillard of 3rd platoon recalls the distance to the LZ differently.

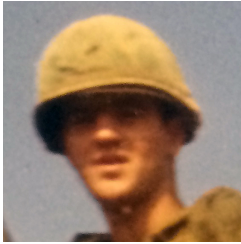
SGT Greg Robillard - 3rd Platoon

"The helicopter LZ was approximately 50 meters from where I laid but the only time I went near it was to grab more ammunition that got dropped off."

Sgt. Robillard had crawled the distance more than once, and didn't believe it was 300 meters between the two platoons.



However, 2nd platoon member SGT Lyle Bowes, who had only 9 days left until DEROS, thought the distance was further. When the fighting initially began, “short-timer” Bowes was ordered to go back to third platoon’s ‘safer’ location. And deservedly so, being as “short” as he was.



Sgt Lyle Bowes
2nd PLT

SGT Lyle Bowes 2nd Platoon – *(sent back to 3rd platoon position)*

“We really didn’t know exactly what all was going on with the rest of the company, as I would guess they were between 2 and 300 yds to our NE. We (3rd platoon) did receive some small arms fire in our location, but nothing like was going on in the other location.”

Apart from the battle, Brigade is impatient for information. They’re not getting the information they want. Inside TOC at LZ Nichole, LT Larry Boyd is monitoring the battle radio traffic, and later reflects on Brigades impatience.

LT Larry Boyd – Delta CO

“Brigade was continuously requesting updates as to battle situation. To be honest, they were pressing for information that Lt. Col. Carter could not answer as timely as Brigade wanted. Charlie Co. was spread out, receiving intense fire from several directions, had lost radio contact with the point element, the battle was escalating, more soldiers were getting wounded and killed, Lt. Nikkola and Captain Wandke had been wounded several times. Charlie Company was just too damn busy fighting for their lives to answer questions like; ‘How many are wounded and killed at this point in time, exactly what are the locations of all of the Company’s elements?’ - and other such questions, that even if immediately answered would have no impact on the battle or its outcome”

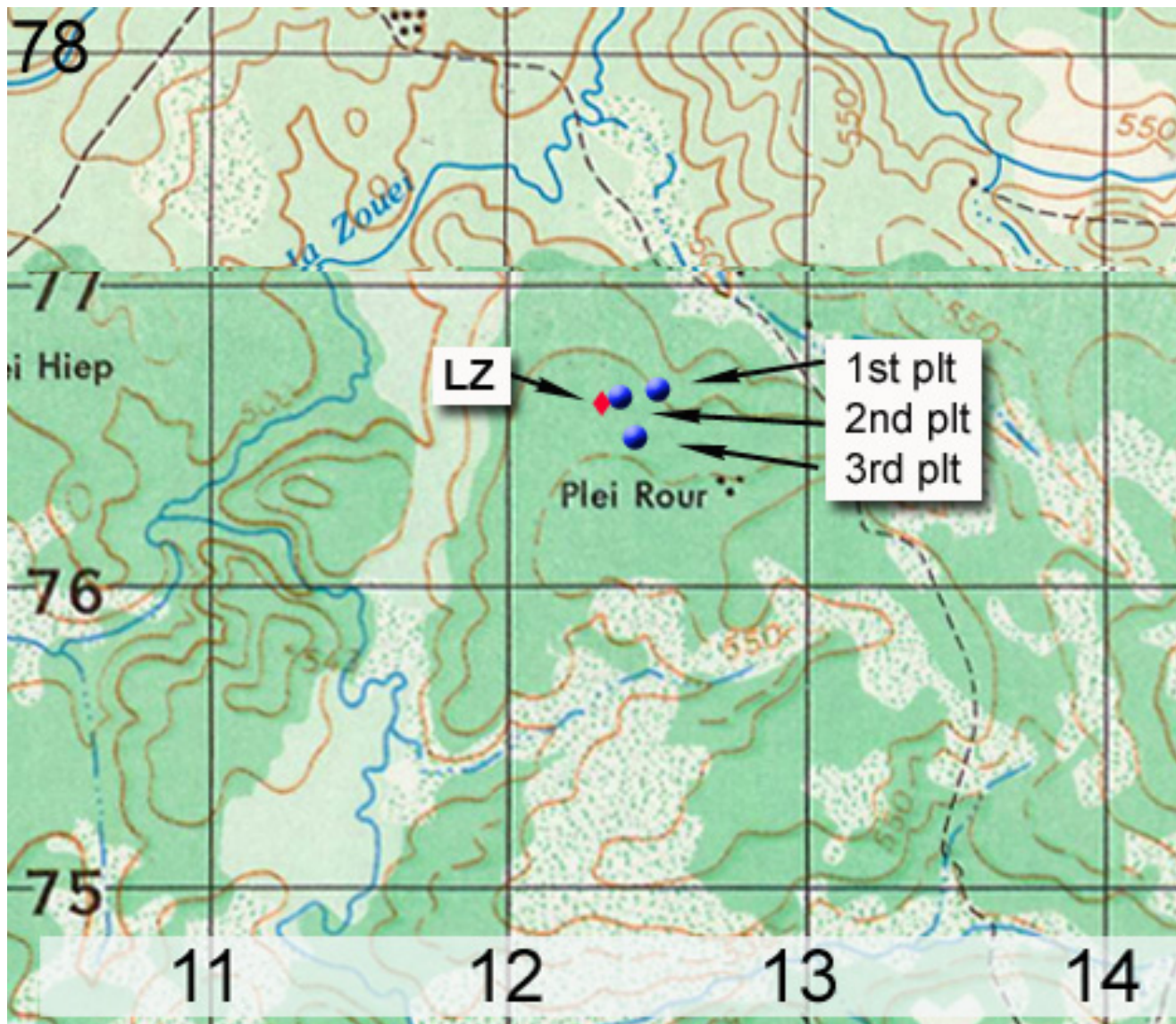
As a review, the platoons are located approximately at the locations on the map. (next page)

LT Nikkola’s First Platoon has pushed eastward toward the direction of their four-man recon, and continues to receive intense enemy fire. They have sustained casualties. LT Larkin’s 2nd Platoon has moved back west and secures an LZ. It too is under fire.

As the day progresses, LT Nussbaum’s, 3rd Platoon is also receiving fire from the enemy. The company is now spread out over several hundred meters. The initial clover-leaf recons from 2nd and 3rd platoons have scrambled back to their platoons.

First platoon’s recon is pinned down in front of 1st Platoon’s perimeter, their fate uncertain.

Approximate Locations of Charlie Company Platoons



At approximately 1330 LTC Carter decides to fly from LZ Nichole towards the battle site.

LT Larry Boyd – Delta CO

“I was still in the TOC when Lt. Col. Carter finally told Brigade that he was going to go out to Charlie Company himself and assess the situation and would report back. He did have a LOH (light observation helicopter) standing by.

I didn't understand his decision. His job was Battalion Commander. He had no real reason to go out on the ground to a Company in the middle of a firefight. Not only that, he stuck out like a sore thumb. He had on a tailored starched uniform with shiny medal rank, branch and unit insignias and web gear that was completely different than anyone else in the Company. It didn't take a genius NVA soldier to figure out that this was a high ranking officer and therefore a prime target.

Back at the battle site the situation for 1st platoon's PFC Willy Masel is worsening. He has just witnessed two of his friends get killed by snipers (Fassel & Gibson). Masel witnesses his friend shot and killed behind the M-60, and how his buddy immediately took over, only to be wounded by another sniper.



PFC Willy Masel
1st PLT

PFC Willy Masel 1st Platoon

"...it wasn't hard to see that we were outnumbered. The NVA kept probing 3 sides to find which was weakest. I worried about the fourth side, which was the only way out. B-40 rockets and mortars kept flying in and the AK-47 never stopped firing. The air was full with smoke and the smell of gunpowder was thick. At first I was full of fear and but now anger was taking over. I fired some M-79 rounds in the direction that my buddy's had been killed, but didn't see any results. When firing to my left, I caught two NVA behind a bush. I don't know if I killed them, but I saw them fly."

By early afternoon choppers are in-bound. Around 1400 a slick drops off LT Richard (Dick) Orndoff into the battle area. Brigade had decided earlier that due to Captain Wandke's wounds, they would evacuate him and send in a replacement. That distinction fell to LT Orndoff. He remembered his reaction as he was thrust into the active battle.



LT Dick Orndoff
CMDR Replacement

After Wandke was wounded; LTC Carter and Maj. Owen said I needed to go in and take over Charlie, given that they had already sustained numerous casualties.

I think it was early afternoon when I was inserted into the position. I didn't know anybody and nobody knew me; interesting situation. "

To be inserted into an active battle and to assume command of a situation that he did not have tactical information on, well, Orndoff's understatement "*interesting situation*" is just that, an understatement. He arrives just as there is a significant lull in the fighting, which began at approximately 1350, and he begins assessing the Company's situation. While the battle site is now eerily quiet, 1st platoon's Willy Masel decides to take advantage of it.

PFC Willy Masel First Platoon

"We begin to treat the wounded and help them out. Another guy and I carried out Keith (Gibson). I saw another man's body lying there, and I know Gary Fassel was killed, which meant we had three dead. My ears were still ringing with the sounds of rifle fire and explosions of 105 rounds and rocket shells. As we came out of the jungle, we turned to the left up the hill through the elephant grass and to an LZ the 3rd platoon had cut out."

Editors Note: The LZ was located near 2nd platoon, approximately 75-100 meters west of 1st platoon, and not 3rd as Masel recalled.

BATTALION COMMANDER LTC ROBERT CARTER



LTC Robert Carter

A key focus of this battle was the on-the-ground presence of the battalion commander, LTC Robert Carter. No one is quite sure of why he decided to enter an active firefight. No notice was given, and it came as a surprise to everyone in Charlie Company that he was suddenly on the ground.

While there are no sources that indicate Carter's intent, or exactly when he arrived, we can deduce that it was approximately 1400, two and a half hours since first shots were fired.

LT Orndoff, who had just landed, actually tried to warn the commander not to enter the battle area. Several men remember Carter's arrival in his small Light Observation Helicopter. (LOH)

LT Dick Orndoff - Acting Company Commander

"As Carter's LOH drew near, I told him 2 or 3 times on the radio not to come in, that here was nothing he could do and his chopper would draw fire. I'm not sure why he wanted to come in. When he did land, he stood out with his clean uniform and all of his rank on his uniform."

PFC Willy Masel, 1st Platoon

"Then a LOH came in, and out steps a LTC (Carter) with tailored fatigues. He asked to see the captain, and the fellow who carried Keith out with me, took him away. I followed behind." – PFC Willy Masel

LT Dennis Larkin 2nd Platoon Leader

"Later in the day a chopper landed and LTC Carter - got off. He asked where Captain Wandke was. I pointed in the direction and said that he was up there about 100 meters. The colonel ... started walking toward the CP, like - going on a picnic. I thought to myself, 'What the hell is he doing here?! Doesn't he know the shit we're in?' Needless to say that was the last time that I saw him - alive."

Getting off the LOH with Carter was 1SG Wade Livesay, who remained near the LZ. Carter immediately began to seek out Captain Wandke. At approximately the same time, Battalion Medic SP5 Kenneth Seward arrived on site, and he too sought out the CO. LT Larkin recalls Carter and Seward arriving at his 2nd Platoon location together. At one time Seward was assigned to Delta Company, and Delta Commander LT Larry Boyd later wondered how Seward had gotten to the battle site.

LT Larry Boyd – Delta CO

"Ken Seward had been assigned to Delta as our head Medic. He then had been promoted to the head medic for the Battalion and transferred to Mary Lou. None of us ever figured out how he got to Charlie Company from Mary Lou. We assumed that he had gotten onto a slick delivering wounded and picking up ammo, and returned to Charlie Co."

As LTC Carter looked for Captain Wandke, he may have felt a false sense of security. After all, he had arrived during a major lull in the fighting. All was quiet. There were no audible signs of enemy activity. But he had to have seen wounded as he neared 1st Platoon.

CPT Wandke remembers when the Commander surprisingly showed up at his CP position.

CPT Richard Wandke Company Commander

“At around 1400 there was a lull in the fighting and LTC Carter appeared. I asked him ‘What are you doing here?’ and he said that he had heard we were in a firefight and he wanted to visit with the troops. I looked at Carter and he looked at me, and I said; ‘This unit is too small for you to command.’ He said, ‘This is your show’.”

Nearby, a wounded LT Nikkola recalls briefly talking to Carter.

LT Warren Nikkola - First Platoon Leader

“ – there was a big lull in the incoming fire, then Col. Carter showed up. I asked him what the hell he was doing here, and he said, ‘LT, looks like you found the regiment we were looking for.’ That was the extent of my conversation with him.”

It is during the lull that LT Nikkola and others make their way to the LZ near 2nd Platoon. They are some of the first wounded who are medevac’d out. As Nikkola peers over the rising chopper skids, he describes the scene over the battlefield. Intense fire had mowed and mulched the area.

LT Warren Nikkola - First Platoon Leader

“ – myself and 4 or 5 others were medevac’d out. When we left the LZ there was a LOH sitting there, Rotors turning, (Carters) and a slick that we left on. As we left the LZ headed for the firebase I was looking out over the skids and was shocked at how cleared out our contact area was. All small brush and trees and leaves were gone! Compared to the rest of the area it looked like a park.”

About this same time Willy Masel is making his way back from the LZ and returning to the 1st Platoon contact area, some 75-100 meters away. His goal is to find his fallen buddy Gary Fassel. Since the letup in fighting was continuing, he thought, “Now is as good a time as any.”

PFC Willy Masel - First Platoon

“As we entered back into the jungle, where the action took place, about 75 to 100 yards, things were quiet. The wounded were getting out, as well as the dead. As I moved forward, I saw LTC Carter talking with the captain. But I was focused to see that Gary’s body was found and taken care of.

Then all hell broke loose.”

At 1420 battalion logs indicate the first radio transmission from Charlie Company in over 2 hours. The wounded and KIA reports are obviously inaccurate, but the log hints that enemy fire has once again commenced. It simply reads; *“one of 18’s plt to the east is still receiving small arms fire.”* The 20-minute hiatus is over.

1408	60	DO	Requested a dust off to be standing by for 18. eta when we call 05 min.	SFRF
1420	18	60	One of 18’s plt to the east is still receiving small arms fire	SFRF
LATE 1350	60	Bde	No confirmed casualties report yet, last word 10 WIA, 1 KIA	SFRFbde

Suddenly Wandke and Carter’s position appears to be the focus of heavy fire.

CPT Richard Wandke – C Company Commander

“Then I told Carter to get into one of the holes in the area and that when the firing got easier that he could go back to the LZ. I called for artillery and we now had artillery on two sides. We would lift artillery and bring in the gun ships. When the gunships left we brought in more artillery. A bit later Carter said he had to get back to the helicopter. I told him to pick out a spot in which to dive toward and when the artillery is falling to move into the position. I then said, ‘If you will excuse me I need to see how my soldiers are doing.’ I left him and my RTO and proceeded to check our forward positions.”

Just a short time later Wandke returns and he discovers that his RTO, SP4 Harold Warmesley, is gone, as well as Battalion Commander Carter.

CPT Richard Wandke – C Company Commander

“I returned minutes later and found my RTO and LTC Carter had left. The radios were left and there were several weapons in the area. I picked up my hand set and for a few seconds I could not remember any of my call signs. I told myself, ‘You haven’t lost it before and this is no time to loose it now.’ The call signs came back to me and when I called battalion, Major Owens was near our position. (Maj. Owens [S3] was in the air acting as FO) He asked ‘Is that you 6?’ I said it was me. He said since we didn’t hear from you we thought you had been killed. I said, ‘ I am fine.’ He said; ‘Do you want us to bring Delta Company into the fight to assist you?’ I said; ‘No, the enemy will get between us and we will end up shooting at each other.”

Wandke’s RTO, Warmesley, apparently went with LTC Carter to provide some security for him. PFC Masel recalls seeing the Colonel dodging fire and heading back towards his LOH.

PFC Willy Masel - First Platoon

“I also saw the Colonel trying to leap frog out. Bullets were flying all around him. He kept low and tried to keep covered. I went back to firing at the enemy. Their firepower just grew more intense by the minute.”

CPT Richard Wandke – C Company Commander

“The jets finally came in and when I heard the explosions, the next thing I heard was the pilot telling me I had just received a secondary (explosions). The next jet came in and the same thing happened. That’s when I knew that we had run into a large number of enemy troops. Then, a round came from one of the trees, and I fired at him. The branches broke and he expired. The next thing I remember was a rifle grenade exploding and hit me in the neck and shoulder. I picked up my Car-15 and the darn thing fell apart. I picked up one of the weapons next to me and continued to fire.”

At the same time, PFC Willy Masel, who seems constantly on the move, finds himself next to his CO, Wandke.

PFC Willy Masel - First Platoon

“Their mortar rounds and B-40 rockets just kept coming. It seemed that to the right, where the captain was, the fighting was getting heavy, so I moved to that side. I lay next to the captain and asked if he had any targets. The jungle was very thick on that side and hard for a M-79. He told me to just keep them high. I fired off one, maybe two rounds, when there was an explosion right behind us to my left. The explosion threw dirt and debris on me, but it wounded the captain from his shoulders to his legs. A man to his left was also wounded. The captain was hurt pretty bad, but still gave orders. I remember him getting on the radio and calling in more artillery. The 105’s were just about on top of us. I fired a few more rounds, but it just wasn’t the right spot for an M-79. No matter where you looked men were getting hit and the fighting was fierce. I started making my way back to where I thought was the weakest part of our perimeter so I could be of value. A B-40 rocket came in landing about 15 or 20 feet in front of me. It just fell there. I just stared at it waiting for the explosion, but it didn’t go off. As I started moving again, I looked over to my left and saw a wounded man sitting up against a tree and saw him get hit. Immediately a medic went to his aid. I too started moving in that direction and saw the medic get wounded, and he crawled away. As I got closer, another medic got there...and he too was shot and wounded.

Only minutes have gone by since Carter’s first arrival and then departure from 1st Platoons CP. Like Carter, LT Orndoff has also been busy seeking out Captain Wandke’s location.

LT Dick Orndoff – Acting Company Commander

“The company was in two groups with the smaller point group separated from the main group. Both groups were under fire and/or had been recently. CPT Wandke was with the point group, hit 3-4 times. When I got to him, he was propped up against a tree and said to me ‘Where you been stud? I’ve been waiting for you’.

I will never forget how calm he seemed in the middle of all that stuff.”

Finding CPT Wandke, LT Orndoff begins the arduous task of familiarizing himself with the situation and analyzing the next move. With Wandke’s debriefing, the young lieutenant begins the task that he’s been assigned and ordered to do. Not envious, under the conditions he was put in.

As enemy fire increases, Carter's attempt to reach his chopper ends as he approaches the 2nd Platoon. He is hit by sniper fire. Men see him go down near to where 2nd platoon is hunkered down. The Commander is hit several times.

SP4 Bill Kahl, a member of 2nd platoon, was lying flat against the dirt when he saw LTC Carter get hit. He remembers that Carter was: *"...shooting at the enemy with an M16, then he got hit just as he crossed a small trail."*

Marshall Petty, 2nd Platoon Sgt., then gave Kahl one scary order.



SP4 Bill Kahl
2nd PLT

"Sgt Petty kicked me on the boot and told me to crawl over and see if I could help him (the LTC).

Believe me, the buttons on my fatigue jacket plowed furrows on the jungle floor. He was still alive when I got to him. I put my face next to his and he said to me 'Killed in combat.' Then he died. I remember marveling at his beautifully starched and pressed fatigues... and those of his last words."

Those words, *"Killed in combat"* would stick in Kahl's mind for his entire life. LTC Robert Carter had just become the highest-ranking 1/12th officer to be killed in Vietnam.

Reports differ. Wandke thinks LTC Carter was on the ground for about a half an hour. Orndoff believes he; *"...was dead 10 minutes after he was on the ground."* SP4 Bill Kahl of 2nd platoon said, *"He wasn't there long."*

THE BATTLE CONTINUES

Charlie Company is receiving enemy fire from the west, north and east. Third platoon, somewhat isolated, is still hunkered down at the same spot from when the battle began. They are unable to move, their number of wounded is growing.

SGT Greg Robillard – Third Platoon, 3rd Squad Leader

"My platoon was pinned down alone by AK and B-40 fire for hours and we couldn't move without getting hit by the snipers. The biggest concentration of fire was to our front but we had constant movement to our flanks. One early dustoff attempt pushed out an ammo resupply that laid on the LZ for a while.

Garey Grubbs and I were able to grab up M-16 bandoliers and a number of extra M-16's from the WIAs in the platoon. We also had an M-60 but we ran out of ammo and just dumped it at the CP."

Artillery is now being ordered in *"danger close."* 1st platoon is still taking the brunt of the pounding from the enemy, but now our own artillery is adding an additional concern.

SGT Rich Makruski- 1st Platoon

"The rounds were hitting so close that we were catching a lot of our own shrapnel. It was a sound I will never forget (besides the ballistics crack of AK47s). The whirring and the big thud of metal hitting the earth. I remember a big piece of shrapnel falling right between my legs as I lay there. I don't know what in God's green Earth was the reason I wasn't hit that day."

As artillery adjustment is made, a battery of rounds comes in with tragic results. SGT's Lyle Bowes and Greg Robillard witness what happened next, as did SP4 Mike McCardle.

SP4 Mike McCardle, RTO 1st Squad, 3rd Platoon

"Somebody yelled "Incoming!" I hunkered down and made myself as flat as I could. The world exploded in a hail of shrapnel, dirt and tree parts. I was lifted off of the ground and thrown into a tree stump. I looked over and saw Garey, (Garey Grubbs) still kneeling by his hole - he toppled over among cries of, 'Medic!'

SGT Lyle Bowes 2nd Platoon – (at 3rd platoon position)

"Later on in the afternoon, we had 1 round of 105 art drop in and wound one man to which I administered first aid including morphine. Shortly thereafter we received 3 or 4 batteries of 105's. The first round killed Gary Grubbs who fell at my feet. We finally got a cease-fire, and there had been 7 WIA and 1 KIA. Immediately we started to administer 1st aid. "

SGT Greg Robillard – Third Platoon, 3rd Squad Leader

"...battery of rounds came right in on top of us. Those of us who had been there many months knew what was coming and I pulled a huge rucksack over my head when those rounds landed. One of my squad members Garey Grubbs ...perished in the explosion."

The afternoon is full of logistical and tactical activity as indicated by the radio logs. Gunships, Skyraider fighters, artillery, are all active. Dust offs are taking place, one at 1550, and the full force of power is being levied against the enemy. Orndoff is busy communicating with the spotter in the air, Major Owen, who then directs incoming armament. The battle, however, has taken its toll. By 1555 there are a reported 29 wounded. More were to follow, as the fight had hours yet to go.

The radio logs clearly show the support provided to Charlie Company and dust offs reported at 1550 and 1611.

1446	cid	60	Cider 24 and Spades on station	SFRF
1515	35	60	The 2 nd secondary	SFRFbde
1530	96	60	PL for 96 117879	SFDSSbde
1540	Bde	60	Let us know as soon as your 18 element as a secure LZ and we will have the Bikini birds come in and get t hem	SFDSSbde

1540	60	Bde	My 18 element has a secure LZ at this time, Empire 81 is on the way to my locations (2 minutes out)	SFDSSbde
1550	60	Bde	We have 5 people dusted off at this time and Bde has the Bikini birds on the way.	SFDSSbde
1555	60	0	We have 3 KIA's and 29 WIA's (Cobras are on the way at this time)	SFDSSbde
1556	60	0	Bikini birds are on station at this time	
1600	60	0	Black Hawk is on station	SFDSSbde
1610	60	Bde	P-81 has left this location at this time	SFDSSbde
1611	075	60	Have 4 men onboard. Dnelson, rozinski, Killer, Iojem	SFRF
1630	Bde	60	18 is 2 minutes out	SFDSSbde
1635	Bde	60	Empire 81 took Sgt Graves to ML	SFDSS
1637	Cider	60	Cider 22 on station	SFDSS
1645	18	60	Believe to have 3 KIA's and 6 WIA's 3 of which are litters	SFDSS

A full comprehension of the number of wounded and KIA's is still not indicated by the 1645 radio entry, and in reality, it would not be felt or comprehended until the next day.

Meanwhile, Bravo Company doggedly is dealing with their NVA activity, although at a much smaller scale. At 1650 they report killing a "dink" in the open area. And a few hours later they report a dink inside their perimeter.

1650	39	60	Just killed a dink in the open area	SFRFbde
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Communicating with his platoon leaders, Orndoff begins to have them consolidate their perimeter as best they can and to attempt to move wounded back towards the LZ. Willy Masel, however, suddenly finds himself isolated. For him, things are about to get real bad, real quick. PFC Masel is in the thick of it.

PFC Willy Masel - First Platoon

"I was firing the buck shot rounds and could hear moans and groans as I hit the enemy. They were only 10 or 15 feet away at my end. Their firepower never seemed to weaken and the rockets just kept falling in. I used up my buck shot rounds and had to go back to the high explosive rounds.

Suddenly I saw everyone get up and start moving to the rear. Now the enemy fire increased and everywhere I looked men were being hit. The guy next to me jumped up and was hit in the arm or shoulder and started yelling, "I'm hit!" I pulled him down and then he scrambled away on his knees and right arm. It was like a turkey shoot. I began firing in every direction trying to get the NVA to keep their heads down, but it just kept up. Finally it slowed down and I looked around. Everyone was gone. I pulled myself up and ran about 3 or 4 yards when another rocket came in. It exploded to my rear and I went down. It had wounded me in my upper left thigh and badly in my lower right calf tearing a large part of my leg away. I could see the bones clearly and it was bleeding heavily. I was a bit dazed so I remained still. My leg felt like a bag of water.

I could hear the NVA around me, still firing. I began to crawl out and I had to pull my right bootlace to drag my leg along so it wouldn't rip off. I began calling for help. I heard a voice, and I crawled out of the elephant grass and hoped I could make it before the NVA got me. As I cleared the grass, there were two men. One put down his weapon, grabbed me and carried me over his shoulder while the other fellow carried his weapon and mine. I guess we traveled about another 100 yards until we got to the perimeter."

Editors note: Many years later Masel would eventually have his leg amputated because of the injuries sustained on May 27. The man who carried Willy to safety was Bill Kahl. Kahl didn't know whom he had rescued, and Masel didn't know his rescuer, but over thirty years later they would reunite. Part of that story reads: "When Kahl put him down, Masel removed chains from around his neck -- one with a cross, the other with a Jesus medallion -- and handed them to Kahl, saying, "Thanks. You saved my life."

The entire story of that reunion can be found at: <http://www.redwarriors.us/QuarryvillNews.htm>

Near dusk there is another lull in the fighting, and it gives an opportunity for Charlie Company to beef up their positions and move more wounded to the LZ.

It's during this latest pause in action that 4/42nd Artilleryman and Forward Observer, Butch Cooper, attached to Charlie Company, begins to help wounded back towards the LZ. That's when he and a buddy come across the body of LTC Carter.



FO – "Butch" Cooper
4/42nd Artillery

"...I headed for the bee's nest (near 1st Platoon) to help with the wounded and help get them back to the LZ so that we could start evacuating them as soon as we could get choppers in. That was when I found the LTC.

Me and another guy got him on a makeshift stretcher and we carried him back. Although he was already dead we figured to get his body back to the LZ because, after all, he was the Colonel."

To the north, Bravo Company continues to play cat and mouse with the enemy.

1650	39	60	Just killed a dink in the open area	SFRFbde
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Minutes later, a chopper observes more enemy fire around Charlie Company.

1700	BK	60	Bikini 16 reports small arms fire from the west of 18 LZ	SFRFbde
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Bravo Company now is receiving incoming from enemy mortars, as reported by air support.

1735	35	60	39 is receiving incoming 82mm rounds (2 rounds)	SFRFbde
1750	35	60	39 just received another secondary	SFRFbde

Brigade requests that LZ Nichole 4/42nd artillery be resupplied as they continue to support both Bravo and Charlie Company.

1816	60	Bde	Requested 1,000 rounds re-supply for 105 HE Nicole	SFRFbde
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Near dusk, word of Carter's death has spread throughout the battalion.

LT Larry Boyd – Delta CO

It had a major impact. Everyone knew that he was in danger, but no one really expected him to get killed.

At Bravo Company's location, Jack Lininger assumes that his unit will dig in for the night. That is not to be the case.

SP4 John (Jack) Leninger - 1st Platoon Bravo Company

"I heard LT's voice as he wandered around to each positions telling everyone, 'First platoon, saddle up! We're moving out. Grab on to the pack of the person in front of you. We have to set up a blocking position. Try to be quiet.' – There was a lot of confusion while we tried to form up in a single file while World War II Skyraiders bombed and strafed in the darkness. There was so much fucking noise we could hardly hear out selves think, let along try to hump in the dark. "

Quote Source: "Time Heals No wounds" – by Jack Leninger – published 1993 Ballantine Books

As Bravo's men are prepping for their move, enemy activity is still ongoing. 92 (unknown but likely someone in the air) comments on Charlie Company's situation as; "...split up all over creation..."

1850	92	60	The 18 Element is receiving small arms fire and B-40 fire	SFRF
1855	Bde	60	Spooky 21 will be on station at approx. 1910 hrs	SFRF bde
1900	Bde	60	You can have the spades on station for 15 more min.	SFRF bde
1908	92	60	At present time we have checked fire red leg and will be employing the spades. <u>What happened was the 18 element got split up all over creation and the dinks got between them.</u> At present time 35 is trying to get everyone together. When the spades are complete we will start the red leg up again. Still receiving fire and B40	SFRF bde

As indicated above, the prop-driven A-1 Skyraiders (Spad's) are just minutes away to wield their powerful armament against the NVA.

As darkness slowly engulfs everyone, enemy activity dramatically falls off and it allows the company to consolidate its perimeter and treat wounded. LT Orndoff orders third platoon to link up with 2nd and 1st platoons. LT Nussbaum cautiously moves his platoon northward and they link-up with LT Larkin's Platoon. Nussbaum then turns the platoon eastward and they continue all the way to 1st Platoon's small perimeter to where CPT Wandke is located.

Wandke vividly remembers 3rd Platoon's arrival into their tiny perimeter.

CPT Richard Wandke – C Company Commander

"The most beautiful thing I remember were American soldiers firing their weapons and moving past our position. LT Nussbaum stopped and asked what he could do for me and I told him to keep going and join the soldiers to our front. He left and then all was quiet. "

Lyle Bowes and others also recall Third Platoon's forward maneuver.

SGT Lyle Bowes 2nd Platoon

"...it was starting to get dark and we decided to move over to where the rest of the Co were. There was a number of wounded at that location also. We never really stopped; instead we moved on through and went straight to the front, so to speak. We were not there very long, before we withdrew and set up perimeter around the wounded ... we had no medics left, they had all been wounded."

SGT Greg Robillard – Third Platoon, 3rd Squad Leader

"- we finally realized where the rest of the company was - it took hours to pull back and link up in a very small tight perimeter. We pulled and sent the badly wounded to the CP with the KIA's. A number of wounded stayed on the defensive line, we couldn't dig in and we had very little cover and limited fields of fire."

LT Dennis Larkin - 2nd Platoon Leader

"I think it was almost dark when the 3rd platoon got to our location. I told him to watch out for any "bad guys" in the trees. Things finally quieted down. We maintained our position and received fire support from B-Battery throughout the night."

SGT Rich Makruski- 1st Platoon

As evening fell things subsided and the fire became more sporadic. Those of us who could were carrying people away and moving back and forth to a point somewhere else with others in the company. ... slicks were taking out the dead and wounded. It's funny, even though there were still people shooting at us; the intensity was much less so I felt relatively safe. I remember at one point volunteering to stay in the forward area with some others to secure people leaving. Finally in pitch dark I made my way back to the larger group of soldiers by the LZ. "

Bravo Company too is on the move and headed southward towards the direction of Charlie Company. They will eventually create a blocking force. In darkness, however, they are moving in less than desired conditions.

SP4 John (Jack) Leninger - 1st Platoon Bravo Company

" Holding on to each other, stumbling and swearing, we groped though the jungle like blind men. The sound of explosions was deafening and the noise jarred my senses. We slowly moved toward the contact area until we were only a few hundred meters away. Then we held up. We were split up and put into two-man positions about five meters apart."

Quote Source: "Time Heals No wounds" – by Jack Leninger – published 1993 Ballantine Books

The first entry in the logs concerning the loss of LTC Carter is input at 2130, although word of his death had previously spread throughout all companies. The entry mistakenly puts him at the CP.

2130	18	60	Will have to get 11 WIA's out tonight and 15 out tomorrow. Subtracting everything, that will leave our banjo at 40. 81 was hit with sniper fire in the neck and solder and knee. He was in the C Company CP at the time.	SFRF bde
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From Camp Enari to the men in the field, almost everyone was aware of his death. Ironically, many men in Charlie Company weren't even aware of his earlier presence. CPT Wandke didn't know of his death until evening when he saw Carters body by the LZ. Meanwhile, LTC Edward Fiora had already been singled out as the new battalion commander.

Third Platoon's McCardle recalls helping the men of the 1st Platoon, and although his time reference is uncertain, it's more than likely during third platoon's move forward.

SP4 Mike McCardle, RTO 1st Squad, 3rd Platoon

"3-6 volunteered to go to the contact point to carry wounded back to the LZ area.

- SGT Fred Holloway, 3-1 Squad Leader, took us into the elephant grass in an attempt to reach 1st Platoon. We had hardly started when several AK's began firing directly to our front. SGT Fred hit the ground as I did, his RTO. Almost immediately SGT Fred said, 'They're not shooting at us, let's move.' Later I asked him how he knew that they had other targets besides us. SGT Fred said, 'If you're getting shot at in the grass, it's like being in a lawn mover. The grass is falling all around you.'

I was with this group as was Roy Meckley and 4 other guys and I carried a guy named Demeo back to the 3rd Platoon position. We faced no opposition on this run, although the short distance - was filled with maneuvering dinks.

As wounded are moved towards the LZ, CPT Wandke recalls his thoughts as he finally nears the LZ.

CPT Richard Wandke – C Company Commander

"They wanted to evacuate me, but I knew that since I was wounded the worst, that once they got me out they would not make an effort to get the others out until the next morning. The medic gave me a shot of Morphine and I was able to stand the pain."

Throughout this time, artillery is pounding the surrounding area, only letting up for choppers. At 2140 there is request for a Dustoff for 11 men. Arrival is expected in 20 minutes.

At LZ Nichole, Radio logs indicate that Delta Company is ordered to enter the contact area the next day.

2300	60		The 20 element will need 17 sorties with and ACL of 6	SFGK bde
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Note: You can view and download a copy of the original radio logs for May 28 at:
http://www.redwarriors.us/Delta_BattleReportElements/Radio%20Logs/Radiolog28May.pdf

Men describe the late hour activities of the 27th and into the early hours of the 28th.

Sgt Rich Makruski- 1st Platoon

"The intensity subsided a little at dusk and those of us who remained started to drag people out. They finally landed choppers at night and we started loading the wounded and body bags."

SGT Greg Robillard – Third Platoon, 3rd Squad Leader

"We tried to pull all KIA's and WIAs into the CP area and the first ones were dusted off around midnight. We were on 100% alert through the night and thankfully the NVA backed out of the area."

SP4 Butch Cooper – 4/42nd Artillery

"I was sitting close to CPT Wandke during the wounded evacuation, he had been hit something like 7 times but refused to be evacuated until all of his men were taken care of."

LT Dick Orndoff – Acting Company Commander

"Around dusk/darkness we got everyone back to the main group and formed what was at best a loose perimeter. We had 4 batteries of arty firing all night basically surrounding us so that if the NVA over ran us they would have to come through the wall of arty's fire. I don't know if the NVA knew how depleted we were."

As LT Orndoff mentions above, he has been busy directing artillery and continuously keeping tabs of the company situation throughout the night. The wounded are being treated as best they could, but there were no medics who themselves weren't injured. Everyone pitches in. Sgt. Lyle Bowes tries desperately to save the life of RTO Harold Warmesley. And he also remembers seeing and speaking to Head Medic Kenneth Seward."

SGT Lyle Bowes 2nd Platoon

"Later that night (Harold) Warmesley died while I was trying to administer mouth to mouth, I do believe he had a head wound. I also checked on the medic from D Co (Kenneth Seward) who didn't seem to be that critical, and he told me he would be OK, but died in the night."

In the darkness attempts are made to get an accurate head count of the company. 3rd Platoon's McCardle recalls the late night mission to find everyone.

SP4 Mike McCardle, RTO 1st Squad, 3rd Platoon

"We had to go out near midnight as we were short one headcount and nobody could figure out who we were missing. Never realized how difficult it was to keep track of around 100 guys in the chaos of a battle. Many of our officers had been wounded, including the 6, Captain Wandke. Many senior NCO's were down, including SGT Francis, dead. There was confusion over who had been medivaced, whose body was still on the LZ, who was still alive but with a different platoon or squad. The consensus was that we were still missing one headcount and so several search parties went out to find our guy. Needless to say, our assholes were as tight as they could be, retracing the path of the contact. We would come across a makeshift aid station with littered bandages and medical supplies cast about... Finally, we found our guy, laying on his back in a little clearing with his hands folded over his abdomen."

Back at LZ Nichole, plans are well underway for Delta Company's insertion into the battle site, when time and logistics permit.

LT Larry Boyd – Delta CO

"The night of the 27th Delta Company received operation orders for the following day. Our orders were to CA (combat assault) the entire Company into Charlie Company's location, assist in their extraction, send out patrols to sweep the surrounding area, clear the area and then conduct a search and destroy mission against the enemy.

... We were all still awake. We still had responsibility for Firebase security. We were on high alert, as there remained a possibility that the firebase could come under attack - We spent time going over our operation orders. Covering map locations, mission objectives, order of movement for the next morning's combat assault, etc."

May 28 Logs indicate the last 3 Dustoffs from the battle site.

0130	Dust	60	First ship dustoff 62 took 6 WIA (4-2)	SFGK
0145	Dust	60	Second ship took 9 WIA Dustoff 63 (4-5)	SFGK
0220	18	60	Third Dust off complete took 7 WIA to include 18 G1 4-3)	SFGK

At 0220 the final dustoff leaves under darkness. On board is CPT Wandke, who was wounded some 14 hours earlier. Also on board is a wounded 1SG Livesay.

CPT Richard Wandke – C Company Commander

"...the helicopter came in and said this is the last load. Top Livesay had also been wounded. 1SG Livesay, myself (and others) - got on board. We were the last to leave the area...When I arrived at the hospital – I walked past the men who had been wounded and thanked them for their outstanding job. The next day I could not talk, nor move my left arm, nor walk. I was evacuated to Japan...."

Note: On December 01, 1969 Captain Wandke would be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions of May 27. View award: <http://valor.militarytimes.com/recipient.php?recipientid=4728>

Dawn arrives the morning of May 28. By 0620 Bravo Company has SP'd and moves southward to consolidate their role as a blocking force.

0735, C-rats are picked up at LZ Carmen and are to be sent out to Charlie Company.

Delta' Company is in a holding pattern at LZ Nichole. (Nicole) They're waiting for enough choppers to arrive to take them out to Charlie Company's location. Finally the unit is on the move around 0915.

LT Larry Boyd – Delta CO

"I, along with the rest of Delta's Command group, was staged to get on the first chopper returning. The chopper had several of the KIA's on board. We had to unload them before we could board. Among the dead we unloaded were Lt. Colonel Carter and Spec. 5 Ken Seward. We did not expect the KIA's to be on board.

After we were inserted into Charlie Company's location, I hook up with Lt. Orndoff ... we send out some recon patrols to sweep the immediate area, then we start to police (clean up) the area where the KIA's and WIA's had to leave some of their gear, rifles, ammo, ruck sacks etc. We load that stuff on choppers and back haul it. It is also my memory that we also found a couple more of Charlie Company's KIA's."

When Delta arrived, some men of Charlie Company were sent back to LZ Nichole, others volunteer to assist in area sweeps. Third platoon's Greg Robillard is one of those volunteers. He recalls finding the location where the battle initially began, near the blue line.

SGT Greg Robillard – Third Platoon, 3rd Squad Leader

"In the morning (May 28) another company linked up with us (Delta) and we policed up equipment and bodies. We found three members of first platoon KIA by the spot where they had initiated the battle."

While the major enemy force has fled, some small skirmishes continue throughout the day.

LT Larry Boyd – Delta CO

"Suddenly shots ring out on our right flank. An NVA soldier is shot by one of our men. The NVA soldier is probably going thru the area picking up some of their dead or wounded, and maybe some of their equipment left behind. We continue forward slowly and ran into a bunker complex, now a couple of shots are fired on my left flank. Same thing, a lone NVA was killed.

Later, Delta Company kills another enemy soldier going through the bunker complex. A RTO sees him slip inside a bunker, a grenade is thrown in, and another Delta soldier sprays the hole with gunfire. They pull one dead NVA soldier out of the hole.

Throughout the mop-up, more enemy bodies are found, until by the end of the day there is a count of 40. Charlie Company sustains 6 KIA. HQ Medic Kenneth Seward is also killed. That's a total of 8 KIA's, including Carter, and around 40 wounded.

Over half of Charlie Company, fifty-four men, have been wounded or killed. Of the 88 men who started the day, there's only 34 healthy men left. Some, who are only slightly wounded, are patched up and stay with the company at LZ Nichole.

While relieved to be away from the battle area, the members of Charlie Company who arrive at Nichole are dazed and numb from the events of just a few hours before.

SP4 Mike McCardle, RTO 1st Squad, 3rd Platoon

"At Nicole we had "Donut Dollies" to entertain us. They tried to engage us in games to lift our spirits but I feel sorry for them even now as we really were not in the mood to enjoy anything, despite their round-eyed hotness. We were damaged enough, at this point...."

Third platoon's Robillard had started with a nine-man squad. He is now down to four.

SGT Greg Robillard – Third Platoon, 3rd Squad Leader

"Charlie company now consisted of 40 soldiers (some wounded. My platoon now consisted of ten men, my squad was four strong and I was now the ranking NCO of 3rd platoon. Later that evening we were pulled back to LZ Nichole where we remained until June 5."

LT Dennis Larkin 2nd Platoon Leader

"The next day the choppers came to pick up our KIA's. When the guys were carrying Col. Carter on the stretcher, the wind from the Huey blew the poncho liner off his body. His arms were out stretched and he reminded me of Christ on the cross. He had made the ultimate sacrifice."

More than one witness of Carters body has made the same "Christ on the cross" comparison that Larkin observed. It must have been one of those eerily unforgettable moments of the lined up dead waiting to be flown out, and the commander laid in such a way.

For the next 9 days Charlie Company is stationed at LZ Nichole. Delta, Bravo and Alpha Companies hump the terrain in search of the fleeing enemy. On May 31st Bravo runs into them and a major fight again ensues. Delta too is caught up in the fight as the NVA Flee eastward from Bravo's Contact area. Eight Bravo soldiers are killed, and one Medic from HHC. Delta sustains several wounded. The enemy continues to flee eastward.

But Back at Nichole Charlie Company is seriously undermanned and understrength. In the days ahead, replacements are rushed in as fast as they can to rebuild the unit ranks. It wasn't until early June that the FNG head count had increased enough to offset the 40 WIA's and KIA's of May 27.

Then, at around 1030 hours on the morning of June 5, just a few clicks east of the May 27 fight, Delta Company finds the same NVA Regiment that Charlie had just fought.

With Delta Company now in a major fight and taking casualties, Charlie Company, under the command of LT Richard Orndoff, saddles up to combat air assault into the fray.

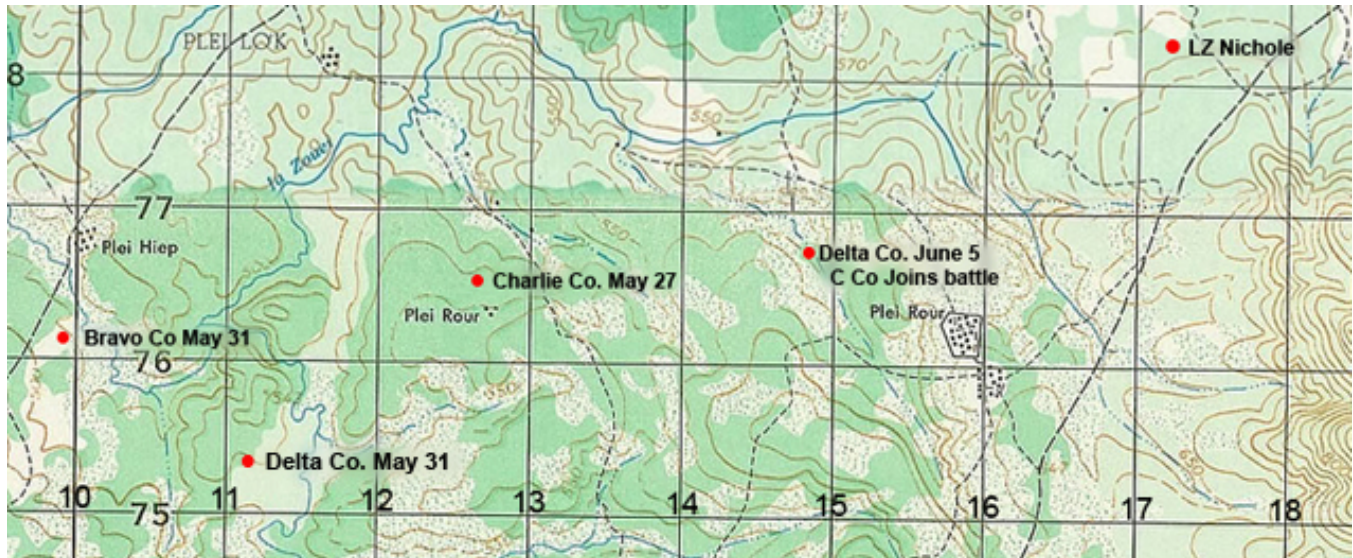
Once again they will engage the very same soldiers of the K6th Bn. 24th NVA Regiment that they had just fought just 9 days before. It will be another unforgettable day.

May 27, 1969

"They were all heroes for their actions that day"

LT Richard (Dick) Orndoff – May 2015

MAJOR BATTLES DURING THE 9-DAY PERIOD OF MAY 27 – JUNE 5, 1969
28 Men were KIA during this 9-day period and over 150 WIA



Maps for all areas that the Red Warriors “humped” can be found on the Red Warriors Website at: http://www.redwarriors.us/NEWS_Maps_Main.htm

All LZ's have been identified on these maps, and a purchasable CD is available through the Red Warriors PX link.

THE JUNE 5, 1969 BATTLE REORT

Written by Delta CO LT Larry Boyd, A battle report of Delta's Company's June 5 Battle and that of Charlie Companies involvement. Found at: http://www.redwarriors.us/BattleReport_Delta.htm

May 27, 1969

CHARLIE COMPANY LIST OF REPORTED WOUNDED



Mullen, Joseph V.	Enland, Kenneth	Henry Willie Jr.	Harwood, Michael
Demeo, Robert F.	Kublock, Gary L.	Masel, William H.	Hildebrand, Thomas
Eergholz, Fred W.	Nikkola, Warren	Bess Carl L.	Brower, Jerry L.
Frorles, David G.	Corey, Thomas A.	Moorman, Kenneth	Ottran, Ernes H.
Jackson, Louis	Lesonzynski, Anthon	Lewis, Robert W.	Barter, Thomas J.
Johnson Robert L.	Relson-Ortis Harm	Wilke, Ronald A.	Bruner, Elliot
Rose, Larry	Deyila, Wilfred	Livesay, Wade	Bligh, Michael
Miller, Gary	Graves, Clyde H.	Galles, Donald K.	Makler, George
Reuce Jr.	Cethran, Howard Jr.	Wandke, Richard D.	Janssen, Gary M.
Collard, James H.	Distler, Kenneth J.	Devilacqua, Epifan	

CHARLIE COMPANY LIST OF KIA

Francis, James	Gibson, Keith	Lozano, Mathew	Seward, Kenneth
Warmesley, Harold	Grubbs, Garey	Fassel, Gary	Carter, Robert

				
<i>Gary Fassel</i>	<i>James Francis</i>	<i>Keith Gibson</i>	<i>Garey Grubbs</i>	<i>Matthew Lozano</i>
				
	<i>Harold Warmesley</i>	<i>Kenneth Seward Medic</i>	<i>Robert Carter BN CDR</i>	

You can view each of the eight men's casualty reports by visiting and searching their names on the Red Warriors Website – Casualty Information @ http://www.redwarriors.us/Casualty_Reports.htm
 LTC Robert Carter and SP5 Kenneth Seward are listed in HHC

POSTSCRIPT REFLECTIONS – LT Larry Boyd, Delta Company Commander

“Charlie Company had fought a long and unbelievably horrendous battle under extremely difficult conditions and had defeated the enemy even though they were greatly outnumbered. There were many brave soldiers that day that performed multiple acts of heroism. They suffered well over 50% casualties and yet continued to fight! Most units would not have been able to emerge alive, much less be victorious.

It is these brave men, (initially under the command of Captain Richard Wandke, then later in the day by Lt. Dick Orndoff who was sent in due to Captain Wandke’s extensive wounds) which deserve the admiration and credit for winning this battle. I, however, feel compelled to also extend much credit to Lt. Dick Orndoff who was CA’ed on to the battlefield around 1400 hours to assume command of a Company in dire straits. Because of how the battle had evolved, the company was spread out in 3 different locations, and had a missing point element. The NVA were in-between and all around each element. Each soldier was heavily engaged in their own individual firefight. To say the least, each man had his hands full.

When a firefight starts, you’re in the moment. You just automatically react and respond to the situation you’re in. You don’t have time to think about anything but the battle. No time for fear or anxiety, you just do what has to be done. But Lt. Orndoff arrived on the battlefield with no knowledge of the locations of each element, nor the location of the enemy, but with full knowledge of the dangerous situation that he was headed into. This awareness would make anyone’s level of anxiety (pucker factor) much higher. Imagine the challenges he faced!

LT Orndoff had to assess the situation, orient himself to the location of the Platoons, as well as the locations of the enemy. He then had to reorganize the 3 Platoons into one single cohesive fighting unit, organize a single defensive perimeter, all while under fire from the enemy.

His actions and bravery that day, along with the brave actions of the men of Charlie Company, is the reason that they were not only able to survive, but to overcome and defeat a much larger enemy force under horrendous conditions.”

LT Larry Boyd – May 2015

Captain Wandke Summarizes his Recollections: April 2016

I would like to add this, when we first fired upon the NVA I immediately called for my concentration of Artillery fire forward of our position and brought it near our location. Then push the fires forward of our location. I ordered the First Platoon into the contact and when they reported that the enemy force was more than initially reported and I ordered the second Platoon into the contact and went with them. I kept the Artillery forward of our position.

SSG Francis was wounded and so was LT Nicola and when the lull occurred, we were evacuating the ones that had been wounded. I talked to SSG Francis and told him he should be evacuated. He told me he wanted to stay with me.

When Col Carter came to our location he and I talked for a few minutes when the firing started up again. I immediately called for artillery to resume. When the enemy started to hit us from the right I again brought artillery against them and we now had artillery on the front and to the right. The enemy never got behind us.

When Lt Orndoff came he suggested we call artillery on the left side and now we had artillery on three sides of us. When the Jets came in they had two secondary explosions and that to me indicated that the force against us was more than a reinforced company.

I would like to add that if it had not been for the Artillery Fires, the work of the Gunships, the Air Support from the jets and courageous effort of the men from C Company, none of us would have lived to be able to tell this story.

Many years have passed, but those of us who were there will never forget those who did not make it out that day.

Captain Richard Wandke – April 2016

**C Co. 1/12th 4th Infantry Division
Vietnam 1968-69**

Three hundred forty eight days in and 17 days to DEROS: both seemed like and eternity

That Tuesday started with a banjo of 88 men and ended with 40; That’s always less than half no matter how hard my dreams attempt to deny such carnage

Map grid ZA11276 could have been aptly names “hell on earth”

The NVA were near, in huge numbers beyond the expectations of military intelligence

Our rifles and machine guns were pointed at the myriad of tall grass waiting for the enemy to come

Countless bullets artillery, mortars and bombs dropped death whenever needed hour after hour

It ended May 28th as yet another day crossed off on a short timer’s calendar on the side of a camouflaged steel pot

I forget what I eat for breakfast but I vividly remember their names, faces, what day and how they died

I don’t expect you to understand how I suffer each day for my tour in Vietnam as you can only see the scars on my face and body

My eyes stare quiet with the past, fixed forever into time.

Anonymous Survivor

Editors Note:

A 4th ID **Ivy Leaf** article was published a few weeks after the battle and is shown below. This red, muddy stained paper was saved in the field by Sgt Jerry Rayala, 1st Platoon Squad Leader of Charlie Company. Rayala was not involved in this battle, but entered the field just days after this event.

In it’s always positive light, the Stars and Stripes article makes no mentions of the horrors of the battle or the death of the battalion commander

By SP4 Roger Seip

HIGHLANDER HEIGHTS — Company C, 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry engaged an estimated company of NVA in a fierce firefight and successfully routed them from their extensive bunker complex.

The fighting began shortly before noon after the Red Warriors had moved into a flat grassy area south of Landing Zone (LZ) Nicole on a search and clear mission.

A temporary perimeter was established as three squads moved separately into the surrounding woodline to search for enemy movement.

Stalking cautiously through the bushes and small trees, a 1st Platoon squad spotted three NVA soldiers washing clothes in a stream.

The Red Warriors fired at the enemy water point and with-

drew to an OP (observation position). Moments later B40 rockets, followed by AK47 fire, began exploding near the squad which then called for reinforcements.

The 1st Platoon, aware of their squad's situation, quickly departed the company perimeter and pushed toward the contact area.

The afternoon was passing quickly as the platoon continued their push and began to receive enemy rocket and rifle fire.

"There were snipers out there," said Sergeant Richard Makruski of Amherst, Ohio. "Some of them were up in the trees and I could see muzzle flashes on the ground."

There was a brief, fierce contact that eliminated the snipers. The platoon closed with their squad and again received enemy rocket and rifle fire.

Suddenly gunships were on station and began to pound rockets and machine gun fire into the enemy positions.

"Immediately after the gunships left," said Specialist 4 Raymond Santana of Brooklyn, N.Y., "artillery began to pound the enemy. We had batteries firing from LZ Nicole, LZ Penny and LZ Joyce and eight inchers coming from Highlander Heights."

The 2nd Platoon moved again toward the battle area and ran into another group of snipers.

Another heavy firefight ensued and the enemy was again beaten back.

As the evening light faded, elements of the 3rd Platoon joined with the 2nd Platoon and together they performed a fire and movement assault that scattered the NVA ranks. The Red Warriors then returned to their perimeter for the night.

"The assault was extremely effective," said Sergeant Makruski, "because the enemy fire was drawn from the 1st Platoon which enabled us to make it back to the perimeter."

The following morning Red Warriors from Company D were lifted into the contact area on a combat assault to relieve Company C and sweep the battle zone.

Amid the rubble of shrapnel-scarred trees Delta Company discovered a widely dispersed, freshly constructed bunker complex.

"The complex was approximately 200 meters wide and 500 meters long," described First Lieutenant Charles Orndoff of Waynesburg, Pa. "The first line of entrenchment consisted of spider holes followed by a long series of staggered bunkers with one and a half feet of overhead cover."

Many of the bunkers had been demolished by artillery during the battle and the Red Warriors destroyed the remaining ones.