

LZ X-RAY NOVEMBER 1965

BY ROBERT L. BATEMAN

The clattering of UH-1 Huey helicopters reverberated through the Drang River Valley in the Central Highlands region of the Republic of South Vietnam during the early morning hours of November 14, 1965. Aboard these light-skinned marvels of modern technology were the “sky troopers” of the U.S. Army’s new Air Assault Division, the 1st (Air) Cavalry Division. These men were part of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry (1/7th Cavalry), nicknamed the “Garry Owen” (or as the Soldiers of the 7th say, “GarryOwen” – all one word). The regiment was one of the Army’s most famous: The 7th Cavalry had been General George Armstrong Custer’s regiment. Half of his unit was annihilated by Indians at the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876. On this November morning, the sky troopers of the 7th Cavalry hoped to add a new chapter to their regiment’s combat history – this one a victory.

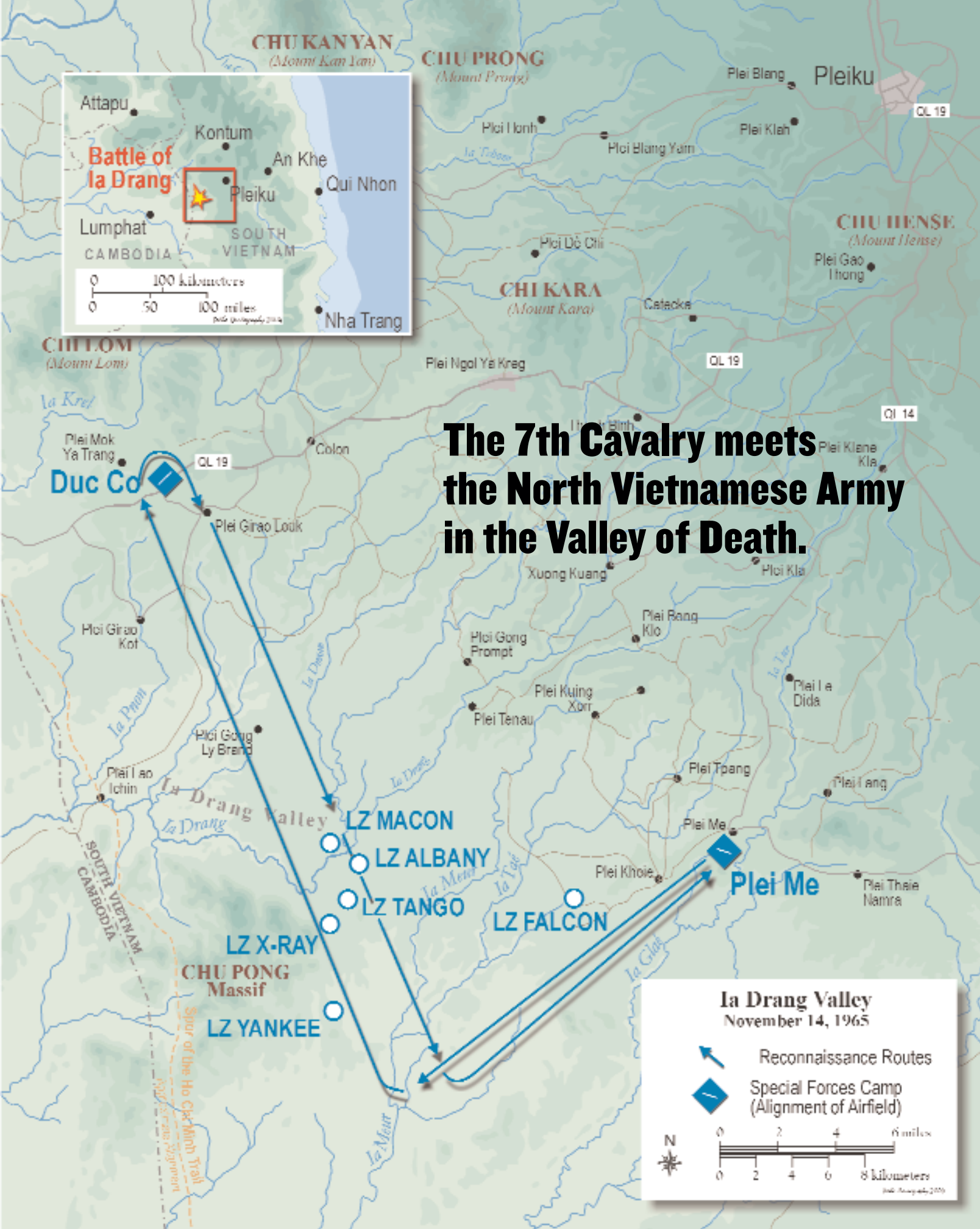
Lieutenant Colonel Harold G. “Hal” Moore, a tough 1945 graduate of West Point, commanded the 1/7th Cavalry. Clutching M-16 rifles, M-79 40 mm grenade launchers, M-60 machine guns, and enough food and water for a short fight, Moore and his troopers flew into Landing Zone X-Ray (LZ X-Ray). That landing zone and two others, Yankee and Tango, were named after the military phonetic code. Yankee and Tango had been considered as alternate landing zones but were discarded after Moore took a reconnaissance flight. It appeared that



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October 30, 1967. UH-1 helicopters land to pick up A/2/8th Cavalry during a search and destroy mission. The most widely used military helicopter during the war, the Bell UH-1 series Iroquois, better known as the “Huey,” began arriving in Vietnam in 1963. Before the end of the conflict, more than 5,000 of these versatile aircraft were introduced into Southeast Asia. The UH-1D could carry up to 12 troops, had a crew of two, a range of 293 miles, and boasted a speed of 127 mph.

Right: Reconnaissance flights were flown on the morning of November 14. The scout Hueys reported that LZ X-Ray could handle eight to 10 choppers, and that trails and communication wires had been observed north of the LZ.





The Ia Drang Valley, near the South Vietnam and Cambodian border, was a major NVA sanctuary because of its remoteness and the possibility of easy escape across the international border.

X-Ray could handle eight UH-1 Iroquois “choppers” per lift while the others could take only six – so X-Ray it was.

The GarryOwen troopers were to seek out and destroy a concentration of North Vietnamese forces near the base of the Chu Pong Massif. As the battle began to unfold, the sky troopers found more than they expected – they had landed near the command post of not one, but three regiments of North Vietnamese army (NVA) regulars.

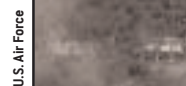
The 1/7th Cavalry consisted of four air assault rifle companies authorized approximately 150 Soldiers each, and a headquarters company of about 100 Soldiers. The headquarters company was under-strength, as were all four line companies: Alpha Company had 115 men, Bravo had 114, Charlie had 106, and Delta had 76. By contrast, the 66th NVA Regiment totaled 1,600 men. Two other NVA regiments were also in the immediate area of the Ia Drang Valley. In addition to these NVA forces, there were approximately 600 members of the

Viet Cong H-15 Battalion staged only an eight-hour march away. What transpired during the 72 hours after the troopers landed at LZ X-Ray was the first major fight between the United States Army and the NVA regular forces. From this engagement each side drew lessons they would use in the years to come. But at 10:48 a.m. on November 14, all that was still ahead.

The central portion of Vietnam, known in previous centuries as the Kingdom of Annam, borders the South China Sea. Hue, the kingdom’s historic capital, lay along the coast between the southern and northern sections of the kingdom. In the 14th century Vietnam was divided into the northern kingdom of Annam (with a capital where Hanoi is located at present) and the southern, Indian-influenced kingdom of Champa. The demarcation between these two kingdoms was close to the 17th Parallel (the area defined as the Demilitarized Zone on the map of South Vietnam). In 1471, after nearly two centuries of fighting between the kingdoms, Champa lost badly when the Annamese razed its capital, Indrapura, and slaughtered an estimated 40,000 of its inhabitants. By the time western Europeans entered the region in the 16th century, Vietnam was effectively three countries: Tonkin in the north, Annam in the center, and Cochinchina in the south. In Annam, the interior mountainous region that orients north and south became known as the Central Highlands. The Ia Drang (Vietnamese for the “Drang River”) runs through the Central Highlands into Cambodia.

The Central Highlands region is sparsely inhabited – unlike the densely populated flat coastal region from which it rises. The terrain becomes more rugged as one travels westward, until mountains nearly 3,000 feet tall dominate along the Cambodian border. In 1965 the main route across the region was Colonial Route 19 (immortalized by journalist and scholar Bernard Fall in his book *Street Without Joy*. This is also where the French met with disaster at the hands of the Vietnamese Communist Forces). Vegetation at lower elevations is often triple-canopy jungle, but thins in the areas remote from water. The ground near LZ X-Ray is covered with a mix of tall elephant grass and stunted hardwood.

The ethnic Vietnamese traditionally inhabited the coastal



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Courtesy of Joe Galloway



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1. A-1E Skyraiders are shown dropping napalm on targets in South Vietnam. This type of aircraft provided the initial air support to 1/7th Cavalry. These prop-driven planes were very good at ground support because their slow speed allowed the pilots to loiter over the target area and identify targets accurately.



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U.S. Army

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Courtesy of Joe Galloway



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Courtesy of Joe Galloway



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2. September 25, 1968. CH-47 Chinook helicopters airlift ammunition to a field artillery unit. After being flown by Chinooks into their firing position at LZ Falcon, two batteries from the 3/18th Field Artillery Regiment provided nonstop artillery support to the Soldiers of 1/7th Cavalry.

3. May 11, 1968. A U.S. Air Force F-100 Super Sabre drops its bombs on North Vietnamese troops near the "Y" Bridge in Saigon. "Broken Arrow" was the code word for "American unit in danger of being overrun." When this call was sent from LZ X-Ray, it brought every available aircraft in the theater to the aid of the beleaguered unit.

4. A private is shown with a Soldier who was KIA at LZ Albany. War is not without cost, and one does not "police up the battlefield" until one has won it. At the height of the fighting, there was little time for that post-battle nicety.

5. November 16, 1965. B/2/7th Cavalry troopers are shown advancing at LZ X-Ray as artillery explodes in the background.

6. November 14, 1965. Members of the 229th Aviation Battalion Pathfinders lead prisoners to a helicopter for evacuation to the rear so they can be interrogated.

7. A wounded Soldier is evacuated by helicopter. Hueys flew through intense enemy fire to deliver ammunition, medical supplies and water. They then flew out with the wounded.



The second wave of troops landed at 11:20 a.m., bringing the rest of B/1/7th and the 3d Platoon of A/1/7th.

plains, while the mountainous region along the interior remained in the hands of a more ancient people known as the Montagnards (French for “mountain people”). Because of an almost genocidal prejudice among the ethnic Vietnamese against these simple mountain tribes, the Montagnards supported anyone who would allow them to fight openly against their hereditary enemies. American Special Forces units took advantage of this cultural xenophobia, befriending Montagnard tribes such as the Rhade and Jarai and turning their hatred-fueled energy against the VC and incursions of the NVA. Such alliances were one of the most successful aspects of the war effort.

In the Ia Drang Valley, the Special Forces camp at Plei Me was a typical example of just such a union. A Special Forces A-Team, paired with members of a Montagnard tribe, established a fortified outpost along one of the avenues of approach from the Ho Chi Minh Trail (a major supply route) as it ran south through Laos and into the interior of South Vietnam. This fortified camp offered U.S. forces a bastion from

which to launch patrols to harass North Vietnamese and Viet Cong operations that were in the area.

On October 19, Communist forces attacked the A-Team and their 400 Montagnard allies by ambushing them along a familiar resupply route. The assault was unsuccessful, and the NVA activity against the base soon settled into something more closely resembling a siege. A battalion of Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces, backed by ample U.S. artillery and air support, broke the siege and reinforced the garrison at Plei Me. This success set the stage for further operations in the Ia Drang area and the first large-scale operation of the 1st Cavalry Division – Operation Silver Bayonet.

The 1st Cavalry initiated Operation Silver Bayonet at the beginning of November 1965, sending its battalions of helicopter-transported infantry through the breadth of the Ia Drang Valley in search of the elusive enemy. On November 13, Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore, commander of the 1/7th Cavalry, reported to the command post of 3d Brigade. He was ordered to conduct an airmobile assault with his battalion into an area near the Laotian border and attack a suspected enemy command post and assembly area. The intelligence was sketchy at best, but it was all that the American Army had available at the time. Moore and the key elements of his staff quickly issued a warning order to his companies.

The next morning Moore conducted a reconnaissance of the area aboard a Huey and selected possible landing zones near the Chu Pong Massif. He returned from the reconnaissance flight with a marked-up map to confirm the rough plan hashed out the night before. Moore gave the final order to conduct an air assault into LZ X-Ray. Bravo Company would be leading, followed by Alpha, then Charlie, and finally Delta Company. He and his command group would be in the first lift.

Initially the landing went as planned. There were 16 UH-1 Iroquois helicopters from Alpha Company, 229th Assault Helicopter Battalion (A/229th) available for the operation. Although Moore was able to fit only three-fourths of a company aboard each wave of helicopters, he believed he could land two companies before the enemy reacted. He guessed right; however, it still took almost four hours to bring the whole battalion into the landing zone. The calculus of the air assault was fixed by the number of helicopters and the distances involved. Each round trip took 30 minutes, and the Hueys had to stop and refuel during the course of the operation.

After a short preparation of the landing zone by artillery sta-

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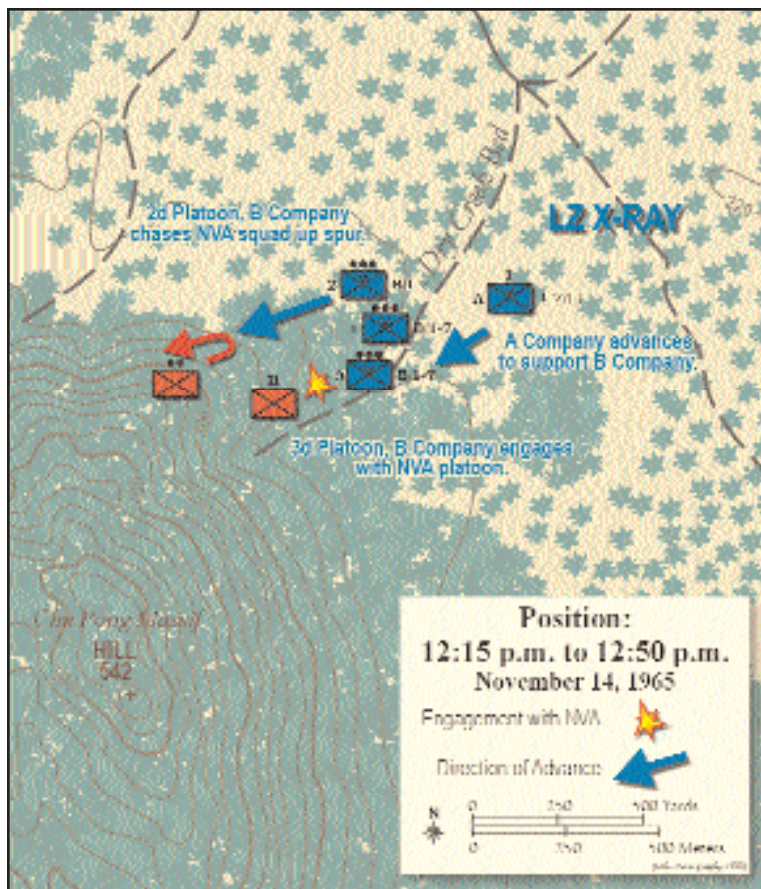
tioned six miles away at LZ Falcon, and attacks by accompanying rocket-armed helicopters, the first lift touched down at LZ X-Ray at 10:48 a.m. Upon landing, these GarryOwen troopers captured an NVA soldier without firing a shot. This man had disconcerting news: "There are three battalions on the mountain who very much want to kill Americans but have not been able to find any," he said. This information seemed to justify the landing at LZ X-Ray. There would be a fight, just as the prisoner's commanders wanted, but Moore's first priority was to keep the landing zone open long enough to bring in all of his companies. This meant pushing the perimeter out far enough to protect the landing zone and the helicopters from small-arms fire that might come from the three enemy battalions the prisoner had said were lurking nearby. Based on the tactical requirement to secure a large enough landing zone, Moore ordered Bravo Company to extend the perimeter outward, slightly uphill and across the flank of the mountain.

At 11:20 a.m. the second lift of helicopters arrived, bringing the rest of Bravo Company and the first half of Alpha Company. When the remainder of Alpha Company arrived at 12:10 p.m., Moore felt he had enough men to start the tentative push westward to find the enemy. Minutes later, shots rang out near the area where the prisoner had been captured. This was much too close to the edge of the landing zone for Moore's comfort.

Realizing that the situation had changed, Moore instantly revised his plan. Alpha would immediately take over the security of the landing zone and tie in on the left of Bravo. The thought occurred to Moore that they *had* to secure the western side of the landing zone and protect the incoming choppers from ground fire – or these 160 troopers might well find themselves re-enacting history in their own bloody version of the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

During their westward advance, Bravo Company ran across a small dry creek bed running down the Chu Pong Massif. This turned out to be one of the most decisive terrain features of LZ X-Ray. Initially the creek bed was only a nuisance to the Americans as they clambered across it during their journey. For the NVA, however, it proved to be a moderately high-speed avenue of approach straight off the mountain and onto the western edge of the landing zone. In a tactical-level fight, every ditch and hillock can suddenly assume great significance. Such was the case with this particular creek bed.

While Bravo Company moved out, Alpha Company assembled and prepared to cover Bravo's left. Captain John D.

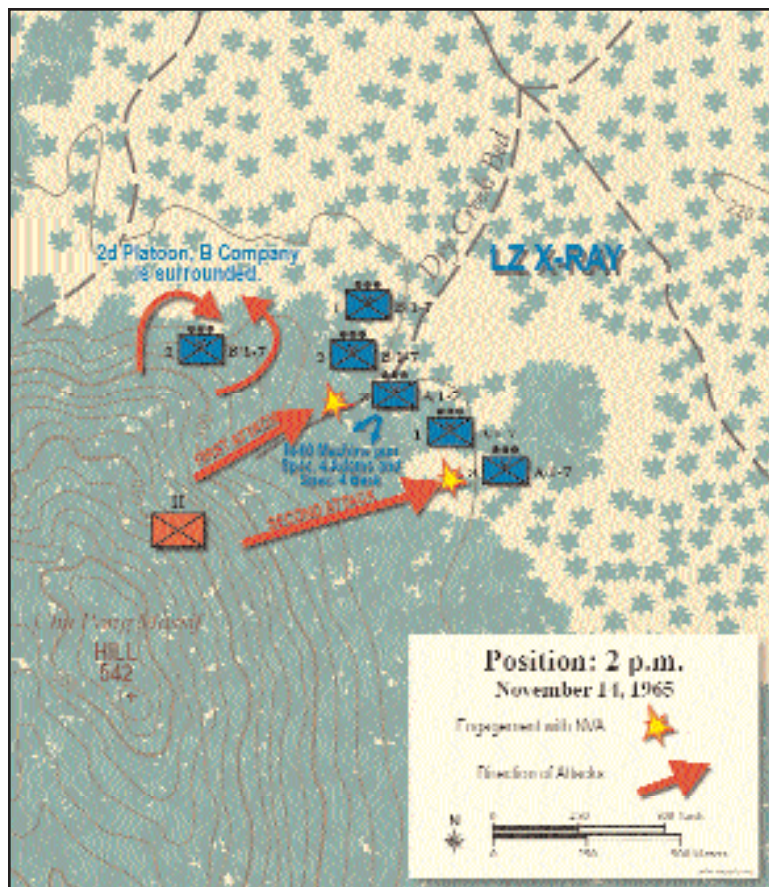


First contact was made at 12:15 p.m. Moore ordered Bravo Company to secure the LZ by moving toward the Chu Pong Massif. The men of Bravo were to keep the enemy as far from the helicopter landings as possible.

Herren, the commander of Bravo Company, led his unit forward with two platoons up and one platoon back. This fairly conventional movement formation was made possible by the moderate vegetation in the area. When standing, the men could see one another and maintain visual contact, but once the shooting started, tall grass constricted the Soldiers' field of vision to only a few feet.

Herren's men were about 150 yards beyond the creek bed when the left-most platoon of Bravo Company ran into a platoon of enemy troops, prompting a firefight. Captain Herren ordered the right-hand platoon, under the command of Second Lieutenant Henry Toro Herrick, to close up with 1st Platoon (they were trailing slightly) and tie in with them. What occurred next changed the course of the fight.

Positioned at the head of his 2d Platoon, Herrick saw a squad of enemy soldiers to his right-front. Apparently the enemy saw the Americans at the same time, and without firing a shot, reversed course at a run. This was not a baited ambush



By 2 p.m., Herrick's platoon had become cut off from the rest of the battalion. However, Alpha and Bravo Companies were successfully defending against the initial attacks.

as some would later suggest. It appears that it was simply a case of a small group of NVA in the wrong place at the wrong time. They were probably a flank guard or an advance element for a larger body of NVA. Regardless, instead of closing ranks with the hard-pressed 1st Platoon to his left-front, Lieutenant Herrick led his men in a dead run to catch the fleeing enemy, and in the process, separated his 2d Platoon from the rest of the company and battalion.

Herrick took his men pell-mell to the west, crossing a second dry creek bed about 100 yards past Bravo Company's 1st Platoon. Upon coming out of that creek bed, Herrick no longer saw the enemy. He then climbed a slight knoll, which was part of a finger extending from the mountain. When Herrick and his two lead squads crested the knoll, his platoon ran head-on into a force of roughly 50 NVA troops. It was a classic meeting engagement. The Americans were hammered hard and pinned down. Within minutes, Herrick's platoon was enveloped on the knoll as more and more NVA troops poured down the slopes.

Although their position so far outside the perimeter of the landing zone may have provided just the buffer Moore needed to bring in the rest of the battalion, it came at a heavy price. Herrick's platoon was cut off for the next day and a half. The survivors clustered together on the mountain's spur and fought back. The time was approximately 1:25 p.m. There were only two companies of American infantrymen on the ground but more were on the way.

Alpha Company rushed to the edge of the landing zone, orienting themselves to the sound of the firing ahead and along the dry creek bed. Meanwhile, Bravo Company continued to fight for its life. Captain Herren's other two platoons, plus one platoon from Alpha, moved forward to try to link up with and relieve the encircled remainder of Herrick's platoon. At 1:32 p.m., the Hueys of A/229th Aviation returned to LZ X-Ray with fresh reinforcements consisting of the remainder of Alpha Company and the greater part of Charlie Company.

Moore immediately positioned Charlie Company at the edge of the landing zone, while instructing Alpha to support Bravo in the effort to reach the separated platoon. Although only 100 to 150 yards separated the companies from the platoon, the ground could not be crossed due to intense enemy fire.

Alpha Company, positioned to the left-rear of Bravo, entered the creek bed and was moving forward diagonally when suddenly hell broke loose and the lead platoon ran head-on into about 150 NVA. With just two platoons under his command (after having loaned one to Bravo), Captain Tony Nadal, commander of Alpha Company, found himself in a swirling fight for control of the creek bed as two more companies of NVA entered the battle. The NVA soldiers attempted to attack down the creek toward the Americans at the edge of the landing zone, but two American Soldiers prevented this attack.

Russell Adams and Bill Beck were a machine-gun team from 3d Platoon, Alpha Company. As Adams and Beck advanced with the rest of their platoon, they lost contact with their platoon leader amid the chaos. The two men were unaware that their lieutenant lay dead behind them, so they kept moving up the slope. Adams later said, "Nobody told me to stop, so I kept going." They finally stopped when they ran into such fierce enemy resistance that they could not move forward any longer. At this point they were roughly 75 yards in front of the rest of the line, on the extreme left flank of Nadal's company. Nadal's line had an open left flank hanging to the south of the creek bed. Charlie Company had not yet arrived and that gap could have been worrisome – but to flank Nadal's men, the

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enemy would have to go through Beck and Adams.

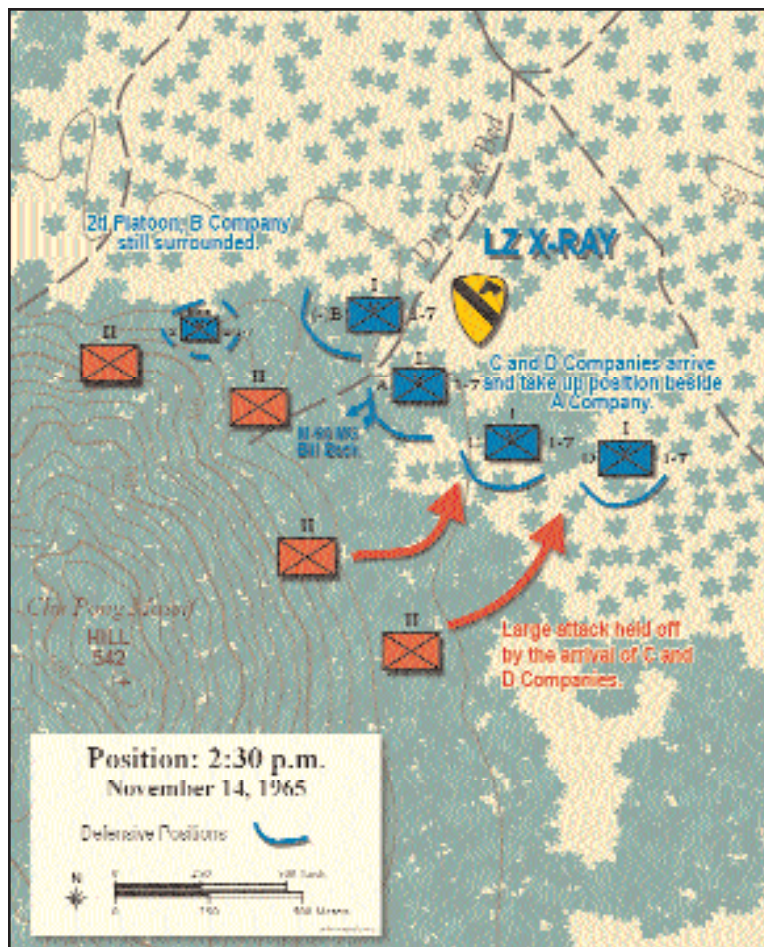
With a steady stream of men bringing them ammunition, Beck and Adams were able to hold off the NVA with the massive firepower of their M-60 and keep the enemy from enveloping Nadal's line and getting onto the landing zone by sweeping through the gap between Alpha and Charlie Companies. But Adams was shot early in the fight, and Beck was left to man the gun by himself. After the fight, more than 100 NVA bodies were found in the immediate vicinity. In the process of saving himself, Beck probably saved the battalion.

While Adams and Beck had been blasting away, the rest of Charlie and Delta Companies arrived at the landing zone. They secured more of the perimeter and repulsed another, even larger attack. This crisis developed quickly. As each new lift of infantrymen arrived, another NVA attack washed down the hillside. Initially it seemed that the four companies could hold out; however, as casualties sapped his battalion's strength, it became clear to Moore that he needed more men. As the afternoon waned, Moore's brigade commander sent Bravo Company from the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry to lend a hand.

As night fell and a lull descended upon the scene, the situation seemed less tenuous than it had throughout much of the day. Although 1/7th Cavalry sustained heavy losses, the leadership held up and the men performed magnificently. Of course, much the same could be said for the North Vietnamese. Since they were the attacking force and located next to their own base camp, they had the upper hand in logistics and manpower and could determine the time and place of their next attack. That attack came the following morning.

At 6:50 a.m. on November 15, there were five American companies on the ground: Bravo Company from 2d Battalion, and four companies from 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry. The latter companies had been depleted by casualties. Food and water were available, and sufficient ammunition had been distributed during the night. Herrick's platoon was still cut off on their lonely knoll but had taken no more casualties.

Everything was calm at this point – too calm for Moore's battlefield senses. Although he was preparing to lead a three-company movement to try again to rescue the lost platoon, he hesitated. Just before the move, he ordered all companies to send out reconnaissance to their respective fronts. In doing so, he afforded the battalion a few precious seconds of warning, as just then a two-battalion NVA attack came down the hill, smashing into Charlie Company and the smaller Delta Company on the



Between 1:32 p.m. and 2:30 p.m., Soldiers from Charlie and Delta Companies arrived, allowing Moore to shift troops to his open eastern flank. The move was completed just in time to block the attack of two NVA battalions that had maneuvered to what they thought was an open flank.

south and southeastern sides of the perimeter.

The units at that part of the perimeter, especially the left two platoons of Charlie Company, were savaged in the ensuing onslaught. The fighting quickly became hand-to-hand and was restricted to a space of a few dozen yards. For a few desperate moments that must have seemed like an eternity to the men on the ground, it appeared that the enemy had turned the flank of the embattled 1/7th Cavalry. On the other side of the landing zone, across from the beleaguered platoons of Charlie Company, Hal Moore's command post was also under fire as bullets whipped across the area. The massacre of Moore's 7th Cavalry seemed close at hand.

Hal Moore, however, was not about to give up. At approximately 7 a.m., he issued a fateful command to the Air Force liaison officer who controlled the close-air support (CAS):

“Send Broken Arrow.” The command indicated that an American battalion was heavily engaged and in danger of being overrun. It was the code word used to bring the full weight of every available element of United States firepower into one small patch of South Vietnam. A “Broken Arrow” call immediately diverted all aircraft in the region from their assigned missions to provide support to the endangered unit. Artillery rounds from the 105 mm howitzers a few miles away at LZ Falcon, supplemented by eight-inch howitzers even farther away, pounded the approaches while the forward observers screamed adjustments into their radios over the constant din of explosions and small-arms fire. Realizing that even this might not be enough, Moore called the 3d Brigade commander, Colonel Tim Brown, and told him of their predicament. Brown said he would send another company from the 2/7th Cavalry immediately – but Moore knew that in these types of situations, “immediately” could actually be a very long time. Moore was also aware that nothing could fly into the landing zone with so much fire in the air. He had to stabilize the situation with the support he had on hand.

Already the smallest of the companies, Delta was being further depleted through attrition. Although they were fighting hard, they were able to extend their line only a short distance. Moore had no choice – he had to commit everything in order to keep their lifeline, the landing zone, open. He pulled one platoon from Alpha Company (the one closest to the near-shattered Delta Company line) and sent them across the bullet-swept landing zone to plug a hole that had opened in Charlie Company’s positions. Still the fighting raged on, and the

NVA moved closer to annihilating the cavalry.

Finally, at 8 a.m. Moore committed his reserve – something every good commander saves as his last option. Moore’s reserve was his scout platoon, which he sent across the landing zone to plug the hole on the left side of Charlie Company. The scouts made it across, filling in where two platoons had been decimated. It was a near-run thing, but they held the line. Nonetheless, Moore’s defense was tenuous, and the enemy still had more forces to commit. Delta Company was in danger of being flanked – in fact, some NVA actually did make it around their flank. The consolidated mortar section (all seven of the available mortar tubes had been consolidated at the southeast side of the landing zone) fought these NVA with their mortars, rifles, and even their pistols. Although one mortar was knocked out by small-arms fire, the position held.

Just after 9 a.m., as the two-hour struggle in the Charlie Company sector finally waned, A/2/7th Cavalry arrived, giving Moore the reinforcements he needed. As members of B/2/7th Cavalry walked over to fill in for Charlie Company, they noted with amazement the number of enemy bodies. But the cost to the Americans was also high. Charlie Company had entered the fighting at LZ X-Ray with 106 officers and men, but by the time they were pulled off the line that afternoon after the arrival of two reinforcing battalions, they had lost 42 men killed and 20 wounded. Included in the casualties were all of the officers (two killed, three wounded) and 18 sergeants. Charlie Company was spent, but the battalion had won.

The NVA tried several more assaults over the next 24 hours, but nothing rivaled the massed strength of roughly 1,000 enemy troops from the NVA 7th Battalion, 66th Regiment and the H-15 Viet Cong Battalion that had come so close to breaking the American defenses that morning. Eventually, the men of 1/7th Cavalry flew out along with the two companies of 2/7th Cavalry that had reinforced them during the desperate moments of November 14 and 15. There was a fight that would go down in the history books. The “lessons learned” guided the combatants for the next seven and a half years.

Garry Owen in Glory!

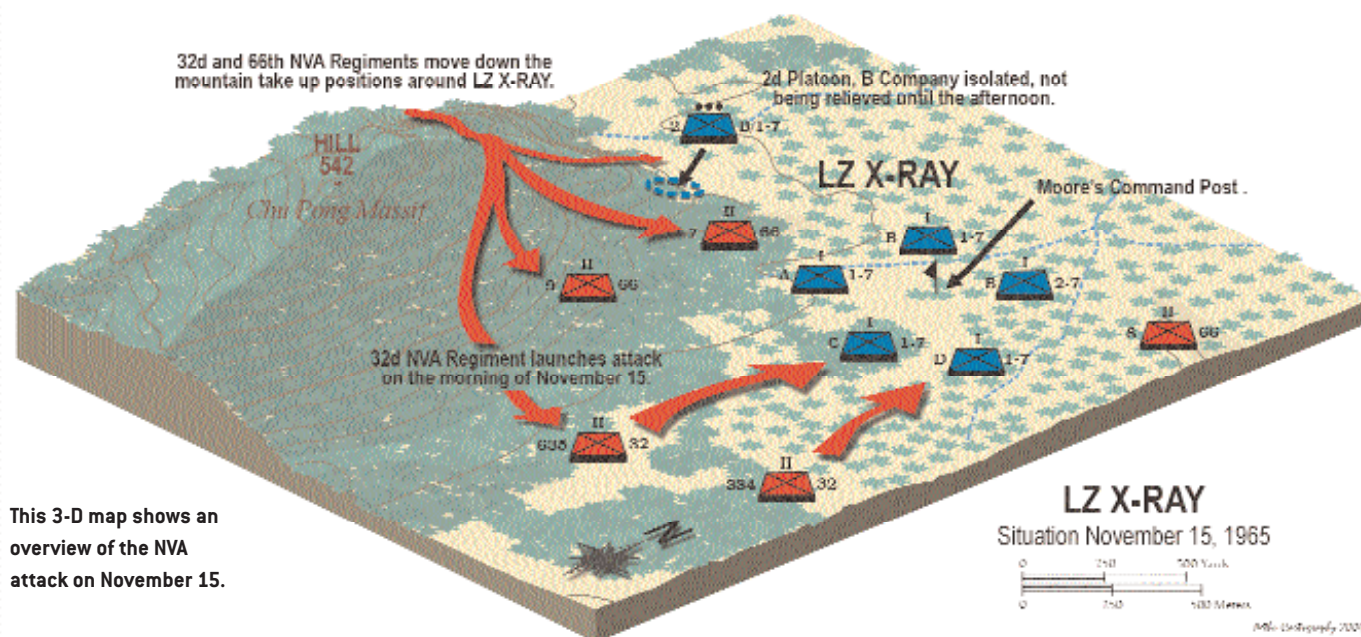
What does an old, “rollicking Irish drinking tune” have to do with the U. S. 7th Cavalry Regiment? The connection is the 7th’s most famous field commander, Lieutenant Colonel (Brevet Major General) George Armstrong Custer.

Custer was quite fond of the Irish song whose refrain ended with the words “Garry Owen in glory!” He thought it an inspiring tune for the regimental band to play. But according to the distinguished historian, Robert M. Utley, it was at the Washita River on November 27, 1868, that the tune became the regimental “battle song.” Preceding the 7th Cavalry’s attack upon Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle’s sleeping village, the regimental band played Garry Owen – or at least they tried to play it. It was so cold that the instruments froze. Nevertheless, the song became so closely associated with the 7th Cavalry that the words “Garry Owen,” along with an arm holding a saber, were eventually incorporated into the heraldry of the regiment, and to this day they are included on its official crest.

TOURING THE BATTLEFIELD

Although many of the battlefields described in other *Walk Where They Fought* articles can be visited, LZ X-Ray is still a dangerous and inhospitable place. It is as hazardous today as it was when the Americans left it on November 16, 1965. The Ia Drang Valley is a sparsely inhabited region of the Communist-controlled People’s Republic of Vietnam. There are neither roads nor jungle tracks leading to the location of the battle. It is 15 miles from human habitation, across lands infested with mines and booby traps left over from the war. The only way in is by helicopter – the same method used to

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This 3-D map shows an overview of the NVA attack on November 15.

reach the area in 1965. Helicopter was also the mode of travel used by retired Lieutenant General Hal Moore and journalist Joe Galloway when they, along with several other veterans of the fight, returned (with the permission and support of the People's Republic of Vietnam) to the landing zone in 1993 with an American news crew. Unless you have special contacts with the Communist authorities of the People's Republic, it is recommended you pass up this "adventure travel" opportunity (and not just because it's hard to reach) and instead take the virtual tour provided by this article.

It is interesting to note that while en route to the 1st Cavalry Division's base camp after the fighting in 1965, Moore made a special point of stopping by the artillery batteries at LZ Falcon. These two batteries provided a great deal of support to his battalion during the battle. They alone fired some 18,000 rounds into the area surrounding LZ X-Ray. It is amazing to consider: 18,000 rounds of 105 mm ammo; plus all the eight-inch rounds; plus all the company and battalion mortar rounds; plus an unknown number of bombs from aircraft supporting the battalion – and that is just the American ordnance! Some of it still exists unexploded, which is another good reason not to visit this battlefield.

If, however, you can afford a helicopter and the money it would take to buy your way into the area, the coordinates for the middle of the kidney-shaped landing zone are YA 93550110 (Point X on the Tour Map).

Standing at those grid coordinates you can see the whole of the battlefield. The landing zone itself is only a few hundred yards across. Facing west, 200 meters from the center of the landing zone, is the dry creek bed (Point 1 on the Tour Map).

This stream, which flows only during the height of the monsoon season, was the NVA's high-speed avenue of approach leading off the mountain and to the edge of the landing zone. Angling slightly to the west-by-southwest is the line where Captain Tony Nadal's Alpha Company made their stand and fought the majority of the battle (Point 2 on the Tour Map). Beyond the creek bed and to the west is an unexploded-munitions-infested area (Point 3 on the Tour Map). Roughly 300 meters due west, past a small wash (unmarked on the map) and up a slight spur, is where the "Lost Platoon" fought (Point 4 on the Tour Map). The change in elevation is only about 12 feet, but in 1965 this was high enough for the troopers to protect themselves from incoming enemy fire and gain an advantage over the attacking NVA.

Moore's command post, the battalion aid post, and the general area where the engineers and mortars were consolidated was located at the protrusion of woods to the east of the landing zone (Point 5 on the Tour Map). Thin vegetation covers the landing zone today, although it was open space in 1965. Just a few dozen yards past the edge of the landing zone is where Charlie and Delta companies were positioned – to the south and southeast respectively (Points 6 & 7 on the Tour Map).

Now, if you have taken that chopper to LZ X-Ray, get back onboard before you blow yourself up!

GarryOwen! ★

Robert L. Bateman is assigned to the Pentagon as a U.S. Army Strategist. He has authored two books, "Digital War: A View from the Front Lines" (1999), and "No Gun Ri: A Military History of the Korean War Incident" (2002). Bateman has also published over 50 magazine articles.