

After Action Report as follows:

FROM "C" BATT.,
1ST BN.,
44TH AAR

January 24, 1968

09:00 Hours

Section Chief Sgt. Sines had accompanied one of his sections tracks to the Camp Carroll Battery "C" maintenance motor pool for repair. The crew of the track consisted of Squad Leader Sgt. Sam Lewis, gunner Spec. 4 Russia Holley, cannoneers, Spec 4 Earl Holt and PFC David Lewis and Driver Spec. 4 Joseph Belardo. At the motor pool the crew was to replace both 40mm cannons with new barrels, repair damaged track treads and were to have the mechanics replace the starter, since the only way to start the track was by pulling it with another track.

11:30 Hours

Track treads were repaired and retentioned, engine oiled and checked, both barrels replaced but not fully cleaned, starter was not replaced or repaired. In the distance the crew could hear what sounded like a full scale fire fight. A common sound along the DMZ. They were advised that the fight was just below the eastern slope of Camp Carroll. All dusters in the Battery area were instructed to take position along the northern camp perimeter. All other tracks were to hold position and await instructions. Sgt. Sines' track was one of five Dusters that began to shoot more than 8,000 40mm rounds at the nva that had attacked the convoy on Route 9 in the valley in front of Carroll. First LT. Steve Hardin had taken command of one of the Dusters, comprised of a new inexperienced crew. Hardin instructed Sines to saddle up, refuel, replenish ammo and meet his duster within fifteen minutes at the camp gate as a reaction force for the ambushed convoy. Sines instructed Hardin of the Duster starting problem, but was still ordered to follow, because he needed a seasoned fighting crew. Sines instructed his crew to return to their position "Water Point" and resupply. The crew hastily fueled, ringed the turret with 40mm ammo, restocked upper and side track ammo compartments and filled the drivers compartment with an extra reserve of loose clips of 40mm ammo.

12:30 Hours

At the gate the Dusters were met by two Marine Tanks and a squad of Marines. A Marine LT. was in command of the first M48A3 Tank followed out the gate by LT. Hardins Duster, then the other M67A2 "Flame Thrower" With half the Marine squad holding on to that Tank and then by Sines Duster along with the balance of the Marines sitting on the back of the Duster.

12:45 Hours

The relief force stopped within 100 yards of ambushed convoy and begins to give direct fire to enemy forces along northern ridge above convoy. Belardo instructs "via radio" the driver of the other Duster Spec. 4 Conley to keep fighting distance between his Duster and the M48 tank in front of him.

13:00 Hours

All is now very quiet at ambush sight. You could see Americans laying in the kill zone, wounded or dead. There was no shooting from the NVA or the convoy. The only sound was the 40mm from Carroll shooting over their heads into the slopes along Dong Ha Mountain. Both LT's. instructed all tracks to proceed forward with caution into the ambush site. Belardo instructed Conley to hold fast and not move. Sines advised both LT's. That this was not a hit and run NVA action and all caution should be used and not advance. Sines advised to sweep both north and south sides of convoy before moving forward. Belardo advised Conley to drive the Duster to his right and take position on a small elevated knoll overlooking the convoy, so they could get a better look at the situation. Sines advised Hardin to reassess the situation and clear the area around the convoy before advancing into a possible trap. Both LT's again instructed their drivers to proceed along the center of the road with caution. Sines instructed his Duster and the other M48 to hold fast and be ready to fire. The first M48 had just crossed over a small bridge that spanned a small creek on Route 9, LT. Hardin's Duster was just approaching the bridge. Both tracks had traveled no more than a 100 yards. The NVA hidden from view suddenly ambushed the M48 and Duster with volleys of RPG's. Both tracks were instantly out of action. The crew of the M48 was seriously wounded or killed. The crew on Hardin's Duster had four with minor wounds and two serious. Cannoneer Solomon had lost the back of his legs from one RPG. Gunner Spec 4 Gilbert had lost both arms from another RPG. Sines' Duster immediately open fire on the RPG teams. Caution had to be taken because the RPG teams were within twenty feet of the M48 and Duster. Belardo instructed the driver of the other "Flame Thrower Tank" to follow him and take position on that small knoll overlooking the ambush site. Both tracks did figure eights to level any tall grass that would conceal the enemy and give an area for the Marines to dig in. As they drove up the knoll they were firing at the NVA that were visible and instructed the "twelve" Marines to dig in and protect the west and south slopes of the knoll.

13:15 Hours

Sines' Duster and the M48 were now about 150 yards off the Road on the south side of Route 9. The ambushed convoy along with the other destroyed Duster and M48 were about 150 to 200 yards slightly to the right, at our one o'clock position. Sines' field of fire was excellent, the terrain

around the knoll was mostly low brush and grass, directly across route nine was an area about 200 to 300 yards wide going and went north for about one quarter mile to a small hedge row along the Cam Lo River. The area was clear or with small clusters of brush. The small stream at the ambush site ran back north to the river, its eastern side was hills covered with heavy brush, the area was know as Mike Hill, because the Marines had lost many men from Mike Company on the hills in a previous battle, the south side of the bridge was similar terrain. At the bridge crossing stood a lone tree about seventy feet tall. The destroyed Duster was in close proximity to the tall tree. The eleven o'clock position in front of Sines' Duster was the beginning of a large hill, heavy cover and a steep drop off. The area behind Sines' Duster was a sharp steady rise up to Camp Carroll and the Observation Post known as Hill 250.

13:30 Hours

Sines requested reinforcements from Camp Carroll. Capt. Easter, "C"-Battery 1st/44th Commanding Officer Advised: "hold position, recover men, casualties and equipment from ambush, return to Camp Carroll." Sines' Duster proceeded slowly towards the entrapped Duster, raking the area with 40mm and M60 machine gun. Belardo repeatedly tried to contact the destroyed Duster via radio, but now only received radio mike clicking. The M48 "Flame Thrower" would give rear security as the Marines hastily redug new positions. Sines' Duster was now within 50 yards of the destroyed Duster. NVA automatic weapons and machine guns now opened fire. RPGs from across Route 9 were fired, falling short of their mark or soaring over head. A small group of NVA began to rush forward, only to be killed by 40mm. NVA 57mm recoilless rifles began shooting at Sines' Duster from the eleven o'clock position. More NVA started rushing from concealed positions along the road. Sines orders the Driver Belardo to return back up the knoll. Belardo unwilling to turn around and expose the Dusters sides or the engine "fearing a RPG or 57 recoilless hit would destroy or stall an unstartable Duster" had PFC Holt use inter-track radio communications and verbally guide him backwards and up the hill until they were sure turning was safe. Automatic weapons fire constantly strafing the Duster. Mortars now exploding at close range. Sines again radioed Carroll advising enemy action and requesting backup. Carroll advised hold position sweep area. The new 40mm cannon barrels installed at Carroll and not completely cleaned, now began to smoke profusely from the cosmoleen oil. Belardo and Holt, feverishly swabbing the barrels with the little reserve oil on the Duster. NVA could be seen running in the open along the small steam and into the heavy brush at the eleven o'clock position and along the stream that headed towards the ambush site. The Duster began firing along the stream area,

delivering effective fire on the advancing NVA. Large groups of NVA dead and wounded were now visible from the river to within 50 yards of the ambushed convoy. NVA mortars again began landing in the Duster area. NVA automatic weapons and small arms fire were sporadic but heavy. Belardo was advised to keep his track moving around the knoll and away from the Marine infantry and M48. A moving target was not as easy a target. The M48 took up position on the path that was made by the two tracks as they went up the knoll. The Marines re-dug slightly to the left and rear of the M48. Sines the sixth man of normally a five man crew, now stood on the back of the Duster giving firing orders, exposing himself to enemy fire. Belardo began giving artillery coordinates to Fire Direction Control at Carroll. The enemy could now be seen dragging their dead or wounded into the heavy brush. Sines, now as the driver and Belardo in the TC-hatch, The Duster again advanced towards the destroyed convoy, raking the area with 40mm and M60. The NVA again charged the Duster. Sines, stopped the Duster and was holding position. The Duster was now only a few yards from Route 9 and about 30 yards from the destroyed Duster. The Duster was now shooting direct fire. Belardo exposing himself to enemy fire, Now stood on the top front right corner of the Duster, so he could see the other Duster, only Gilbert the gunners head was visible and not moving. No other Duster crew could be seen. Sines was now shooting Belardo's M16 from the drivers compartment at the advancing NVA. Belardo, now on the ground outside the Duster, had the front main door open of the Duster. This was a common combat practice for Duster drivers and allowed them to take the 40mm ammo out of the inside storage area and hand it to the loaders in the turret. Belardo continually exposing himself to enemy fire, repeatedly climbed in and out of the drivers hatch retrieving 40mm ammo and distributing it to the loaders in the turret. Belardo advised Sines that the 40mm ammo was extremely low. NVA RPG's, mortars and 57 recoilless began hitting close to the Duster. Sines instructed Belardo to get back in the Duster and did a 180 degree turn and headed back up the knoll. Two helicopters began shooting extremely close to the east slope of the Duster and advised them that a very large NVA force had crossed Route 9 and was advancing towards them and up to Camp Carroll. The helicopters continued to shoot into a small ravine that headed up to Camp Carroll and covered the eastern slope of the knoll. The M48 "Flame Thrower" was now out of 50 cal. ammo. Its crew began using their rifles. Sitting motionless the NVA stopped shooting at the M48 with mortars and RPG's, possibly thinking they had already scored a direct hit. The dug-in Marines almost out of ammo, were using M16 ammo from the Duster.

14:15 Hours

Belardo radioed Carroll that the 40mm ammo was down to 60 rounds and they would not abandon the convoy, expected to be overrun, needed ammo and reinforcements immediately. Jets had now arrived and were dropping bombs and napalm on the north side of the river. The Duster continued to shoot the M60 at the visible NVA and direct air strikes and napalm strikes on the NVA positions. The NVA had now stopped shooting at the Duster. A small group of villagers began running across the open field between Route 9 and the river, heading west. Neither side shot. After they disappeared, no other shots were fired from either side. The NVA seemed to vanish or were digging in out of view in the heavy cover or were trying to avoid the jet air strikes. Camp Carroll stopped shooting 40mm and heavy artillery fearing it would hit the helicopters or jets. Sines again radioed Carroll reminding them of the situation and that forty to fifty NVA lay dead on the knoll and what seemed to be hundreds of NVA lay dead between Route 9 and the river. NVA could be seen dragging their wounded into heavy cover. Sines repeated. need ammo and reinforcements and would not give-up the hill advantage to the NVA. Easter advised, no reinforcements were coming, but a group of four to six volunteers would try to bring ammo and that Duster should hold position until it arrived. Spec 4 Robert Williams was the ammo truck driver. Fearing the ammo truck would run into the NVA and hoping to intercept the ammo truck before it reached the ambush site, Belardo proceeded down the west slope of the knoll, the same path they drove up to get on the knoll, It was the Duster crews belief that if Belardo reached the ammo truck, he could direct the ammo truck back up the knoll, the Duster could replenish its ammo, extract the wounded and dead from the ambush and return to Carroll. The Marines had been instructed to keep this path open knowing it was the alternate route back to route 9 and Camp Carroll. Belardo armed with M16 and hand grenades, Sprinted down the knoll through the dead NVA, shooting into the heavy brush and throwing grenades at suspected enemy positions. The Marines constantly giving support fire. At the road Belardo waited crouched in a drainage ditch. NVA could be seen taking up position across the road. Belardo quickly dispatched the NVA he could see and threw the remaining grenades into their positions across Route 9. Belardo waiting for the ammo truck and could hear automatic weapons fire from the west on Route 9. Twenty minutes had elapsed and no ammo truck, Belardo began his return back up the knoll. Fearing he would be shot by his fellow comrades, Belardo ran up the center of the path with rifle overhead, shouting American slogans. Upon reaching the Duster, Belardo was advised that the ammo truck had returned to Carroll because it could not get past the heavy NVA automatic weapons.

15:00 Hours

The Duster crew radioed Carroll that they were almost completely out of ammunition. Carroll advised that they had dispatched a second group of volunteers with a Marine weapons squad. Belardo in contact with the second ammo truck via radio advised Spec 4 John Huelsenbeck and Marine Cpl. Roger Blentlinger weapons man aboard ammo truck the road area where he would meet them. Belardo again descended down the hill. The Marines and Duster not giving support fire, because ammunition was very low. They now could see Belardo about halfway down the slope engage one NVA soldier in hand to hand combat. Quickly overcoming the enemy Belardo sprinted to road and hastily moved west on Route 9 waving down the second ammo truck and reinforcements. Belardo riding on to the running board of the ammo truck, directed the ammo truck and one other truck with about twelve Marines up the path. About 50 yards up the hill the ammo truck slid off the path and its front wheel fell into a ditch and was unable to move. The Marine truck was unable to push it out. Mortars began landing all around the two trucks. Huelsenbeck ordered the Marine LT. on the other truck to move his vehicle and have his men dig in and give support fire. Huelsenbeck exposing himself to enemy fire positioned the Marines for maximum support. Belardo running through the mortar barrage went to get the Duster. The Duster was now proceeding down the eastern slope of the knoll spraying the ravine that led to Carroll with M60. The jets and helicopters had left the area. A loan observation plane could be seen flying on the eastern side of the stream. Belardo advising the crew what had happened drove the Duster to the stranded ammo truck. At the ammo truck, Holt using the M60 gave additional fire support for Huelsenbeck and Blentlinger. Exposing themselves, fastened the Duster tow cable to the ammo truck. The ammo truck laden with ammo was pulled the top of the knoll. The Marine LT. from the reinforcement truck was now assessing the situation with Sines. The LT. after viewing the battle area from on top the Duster, agreed to try to secure the path back to Route 9. The ammo truck had now been parked behind the Dusters right north side. Replenished with M16, M60 and a truck load of 40mm ammo the Duster crew again opened fire on the NVA. The crew giving each other a needed rest took on new assignments, Squad Leader Sam Lewis was now the gunner, seated in the turret on the left side of the twin 40mm cannons, Belardo behind him as cannon loader, seated on the right side of the 40mm cannons and traversing the turret was Spec 4 Russia Holly, Holt behind him as the other cannon loader. Holt until now was single handedly loading the 40mm as PFC Dave Lewis shot the M60. Dave Lewis now stood on the outside of the turret with Huelsenbeck and Blentlinger handing Belardo and Holt 40 mm ammo. A human assembly line was now from the ammo truck to the Duster. The Duster now shooting full auto first cleared the ravine leading to Carroll and shot as close to the destroyed convoy as possible. The NVA again opened fire with mortars and 57

recoilless rifles and again could be seen crossing the river in large groups. Sines on the ground with an other group was reloading the inside of the Duster with 40mm and giving Carroll's FDC artillery coordinates. The ammo team was giving NVA 57 recoilless and mortar targets to the men in the turret. Secondary explosions were everywhere. The Duster crew and the NVA not giving ground. When fully loaded the Duster along with the Marines were going to clear a path to the ambushed convoy, rescue the dead and wounded, destroy the damaged vehicles and return to Carroll. The crew had now fired an additional 2000 40mm rounds. The 40mm cannons red hot began to jam and cook-off without firing. Holt and Belardo repeatedly reaching into the cannon breaches removing the hot rounds by hand. The twin 40's now had two 40mm shells jammed half in the breach, not allowing the firing block to move into firing position. Holt now stepped out of the turret, hoping to find more oil on the ammo truck or Marine truck. The oil would be used to free the cannon breaches. NVA artillery rocking the Duster and ammo truck. Squad Leader Lewis seeing a team of NVA 57 recoilless rifles shoot, yelled "duck". The 57's hitting the ground a few feet from the Duster. The explosions throwing Holt, Huelsenbeck, and Blentlinger over the ammo truck. PFC Dave Lewis hit in the face with shrapnel, stood frozen with blood running in his eyes and down his face. Squad Leader Sam Lewis with bad head wounds lay unconscious in the gunners seat. Belardo half on the 40mm cannons, had head, chest and arm wounds. The two 40mm rounds in the breach now exploded wounding Belardo a second time and sending him up and on top of Sam Lewis. Holly sitting on the other side of the turret was thrown unconscious, but unwounded on top of Dave Lewis between the Duster and the ammo truck. Belardo still conscious and covered in blood thought the Duster had been hit a second or third time. The turret was now in flames and filled with smoke. Belardo seeing Sam Lewis unconscious and bleeding picked him out of the gunners seat. Belardo with Lewis on his shoulder armed with an M16 from the turret held onto the hot 40mm barrels and exited the Duster. Belardo carrying Lewis and firing the M16 moved to behind the ammo truck. The event was so quick to happen that the Marines dug in by the M48 were now just responding with aid and counter fire. The ammo crew was trying to assess damage, regroup and give medical aid. Belardo refusing medical aid climbed back into the turret and used the fire extinguisher on the burning cannons. Grabbing the M60 from its mount Belardo returned fire on the advancing NVA. Huelsenbeck, Holt and Blentlinger joined Belardo in the turret. Holt and Huelsenbeck frantically trying to salvage the cannons and clearing the loading magazines of hot 40mm ammo. Unable to fix the cannons they commandeered M16's and remained up in the turret giving direct fire at the rushing NVA.

17:00 Hours

Sines advised Carroll of the situation and told them he would try to get back to Carroll. The wounded Duster men and Marines were placed inside the M48 and in the Duster TC hatch. With Marines laying on the top decks of the Duster, M48 and loaded into the trucks they departed the knoll. Sines drove the Duster with Belardo at the M60, Huelsenbeck, Holt and Blentlinger shooting their M16's and throwing grenades. The two trucks in the middle and the M48 bringing up the rear, they blasted their way through enemy positions and back to Camp Carroll. At Carroll they were advised by Captain Easter to keep the chatter down about all the NVA in the valley. Easter did not want the men to think Carroll could be over run. The crew was ordered back to the water point position to stand guard duty. The wounded were medevaced to Dong Ha and Da Nang. Sines and his crew was never again asked about the ambush. Their heroic action, possibly was the reason Camp JJ Carroll was not over run on January 24, 1968. Later that same evening Captain V.J.. Tedesco with a large reaction force from Dong Ha rescued the ambushed convoy.

January 24, Ambush below Camp JJ Carroll on Route 9. This was the day of the big battle. It seemed that there was no other battle in Duster history that surpassed this tragic day. It was just another bad day for the Duster Road Warriors. At all the reunions it is rekindled and the Dragon of War is allowed to breathe flames once more. In the eyes of our crew, someone just waited a little too long to make a commitment to action. The hierarchy seemed to shudder at the mere thought of either screwing up, having death on their hands, or losing more of Uncle Sam's equipment. War is not fair or just and has no conclusion but victory or defeat. Our crew was "seasoned", but the other crew chosen to go down to the ambush had no idea what to expect. The squad leader Johnny Towns was the only combat-experienced member on the Duster and was scheduled to go home within the week. This alone was unfair to a short-timer. The driver Conley was not the designated driver for that track, but only a reactionary force volunteer. A few months later, Conley would be killed in another battle. The New LT. was in charge should have known the facts about this crew. He was the platoon leader. Everyone knew that the ambush was bad and big by the amount of firepower the NVA had already expended at the convoy. Also, by the thousands of thousands of 40mm shells we had already counter fired at the NVA from Camp Carroll. Our track had no starter and had to be towed to start. Both Dusters had already fire thousands of rounds at the ambush site from Camp Carroll. They should have been quickly cleaned and re-oiled before leaving camp. The 40mm shells were already jamming, due to over heating. The New LT. said, this was no the time to get squeamish, "SADDLE-UP". After arriving at the ambush site, the lead M48 tank and Duster, including our Duster and the other M48, never fired a shot into the ambush area. We just sat there as ordered, looking and listening. The only shooting was the 40's flying over our heads from Carroll. I could feel my jaw muscles tighten and taste my own bile. We were sitting ducks.

The Marine LT. and the Duster LT. called all the shots. Sergeant Chester Sines, our section chief and the extra man on the crew, repeatedly advised both officers of proper ambush deployment. I begged Towns and Conley not to move, but to start shooting. The two LTs issued orders that they were moving forward. They would not chance shooting any Marines that might have taken cover in the brush. Nothing was moving or shooting from the ambushed convoy or from the NVA. It should have been obvious that an NVA unit that could shoot at any convoy with such firepower did not have time to leave the area. They ordered us to hold our positions and await instructions. It was our standard operating procedure, when in doubt, shoot the 40's a few hundred yards out pass the ambush and then assess the situation before committing and moving. We knew the reputations of both LTs, and that they would charge the unseen NVA. This ambush was too big to be so quiet, and we were very concerned. The NVA let them drive into point- blank range of their RPGs. It was over for the Tank and Duster in less than a minute. The NVA were so brazen, they just stood in full view and fired repeatedly. We looked on in horror. We started shooting immediately and drove to the top of this little knoll on the south side of the rode. On top of the knoll, we could see the ambush area and most of the ambushed convoy. We could see what needed to be done to retrieve the men from the ambushed convoy. All we needed was some immediate fire support and infantry.

The NVA should not have been allowed to dig in and take ground. We desperately needed that additional firepower. Sam Lewis handed me the little green book of secret

codes from around his neck. As I adjusted the radio frequencies, Chester Sines made the first calls for choppers and air support. We quickly listed all the grid coordinates of all the NVA positions we could see. Our sister Dusters, firing over our head from Carroll, were radioed individually. Their lines of fire adjusted to sweep NVA positions effectively. We then gave the same coordinates to FDC at Carroll. Our orders from Captain Easter at Carroll were vague and non-committal. Our crew to this day cannot understand "C" Battery's thinking, and that no other Dusters were to be sent to help. I remember how infuriated we became at Easter. It was a hard pill to swallow; knowing and feeling you were left to die. Our crew all agreed that we were not going to leave the ambush site without saving the other Duster crew. We thought, if we could fight long enough, Easter would have to send help or body bags. We were not prepared for the number of NVA we had to fight. They seemed to be coming out of the cracks in the earth. To this day I am amazed how easy it was shooting them. It was a slaughter, but they did not give an inch. In all the other firefights I had been in, the NVA would try to hide and shoot. This fight was completely different; the NVA exposed himself continually. Any weapon we fired was effective in killing or wounding the NVA. There were so many NVA that one to three 40mm rounds fired would injure and kill many. We would no sooner shoot at one group and another group popped up. As we went from group to group, the first groups we shot could be seen dragging their wounded into the cover of nearby brush by a short piece of rope tied to their leg. By the time we traversed back, most of the bodies had disappeared from sight. The NVA did not stop coming and we did not stop killing them. The crew was in disbelief when Easter did not send ammo and help. Our Duster had killed or wounded all the NVA we could see on each side of the ambushed convoy.

There had to be over five hundred NVA killed or wounded, just in the area north of the convoy. One of our crew once said that we had killed forty-nine on the knoll alone. I never counted, but only dead NVA were left on that hill, bodies strewn everywhere. To avoid being hit by NVA artillery, we did a sporadic stop and go all over the knoll. It was impossible, as we dodged artillery, not to run over some of the NVA bodies. On the east side of the creek, there was a small group of NVA we could not shoot without hitting the convoy. There was this half-hour or more pause in the battle. Everyone seemed to be regrouping. We were almost out of ammo and hoped for relief. The NVA feverishly picked up their dead and wounded and disappeared with them back into the brush. They had to know we were low on ammo but did not risk the test under fire. We just stared at each other and waited. As the NVA ran out from their cover, we would try to shoot them with our M16's. If we had the ammo we requested, this would have been the only time we could evacuate the men trapped in the ambush. As history was written, the wait for ammo was long and we did not retreat.

When Easter finally allowed the first group of volunteers to try to bring us ammo, it was too late. The NVA could be seen regrouping and very slowly advancing. We had stopped shooting the 40mm, because we were down to only a few clips of ammo. We shot our M16s and took turns shooting the M60. I am not sure how I was selected to run down the hill to "fetch" the first ammo truck. Some say I volunteered. I'm not really sure and it really does not matter. I had filled my pockets with grenades before descending down the hill. As I ran, my pants were falling off from the weight of the grenades.

he and John Huelsenbeck would be on the next ammo truck and to meet them on the road. Finally, the call came from Carroll saying ammo and reinforcements were coming. The NVA had moved really close to the knoll. We just could not stop them; we now had no 40mm ammo. We were saving the balance of our personal ammo for a face- to- face confrontation. Again I ran down that hill as fast as I could. We did not want this ammo truck to run into the advancing NVA. My forward momentum caused me to stumble. As I ran and stumbled down the hill an NVA soldier jumped me from the back right. I was actually stumbling and trying not to fall on my face when he attacked. His knife hit my M16 and my left wrist. I let go of my rifle and grabbed his arm and we both went falling and rolling down the hill, head over heels. I never let go of his arm or the hand holding the knife. The NVA soldier was either out of ammo or trying to take me as a prisoner. At reunions, it always comes up in conversation. I acknowledge that part of the battle, but try quickly to move the story to helping get the second ammo truck. It was just another day in the Nam.

Some of the Duster men I have met never saw or killed the enemy, so I guess they are a little curious. They don't realize you don't have to bleed to be hurt. To this day I blame Easter for making that part of the war much too intimate and personal. I met the ammo truck and directed it back to the top of the knoll. Back on top of the knoll, with our new supply of ammo we started to shoot back at the advancing NVA. As we shot, the supply crew refilled the Duster with 40mm ammo. Sam Lewis yelled duck. An NVA recoilless rifle shell hit the ground next to our Duster, I thought the skin was burnt off my body. (The story of the battle is in the attached articles). When we got back to Carroll, the first thing we did was, insist that Sam and David get medical help. We then tried to get more Dusters and Quad-50 machineguns to go back down to the ambush. Sines advised us that we were ordered to stop. A reactionary force had arrived from Dong Ha. They kept insisting I get medivaced, and we insisted on seeing Easter. I was not trying to be a martyr or a hero and I knew I was wounded. My right eye, left armpit, forearms and right upperarm were all covered with field dressings. The back of my flak jacket was hanging off, and my clothes looked like shredded wheat covered in blood. Easter met us outside the command bunker. I will never forgive him for telling us how to report what we did and saw. He instructed us not to upset everyone and to say that, basically, we encountered a small group of NVA and that our guns jammed and blew up. The jamming and blowing up of our guns would be the only recognition we would ever get and the only thing people ever remembered.

We were accused of abandoning our comrades and running back to camp during a firefight. In the bunker we were interrogated as if we did something wrong. We sat with our heads bowed in disbelief, answering the tribunal the way we thought Easter wanted us to. I asked to be sent to the medivac station. In Dong Ha at "D" Med, I would see the crew from the Johnnie Towns, Duster. It was hectic and noisy; Johnnie just stood there with powder burns down his left side. He was trying to get the best aide he could for his injured crew. I assured him everything was okay. They quickly separated us. I was sent to Da Nang for some body repairs before being allowed to return to Camp Carroll. I never saw Johnnie Towns again. Weeks later Easter would also accuse me of pulling the fire extinguisher in the turret prematurely during the battle. How could I be so stupid to think the Duster was on fire, when it was only the 40's that blew up and were burning? I would

soon let everybody at the camp know my feelings about the Captain and that New LT. They could give us our missions, but we were not going to let them kill us without them knowing how we felt. Our crew now had the reputation of being "Rebels" and troublemakers. We really didn't give a shit what they thought. About two months later, I would be called to an awards formation. Capt. Tedesco would pin on my Purple Heart. After the ceremony one of the other officers asked for the medal back, claiming they did not have enough for the next group. I was allowed to keep the certificate. All the soldiers getting awards knew each other, and I was the only person singled out. It was obvious; someone was getting even. Twenty years later, in 1988, I would receive the actual Purple Heart Medal. I was thankful that the Marines had sent my Father a letter attesting my wounds and that I had received a Purple Heart. It was instrumental in finally getting, the Purple Heart. The Army never sent anything.

Camp J.J.Carroll was hit every day for the next twenty-eight days by NVA artillery. We got a new Duster called "Float 4"

February 5, Rockpile hit by twenty NVA rockets.

February 8, Our crew is called to the CP (Command Post) for another debriefing of the January 24th battle. An officer I did not know but had seen around camp did all the talking. To our surprise the officer reports how courageous we all fought and how proud, he is of the men in Charlie Battery. The officer goes into some detail on the strength of the enemy we fought and some battle statistics. He further explains how important our role is in this war and he is personally going to see all of us get proper recognition. It was a good meeting. Later that night I write my Dad another letter marked "Personal"

Dear Dad,

How are you? Fine I hope. I am also fine. I know you are probably wondering how I got wounded again. This isn't the first time things like this happen around here and won't be the last. Well here goes. January 24th the convoy got hit going from Dong Ha to Camp Carroll. It was almost here when it got hit. Our track and another was called to go help pull it out. We pulled almost to the ambush. The other track and a tank went right into the ambush. Before we knew it the tank and track got hit with RPG's (they blow tanks apart). Dad, we tried to get them out. We couldn't get to them. We pulled on top of this small hill overlooking the ambush. They started hitting us with everything they had, rifles, RPG's, mortars and recoilless rifle cannons. We finally got hit by one of the cannons. The blast caused both our Twin 40mm cannons to explode. As they say "that's all she wrote". At our last briefing we were told at the end of that battle 400 hundred of the enemy were killed. Half of the Marine unit we were trying to help were wounded or wiped out. Three tracks, a tank and many trucks were destroyed and some Army personnel "us" killed and wounded. Since then we're running the roads even more, becoming regular road-runners. We get hit every day at Camp Carroll. Well that's about all Dad. Don't worry I know the ropes of the game. Since I have been here life has a new look for me. I'm a real lucky guy to have parents like you and Mom. The saying that fits this place goes like this; "To really live, you must nearly die". Thanks Dad for everything you've done for me.

Love you,

Your son

XXXX

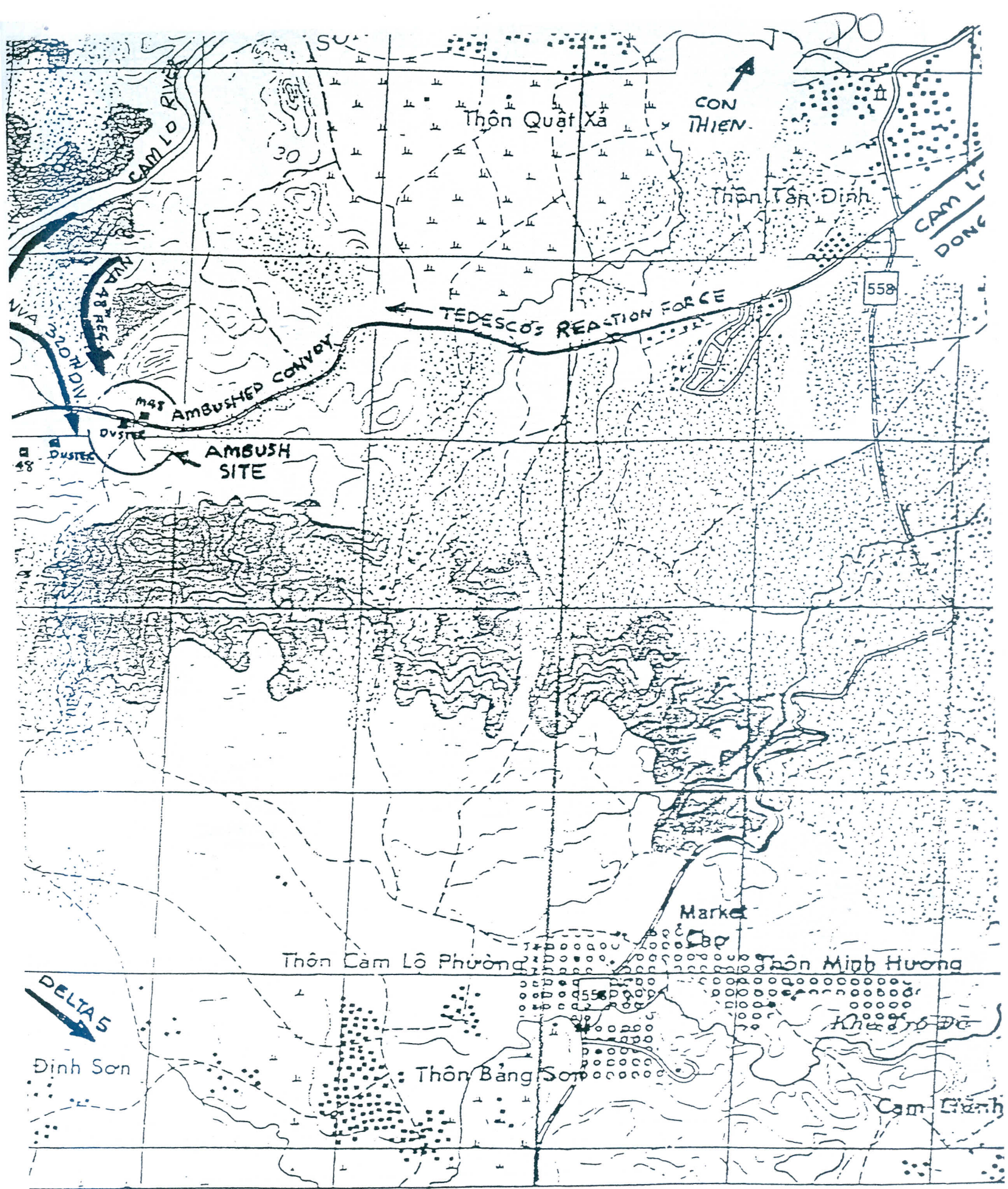
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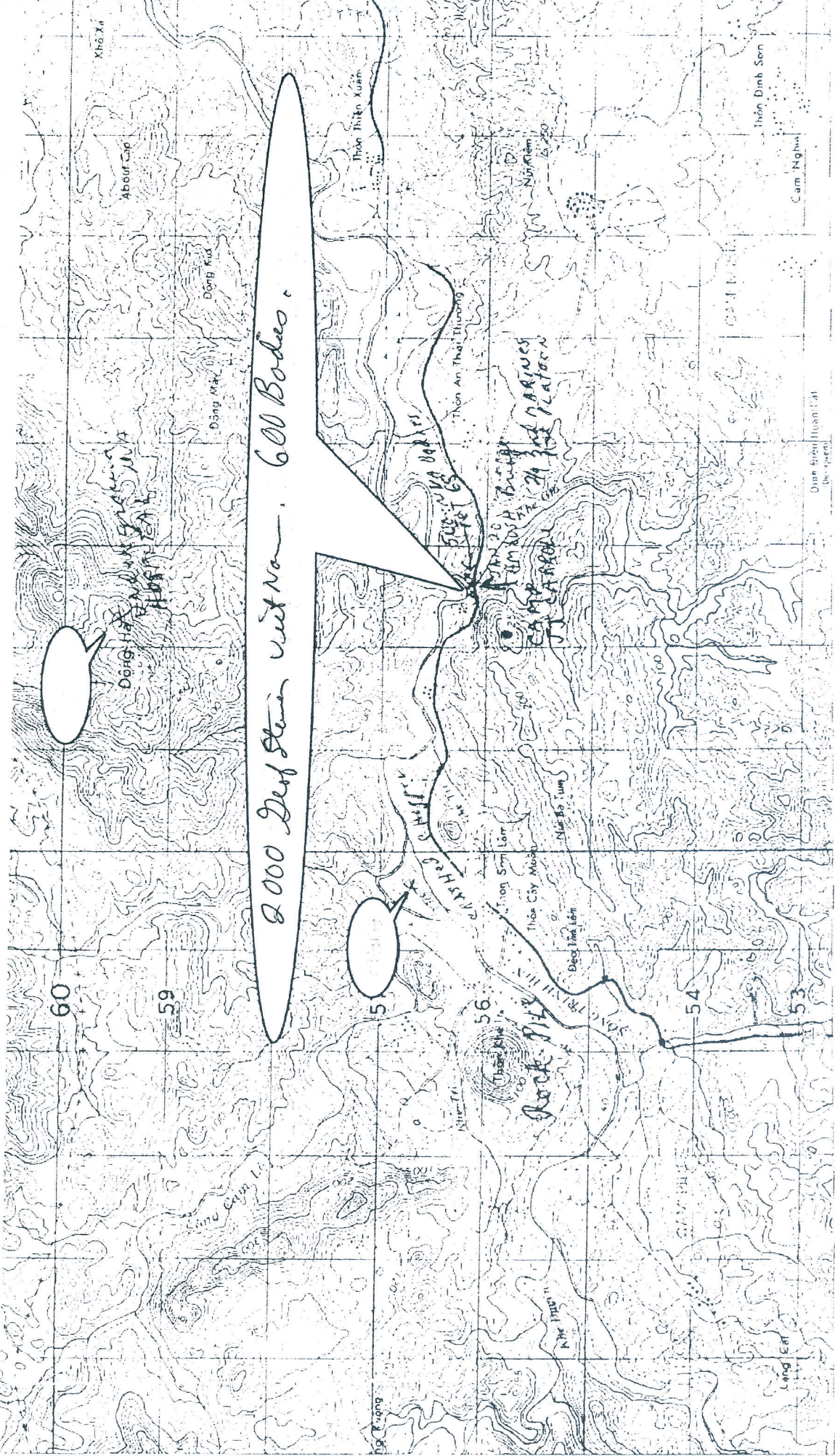
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Page 1 of 1

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Scale 1:50,000

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