

Operation Lancaster II

Battle for Mike's Hill

01-27-1968

Prelude - 01-24-68 thru Mop Up - 01-30-68

Named for Mike Company

3rd Bn. 4th Marines

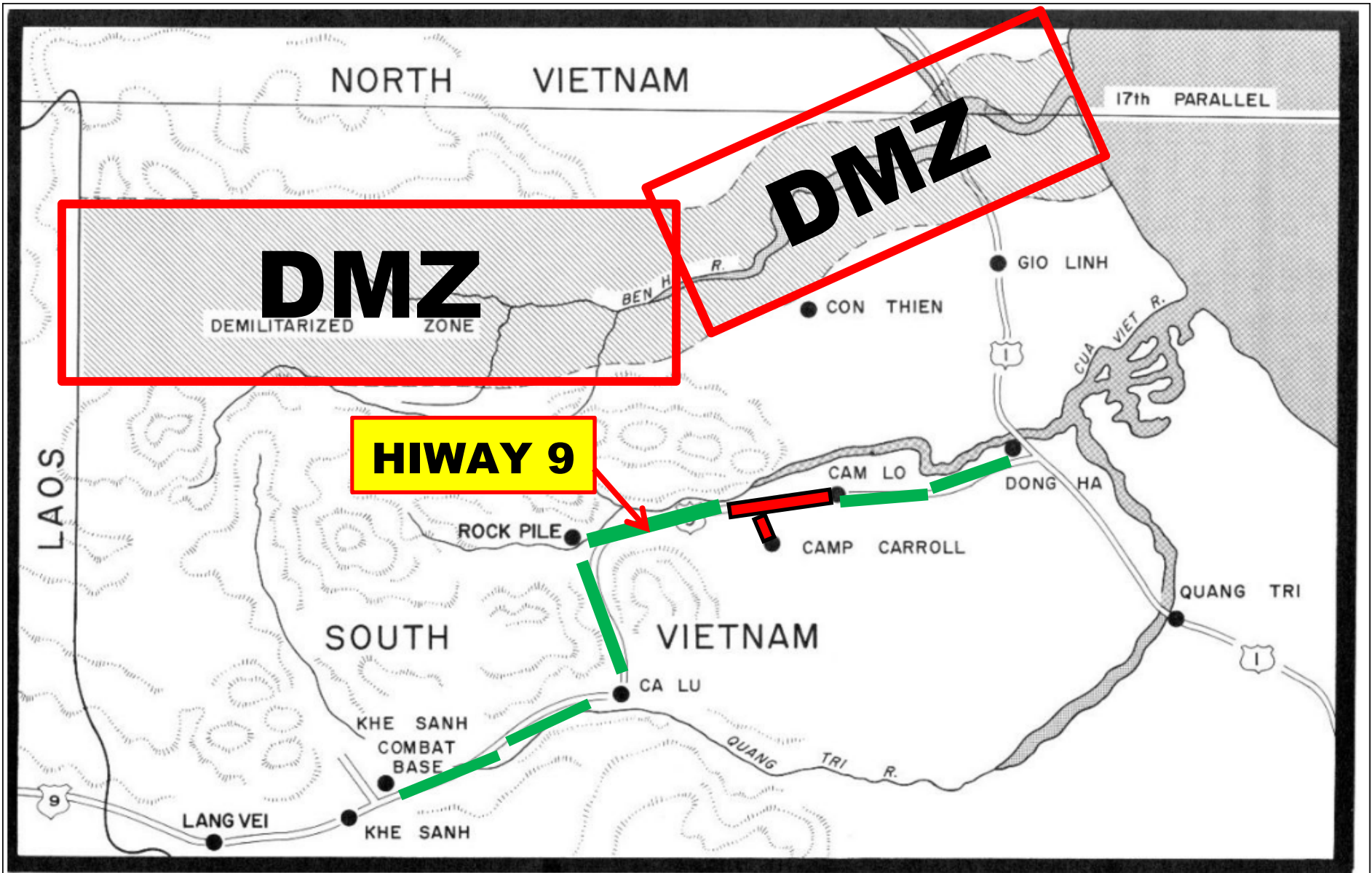
The Thundering Third

Credits & Links to the details of the battle

<https://thundering-third.org/4members/LarryWilliams/LWilliams.html>

<https://thundering-third.org/4members/RGHarriman/RGHarriman.html>

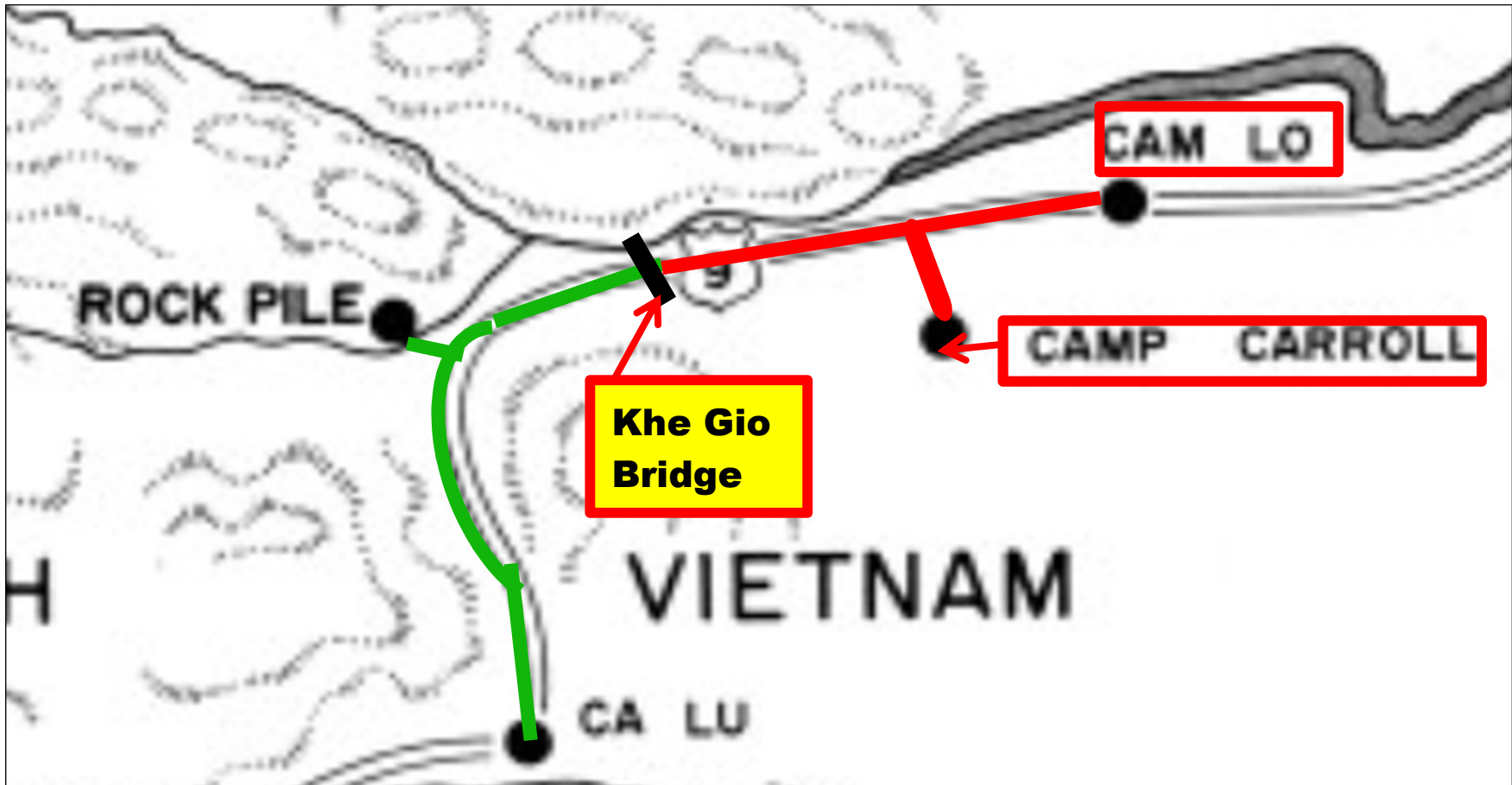
[US Forces That Participated](#)



During the 1960's, as the Vietnam War began to increase in intensity, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) & US Special Forces began to build a chain of bases south of the DMZ to interdict the flow of men and materiel from North Vietnam.

3rd Battalion 4th Marines Mission

Provide security for & keep Route 9 open from **Khe Gio Bridge** to **Camp Carroll** to **Cam Lo**
(approx. 5 1/2 miles)



NVA 64th Regiments Mission

Control any portion of Hiway 9 & prevent US forces from access to any of their combat bases supplied via Hiway 9.

Khe Gio (aka Dau Mau) Bridge - 1968



Sideview in 1968



Today this bridge is gone, replaced by a small modern design

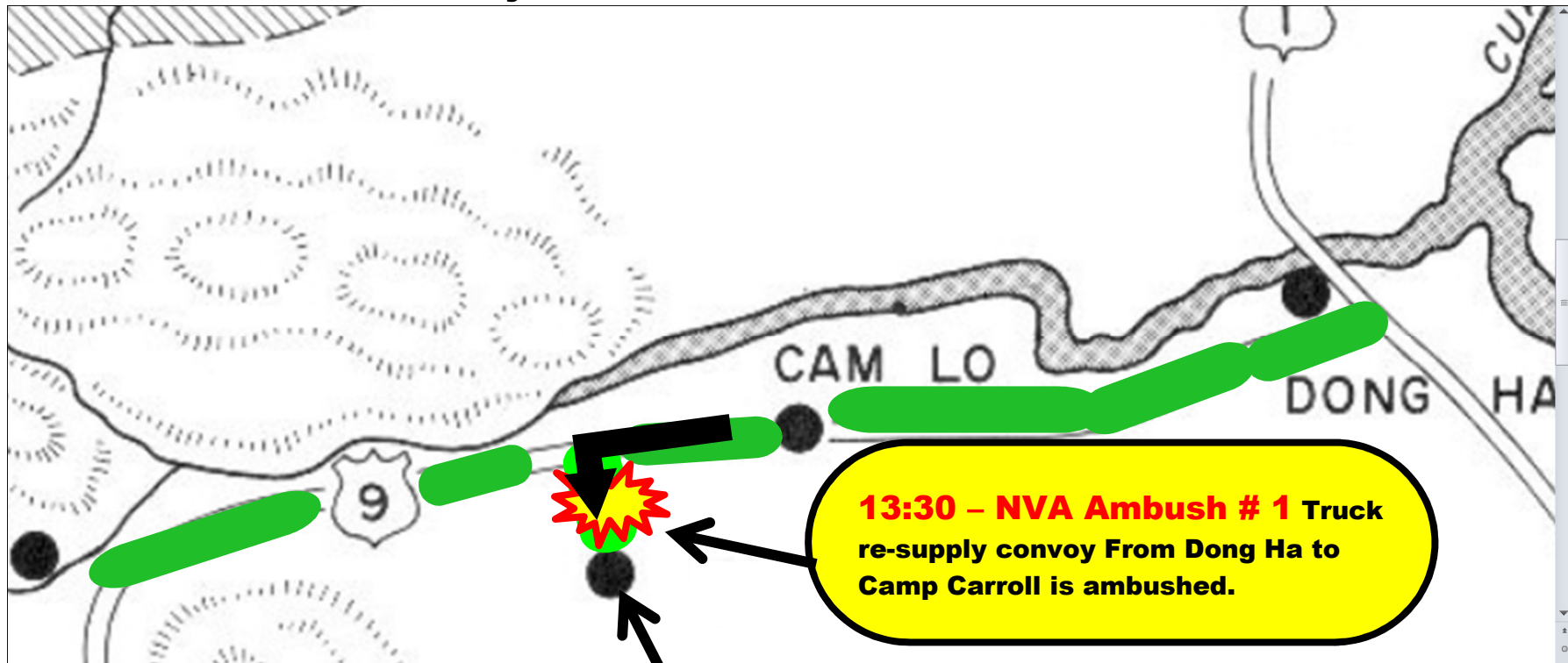
First Blood Is Drawn

24 January, 1968

Around 10:30 hours, elements of the elite 320th NVA Division, the 64th Regiment, hastily made last-minute camouflage adjustments and checked their fields of fire. The first trap in the NVA's attempt to isolate Camp Carroll and sever the main supply route was about to snap shut.

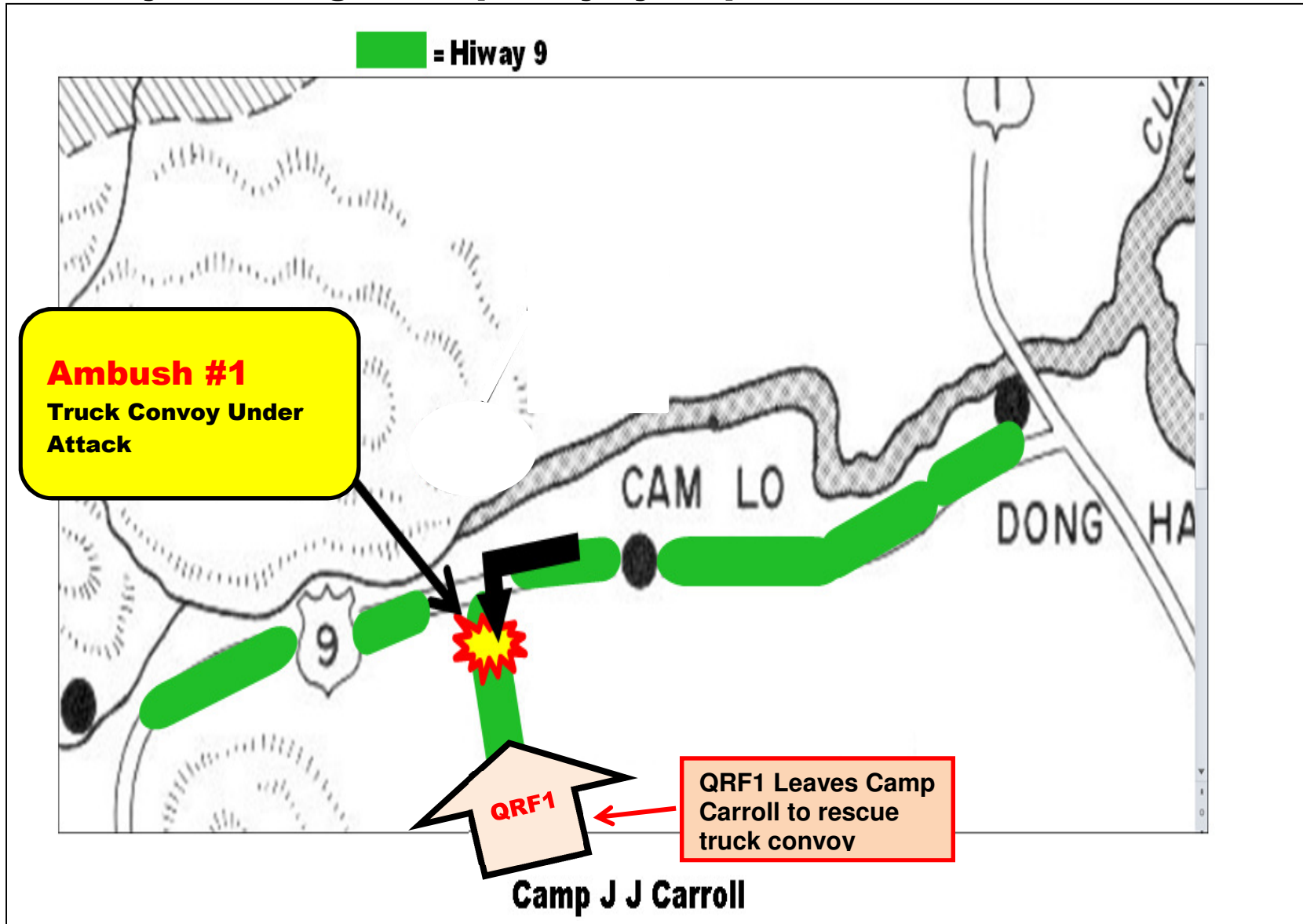
- **13:30 Hours** - **NVA Ambush #1** - All hell breaks loose. **Convoy is caught by surprise**

 = Hiway 9



Camp J J Carroll

- **Convoy was caught completely by surprise.**



Quick Reaction Force 1 (QRF1)

One platoon of Marines from Hotel 2/9

2, USMC - M48 Patton Tanks



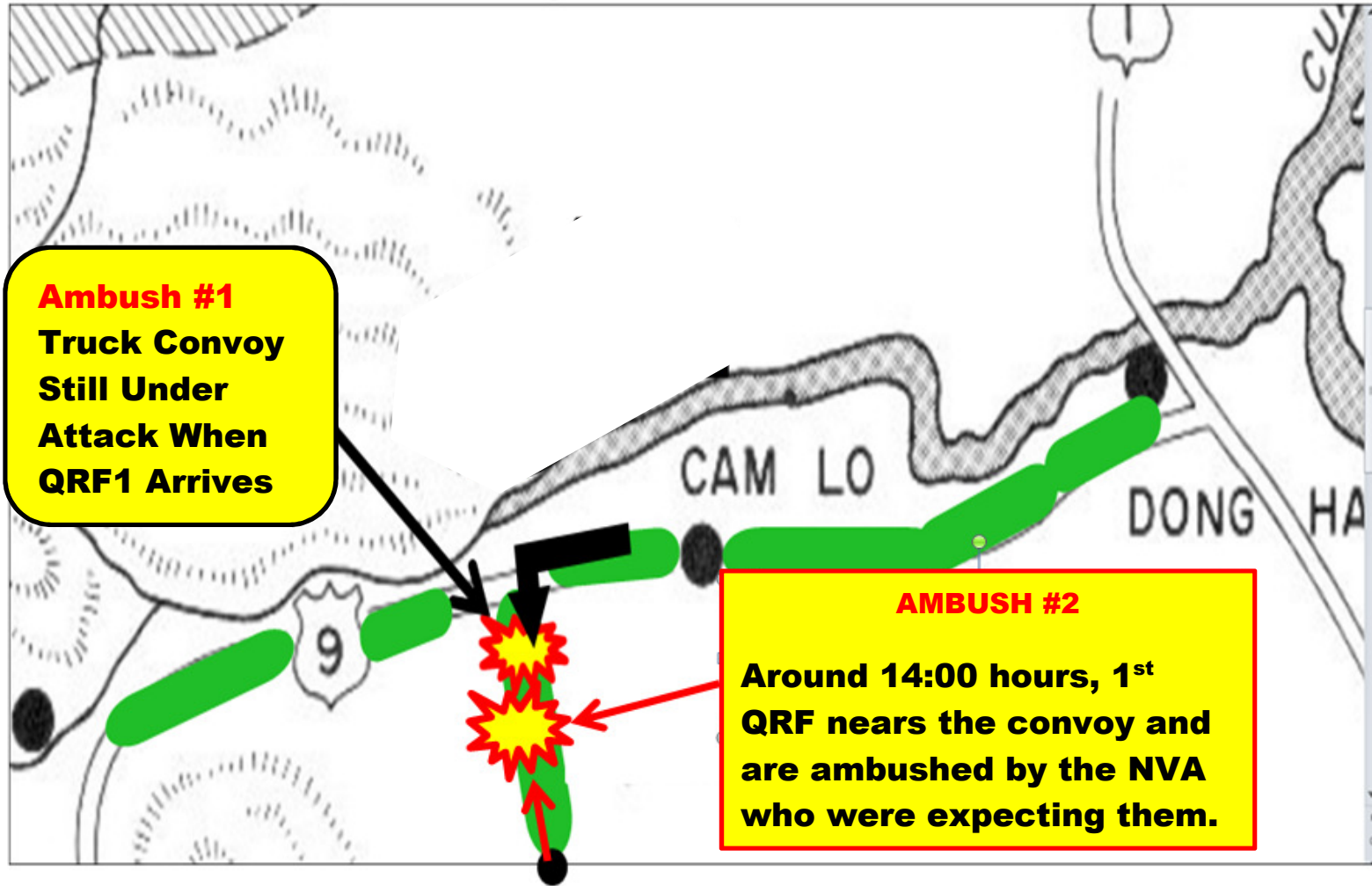
One, M67 Flamethrower Tank



2, M42 Dusters – Used for road security



 = Hiway 9



Ambush #1
Truck Convoy
Still Under
Attack When
QRF1 Arrives

AMBUSH #2
Around 14:00 hours, 1st
QRF nears the convoy and
are ambushed by the NVA
who were expecting them.

Camp J J Carroll

- **Also around 14:00 Hours - 2nd QRF was sent -** A second relief force, accompanied by two UH-1E helicopter gunships was sent from Dong Ha.



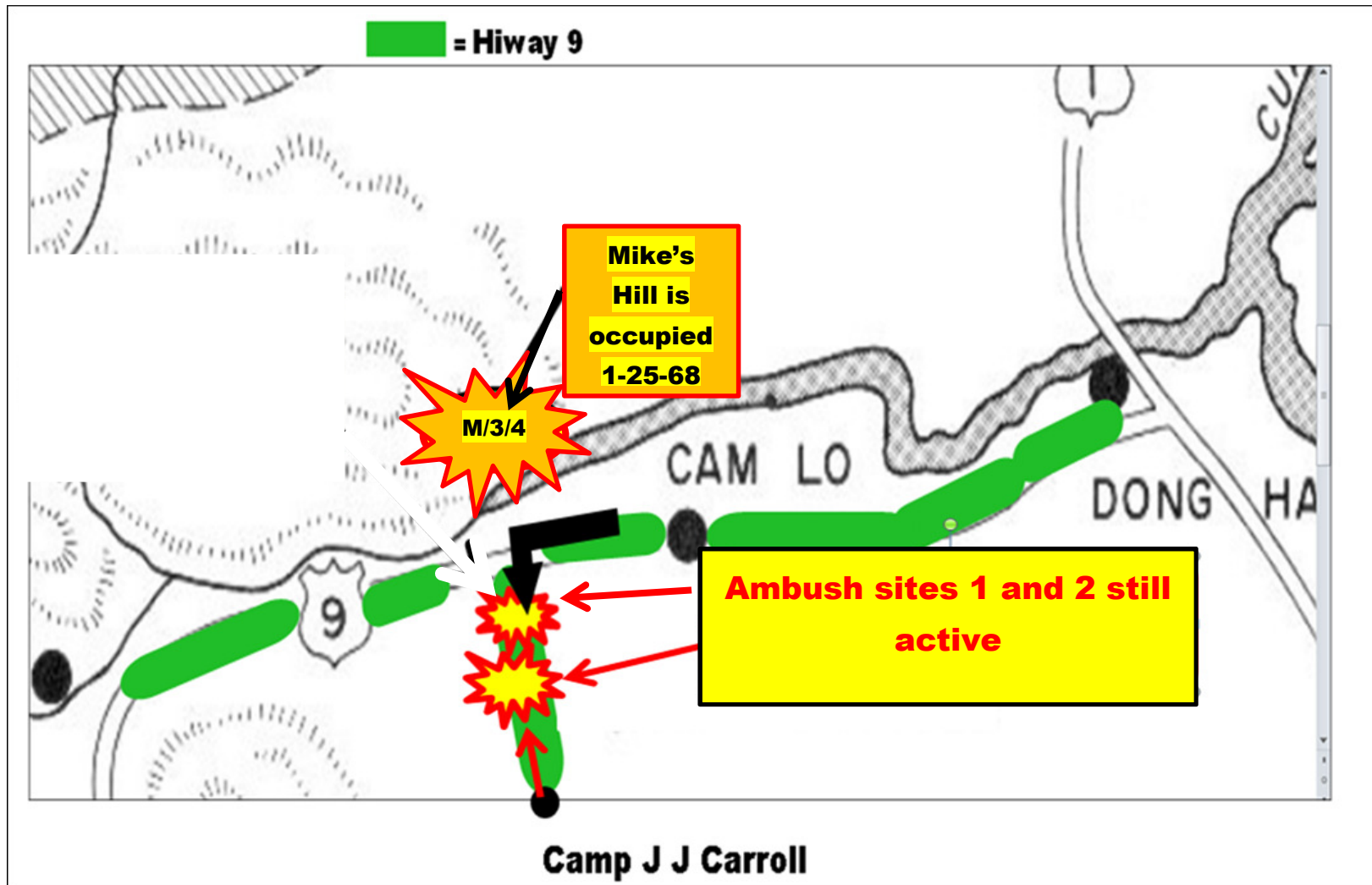
The two Marine QRF's with the aid of the two gun ships, engaged the NVA in about a five hour battle.



19:00 Hours – Same day 3rd Marine Division commander Maj. Gen. Rathvon M. Tompkins was concerned about the NVA's ability to disrupt the use of Hiway 9 at will so he called up Mike/3/4..

25 January, 1968 – Vacant Hill occupied by Mike/3/4

- **06:30 Hours-** Mike Company 3/4 left its night defensive position and one of its platoons established a defensive position on a hill overlooking Route 9 (named "Mike's Hill") (16.796°N 106.941°E) while the rest of the Company at the ambush site were patrolling and recovering the bodies of 4 dead Marines.



26 January, 1968

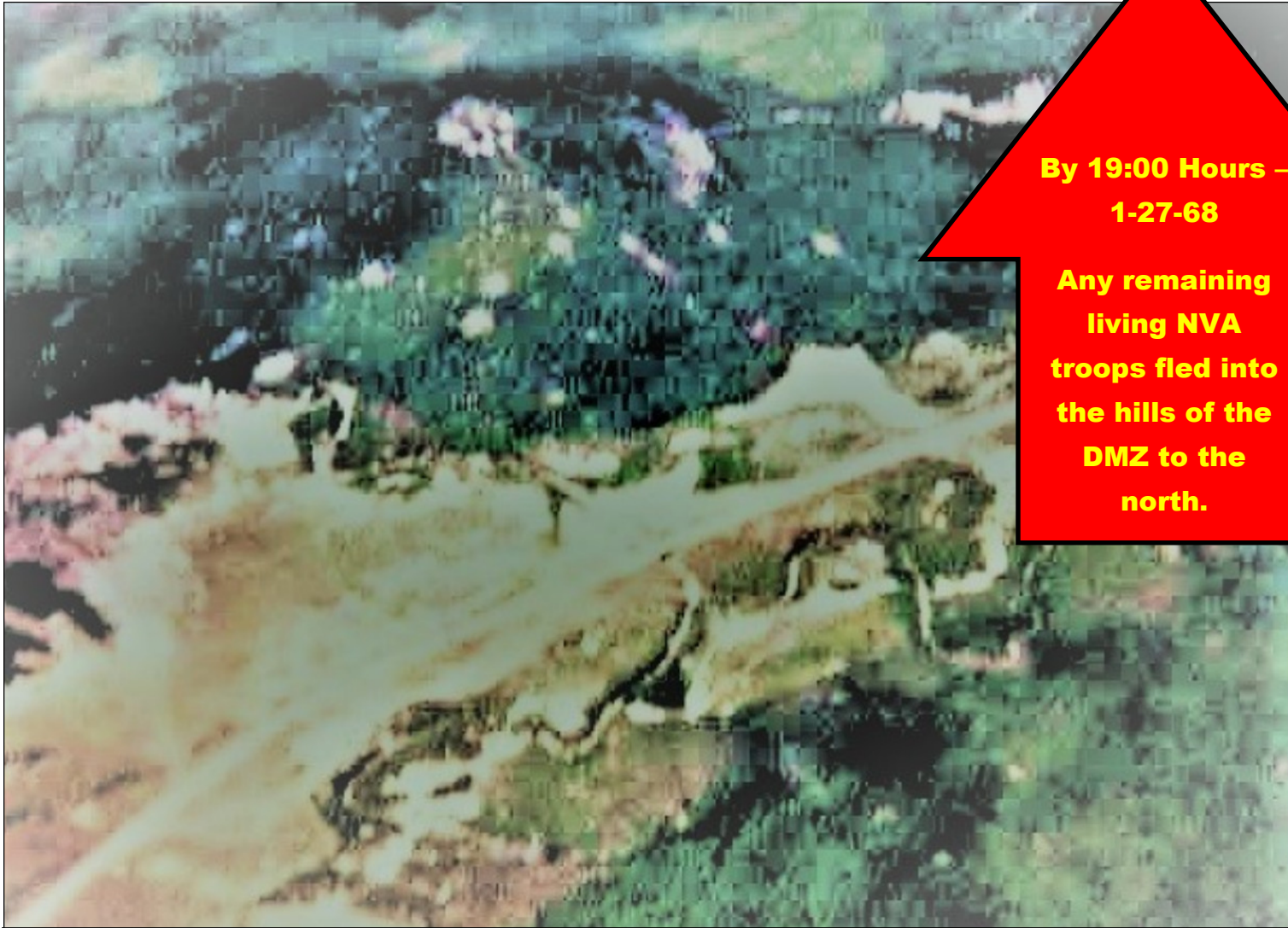
- **By 05:00 Hours**, The 3/4 Marines discovered that during the night the NVA had destroyed the bridge over the Cam Lo River just east of their night defensive position. I do not know if this is the Khe Gio bridge mentioned earlier.

27 January, 1968

- **By 03:00 Hours**, the enemy had probed all sides of Mike's Hill looking for weaknesses.



- **At about 05:00 Hours** any Marines on Mike's Hill that were asleep were abruptly awakened by gunfire. Mike company was under a furious attack. 3/4 has been fighting in Viet Nam since April of 1965 so combat was not new to them but this time they were being attacked by a reinforced NVA battalion of about 600 to 700 men and were outnumbered about 4 or 5 to 1. The NVA intensified their attack on Mike Company's western and northern flanks. The NVA had managed to use the nearly dry creek bed that ran from the Cam Lo river to the base of Mike's Hill and eventually to the bridge at Highway 9 to cover their advance to the base of Mike's Hill. The NVA knew they had to get in real close to the Marines on Mike's Hill, this would prevent the Marines from using their Air and Artillery assets. The NVA attacked up three slopes of the hill with mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and automatic weapons covering their advance. Mike Company responded with its full final protective fire maneuvers. The violent assault quickly evolved into a desperate free-for-all with warriors grappling in hand-to-hand combat
- **Sunrise** –Two Marines, Jim Sroka & Alex Caro, knew that Mike 3/4 was running out of ammo, because they had been fighting all night and something had to be done quickly. Since it was starting to get light out and were now able to better assess the battle field, they took charge.
More about them in a minute
- **By 1900 hours** the enemy, had all either been killed, captured, or fled into the hills.



**By 19:00 Hours –
1-27-68**

**Any remaining
living NVA
troops fled into
the hills of the
DMZ to the
north.**

- **After battle aerial photo of MIKE's Hill & Hiway 9.
Notice all the craters on Mike's Hill from mortars & artillery**

The battle for Mike's Hill was now essentially over

28 January, 1968 - 3/4 Marines continued to patrol Route 9 finding a tunnel complex containing NVA dead.

29 January, 1968 - Hotel 2/9 Marines returned to the area to provide security for engineers to repair the damaged bridge. They met little opposition and located 30 dead NVA in the area.

To summarize, In a fierce daylong fight for Mike's Hill, the NVA troops were driven off by a smaller but better trained and more fierce force of U. S. Marines, and Route 9 was open once more to traffic

Mike's Hill battle Started with

the convoy ambush on 01-24-1968

and Mopping Up Ended on 01-30-1968

Final numbers from the battle:

- 131 NVA soldiers killed
- Conflicting numbers of prisoners were taken.
- Three 57mm recoilless rifles were destroyed.
- Extensive ammunition and equipment were captured including:
 - Two, 60mm mortars,
 - One NVA radio,
 - A tripod and barrel for a .50 cal. machine gun,
 - Thirty-five AK-47s,
 - Three RPGs, and
 - Eight bolt-action rifles

Marines of 3/4 paid a heavy price to open up/secure the vital Hiway 9 supply route

- **Twenty-one brave young Marines were killed in the action.**
- **Sixty-two more were wounded.**

Recognition For Acts of Bravery and Heroics

Here are some of the details of these heroics



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
HEADQUARTERS, FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC
FPO, SAN FRANCISCO 96610

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the BRONZE STAR MEDAL to

LANCE CORPORAL JAMES S. SROKA

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For heroic achievement in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam while serving as a Grenadier with Company M, Third Battalion, Fourth Marines, Third Marine Division. During the early morning hours of 27 January 1968, during Operation Lancaster II, Company M was occupying a defensive position north of Camp J. J. Carroll when the Marines were suddenly assaulted by a large North Vietnamese Army force. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, Lance Corporal SROKA unhesitatingly exposed himself to the enemy fire and, moving to an advantageous firing position, began delivering a heavy volume of M-79 Grenade Launcher fire upon the enemy force. Expending all his grenades, he quickly obtained an M-16 rifle and directed accurate rifle fire upon the assaulting force. Disregarding his own safety, he moved about the fire-swept terrain throughout the day from one position to another, distributing ammunition and encouraging the Marines. His bold initiative and resolute determination inspired all who observed him and were instrumental in his unit accounting for 131 North Vietnamese Army soldiers confirmed killed and eight captured. Lance Corporal SROKA's courage, aggressive fighting spirit and steadfast devotion to duty in the face of great personal danger were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service."

Lance Corporal SROKA is authorized to wear the Combat "V".

FOR THE PRESIDENT,

V. H. KRULAK
LIEUTENANT GENERAL, U. S. MARINE CORPS
COMMANDING GENERAL, FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC

Additional details from the Camp LeJeune Globe newspaper

Two Marines, presently members of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, who served and fought in the same squad in Vietnam, were honored for their gallantry in the same firefight at awards ceremonies held here today.

The two Marines were in the same squad in Mike Company, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, 3d Marine Division in Vietnam. On January 27, 1968, Mike Company was participating in Operation Lancaster II in the vicinity of Camp J.J. Carroll, Vietnam.

During the night of January 26, the company had established a temporary defensive position on a small hill near the camp. At dawn on January 27, a reinforced North Vietnamese battalion launched a furious assault on the Marine Company.

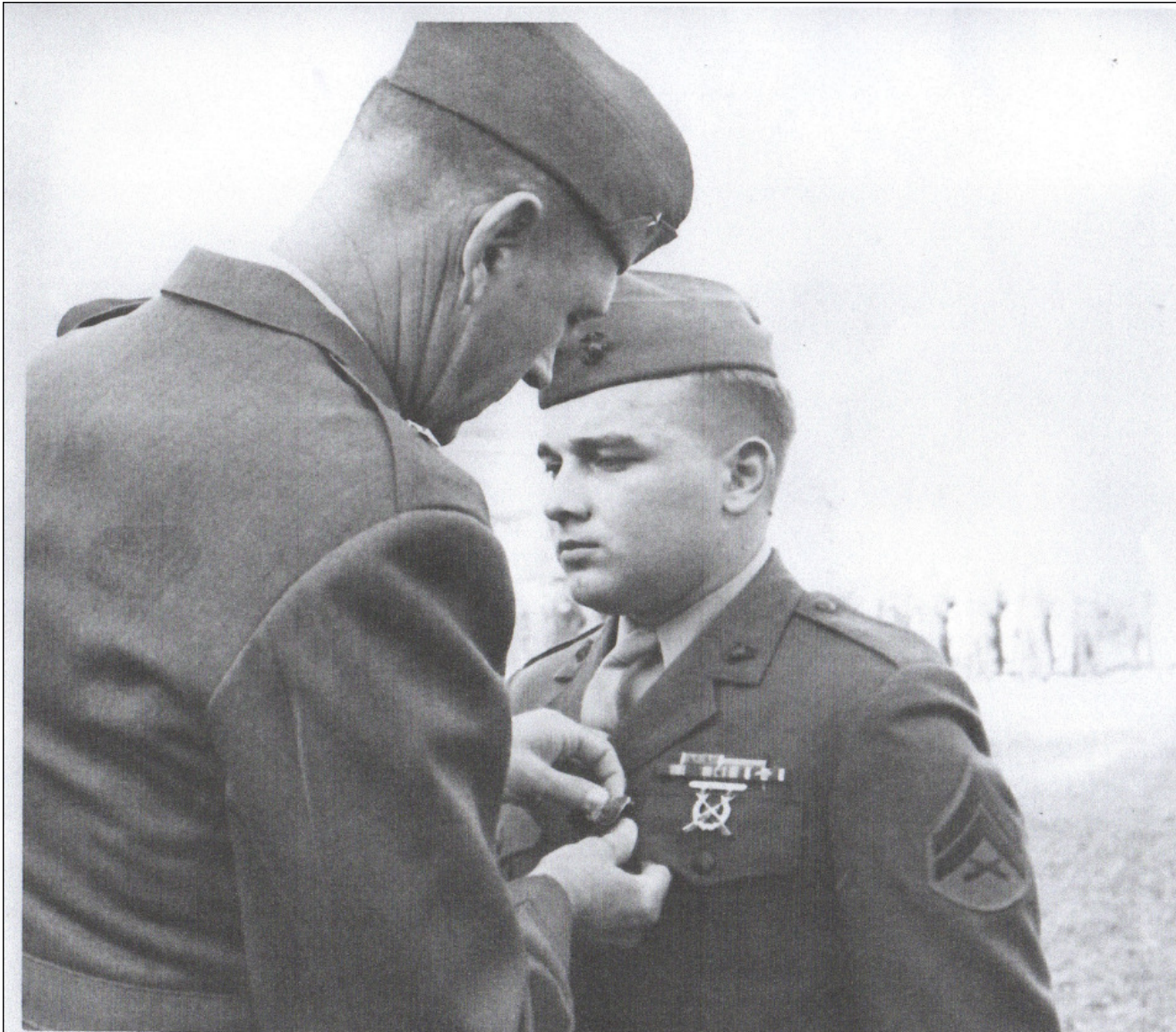
The brunt of the enemy attack was directed at the positions that were being held by Caro and Sroka's squad. During the initial attack, the Marines suffered heavy casualties.

When LCpl Caro made his first trip down the hill to recover the machine-gun Cpl. Sroka, who was a grenadier, moved through the fire swept open area and took up a position about 25 yards behind LCpl Caro. Cpl. Sroka blanketed the assaulting enemy troops with M-79 rounds until his ammunition was spent.

He ran from his position to recover an M-16 rifle that was lying in the open, then moved back to his position and delivered covering fire against the enemy troops for LCpl. Caro.

When the enemy troops stopped their attack on the Marine Company there were 27 North Vietnamese soldiers in front of the squad's position. Most of them were lying at the bottom of the hill in front of the position that Cpl. Sroka and LCpl. Caro were defending.

Although L/Cpl Alex Caro also did something heroic and saved Marines lives and deserves to be honored for his heroics; my presentation is only about Jim Sroka. I have however, enclosed the entire article from the Camp LeJeune Globe newspaper about both Jim Sroka and Alex Caro..



BGen Joseph C. Fegan (L), Assistant Division Commander, Second Marine Division, presented the Bronze Star to Cpl James S. Sroka at Camp Lejeune, N. C.

General Fegan awards Bronze Star to Cpl. Jim Sroka

In my opinion, the fact that Jim personally killed many of the enemy, or how many he killed is not important, what is important is by doing what he did, he saved American Marines lives. That's what we should focus on.

Between January 27, 1968 & June 15, 1968 (4 ½ months), Jim managed to earn a Bronze Star and 3 Purple Hearts suffering injuries each time ranging from a concussion to shrapnel wounds to his body and extremities and a gun shot wound to his right arm.



Mike's Hill
Jan. 27, 1968



Mike's Hill
Jan. 27, 1968



Khe Sanh area
+/- Feb. 15, 1968



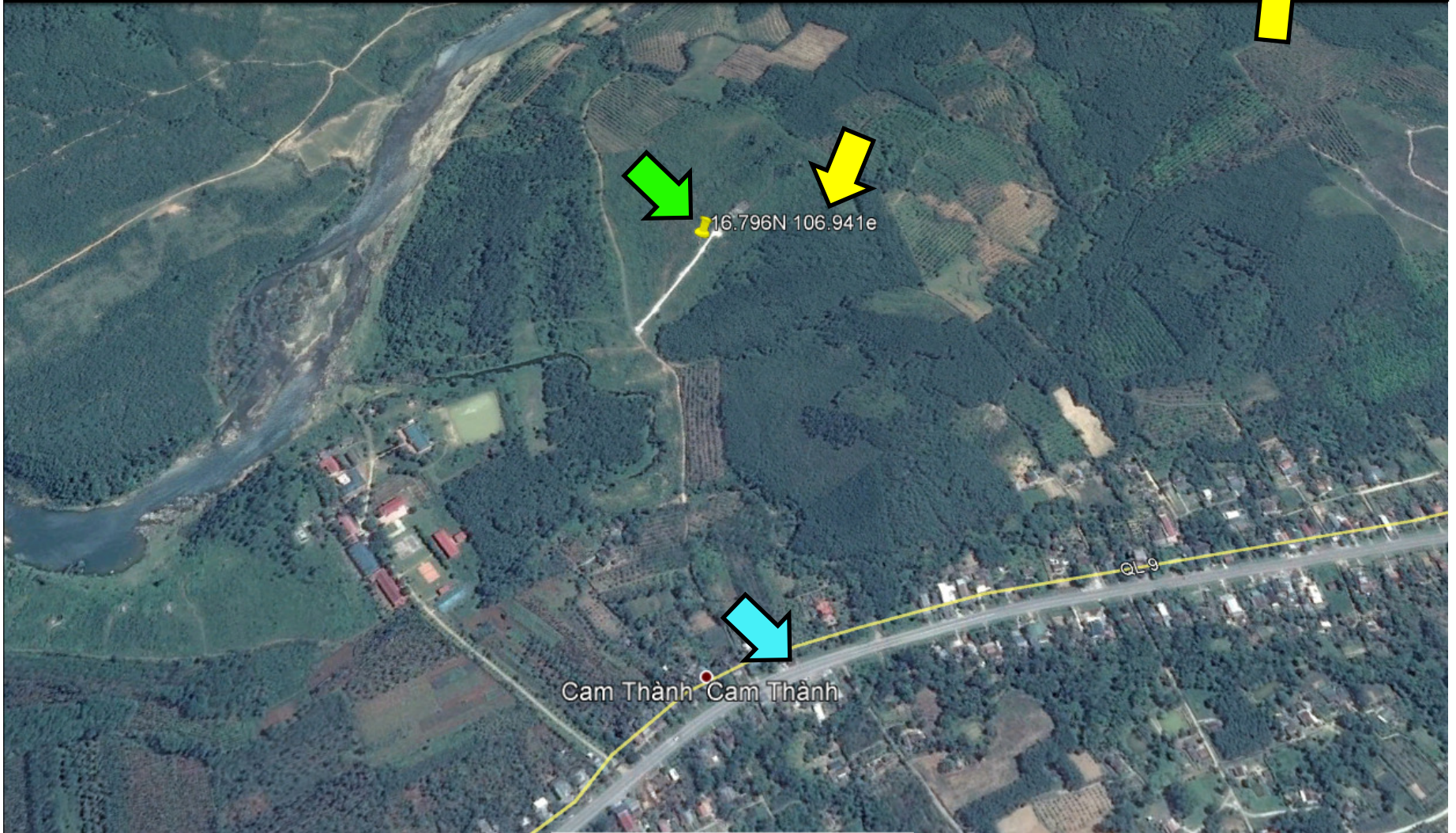
Phue Bai area
June 15, 1968

Well Done Marine

Real-Time Photos captured
via satellite using
Google Earth 7.3

Mike's Hill as of 5-12-19 Showing
Hiway 9 GPS Marker & GPS Coordinates

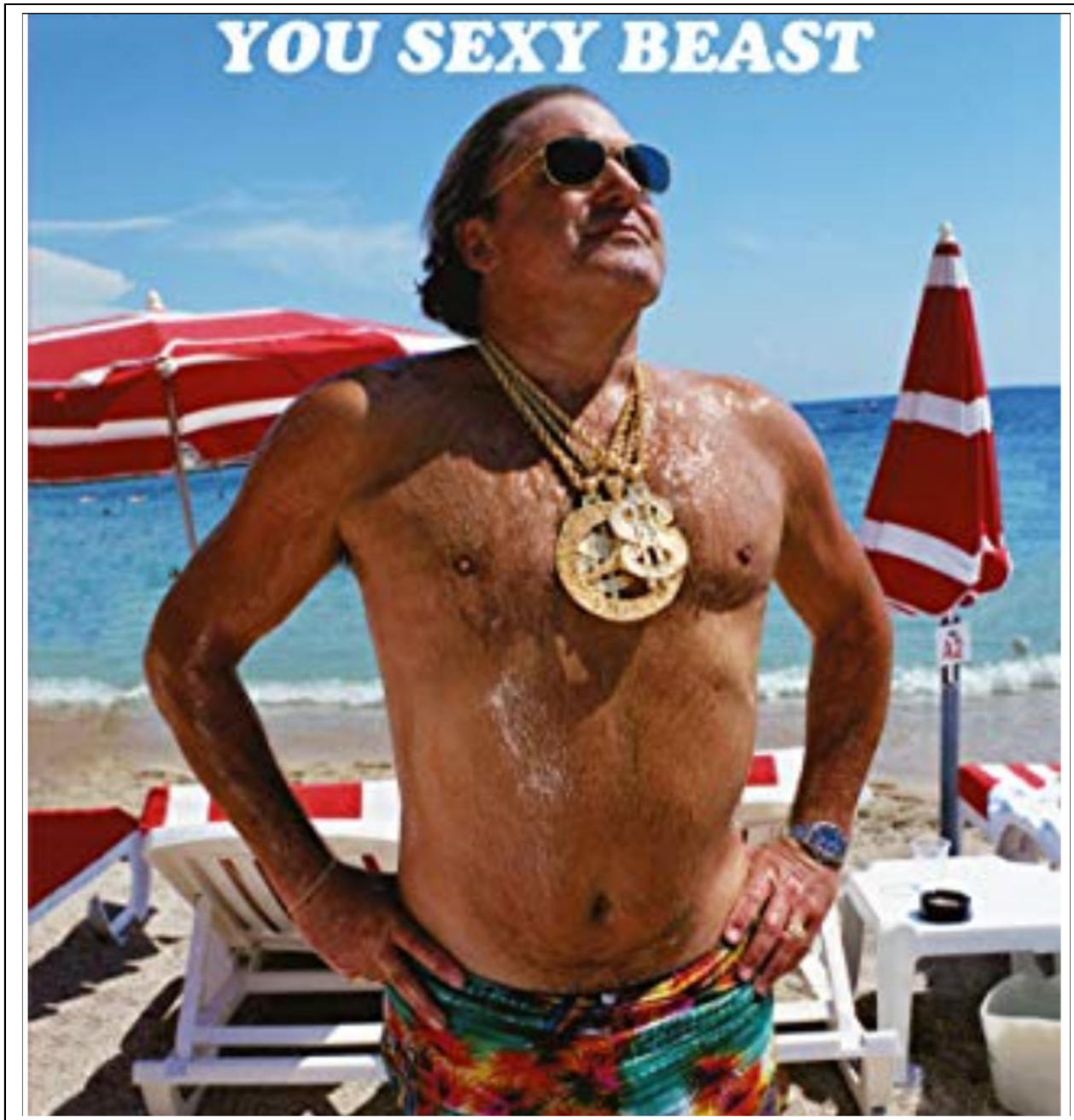
Google Earth 7.3
GPS Coordinates used
16.796N 106.941E



Jim - 1968



Jim Today !!



Following is the article about Marines Sroka & Caro

TWO AWARDED MEDALS FOR SINGLE ACTION

(From the Camp Lejeune Globe, Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, N.C.)

Two Marines, presently members of the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, who served and fought in the same squad in Vietnam, were honored for their gallantry in the same firefight at awards ceremonies held here today.

The Silver Star was awarded to Lance Corporal Alexander J. Caro and the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" was presented to Corporal James S. Sroka by Brigadier General J.C. Fegan, assistant division commander, 2d Marine Division.

The two Marines were in the same squad in Mike Company, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, 3d Marine Division in Vietnam. On January 27, 1968, Mike Company was participating in Operation Lancaster II in the vicinity of Camp J.J. Carroll, Vietnam.

During the night of January 26, the company had established a temporary defensive position on a small hill near the camp. At dawn on January 27, a reinforced North Vietnamese battalion launched a furious assault on the Marine Company.

The brunt of the enemy attack was directed at the positions that were being held by Caro and Sroka's squad. During the initial attack, the Marines suffered heavy casualties. When LCpl Caro saw that the Marines of one of the machine gun teams from his platoon had all been killed, he volunteered to recover the vital weapon.

LCpl Caro ran over 250 yards of open ground dodging the enemy fire to get to the weapon. As soon as he reached the gun he opened fire and killed three enemy soldiers who were trying to overrun his position. When the machinegun was hit by an enemy round, he repaired damage so he could continue firing at the enemy.

When he ran out of ammunition, he again braved enemy fire to recover a full box of grenades. Returning to the gun position, he stood up to hurl the hand grenades at the enemy, completely disregarding the heavy enemy fire.

When the Marines from Mike Company were resupplied with ammunition LCpl Caro ran the gauntlet of enemy fire up to the top of the hill to get more ammo. He ran the 250 yards back to the gun position, loaded his weapon and continued to deliver heavy fire against the enemy troops, preventing them from entering the company's perimeter.

When LCpl Caro made his first trip down the hill to recover the machinegun Cpl. Sroka, who was a grenadier, moved through the fire swept open area and took up a position about 25 yards behind LCpl Caro. Cpl. Sroka blanketed the assaulting enemy troops with M-79 rounds until his ammunition was spent.

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LCpl Caro and his wife, Patricia, live in Jacksonville. Cpl. Sroka lived with his mother, Mrs. Mary Sroka, in Waukegan, Illinois, before entering the Corps. Both Marines left with the 1st Battalion, 2d Marines when it deployed to the Mediterranean.

Scuttlebutt note: the March issue of Leatherneck Magazine carries the photo of the presentation of awards.

1stSgt H. McDANIEL

1stSgt H. McDaniel is at the U.S. Naval Hospital, Great Lakes, in Ward 9-E. He logged in the 26th of March.

US Forces Participating In Lancaster II

Strength	
3rd Battalion, 1st Marines	320th Division
1st Battalion, 3rd Marines	
3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines	
1st Battalion, 4th Marines	
2nd Battalion, 4th Marines	
3rd Battalion, 4th Marines	
1st Battalion, 9th Marines	
2nd Battalion, 9th Marines	
3rd Battalion, 9th Marines	
3rd Tank Battalion	
44th Air Defense Artillery Regiment	