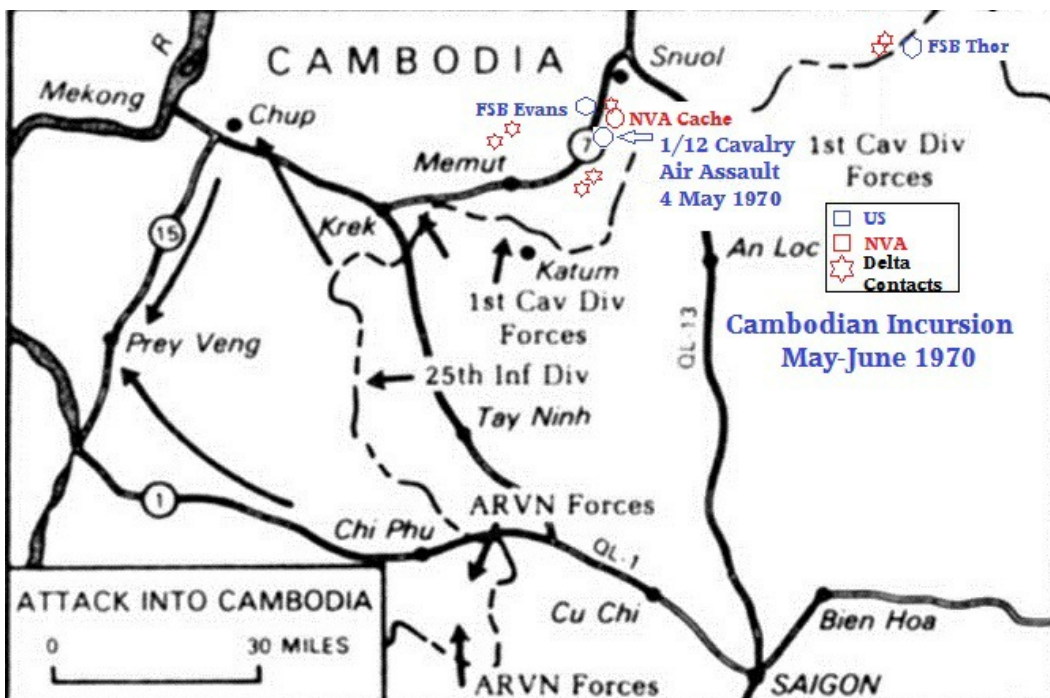


## THE 1970 CAMBODIAN INCURSION

THOMAS KJOS WITH FRED MACLENNAN

By the spring of 1970, US ground forces in Vietnam totaled 385,000, but many units were preparing to depart. Vietnamization was turning the war over to the South Vietnamese. To protect US troops and exert pressure on North Vietnam in negotiations, bombing of the Cambodia sanctuaries had begun in 1969. Following the overthrow of Prince Sihanouk in March, President Nixon approved an attack into Cambodia to destroy the major enemy bases and the NVA they harbored. Officially named "Operation Rockcrusher," it is better known as the Cambodia Incursion.

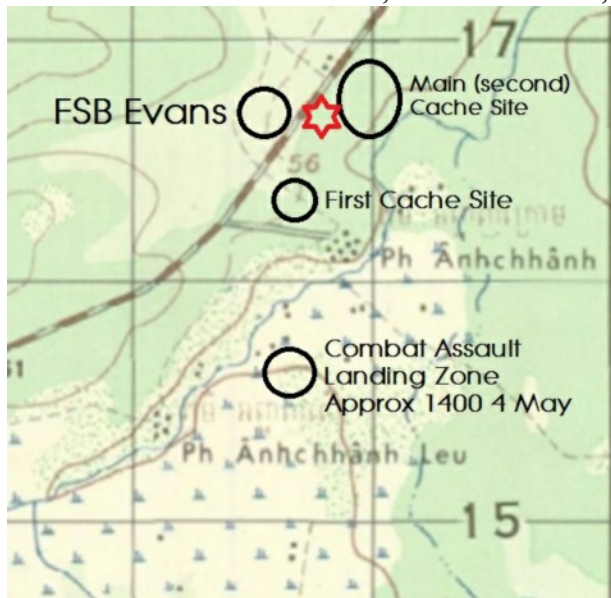
Elements of the ARVN III and IV Corps totaling 48,000 troops attacked across the Cambodian border into the Parrot's Beak on 29 April. Two days later, Task Force Shoemaker, comprised of elements of the 1st Cavalry Division, the ARVN Airborne Division, and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment entered the Fish Hook. The American units attacked from the east, west and south while the Vietnamese paratroopers air assaulted into landing zones further north, blocking NVA/VC escape.



During the its months in Cambodia, Delta helped establish FSB Evans, discovered a large cache of supplies and weapons, and fought NVA troops in seven engagements.

The assault began at dawn with B52, tactical airstrikes, and artillery. Helicopter gunships pounded the NVA fleeing the allied armored and air cavalry.

On May 2, aerial scouts of 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry spotted a supply depot of the NVA 7th Division. Dubbed "The City," it contained nearly 200 tons of enemy supplies: 1,282 individual and 202 crew-served weapons, 2.2 million rounds of ammunition, and 300 vehicles, including a Porsche.

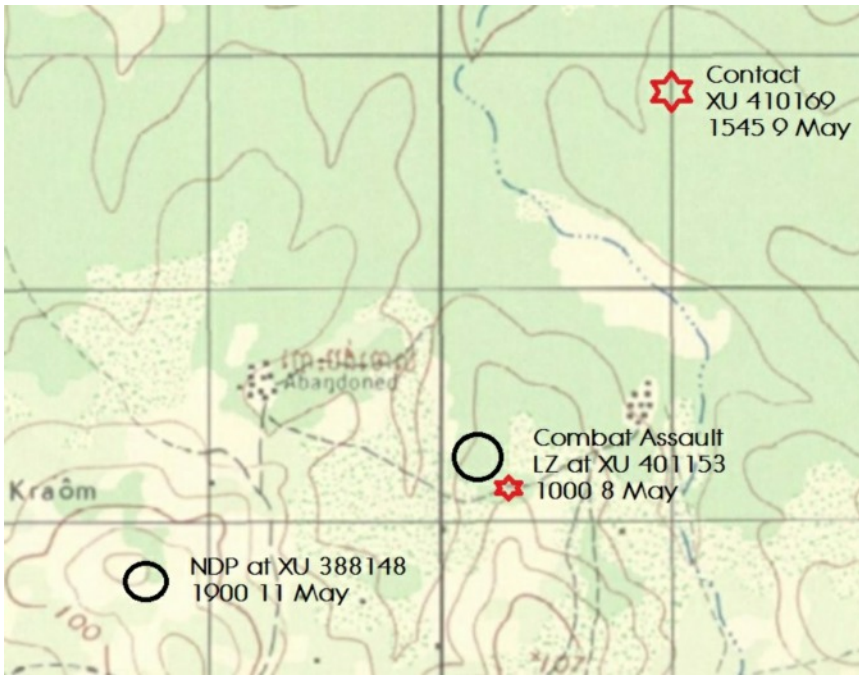


Following a morning C130 flight from LZ Buttons to Loc Ninh, the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry combat assaulted into Cambodia the early afternoon of May 4. D Company's landing zone was in an open area at XU486157, from which it moved west, into a treeline, through a stream, and up a bank to Cambodian National Highway 7. From there, with the 1st platoon on point, Delta followed the highway toward the northeast. As they did, a Troop of the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment motored through headed toward Snoul, where the NVA was making a stand. They apparently had come from a banana farm; the Sheridans and M113's were covered with the fruit.

On Hwy 7, Delta encountered a 1/9th OH6 crew poaching an enemy weapons cache seen on an aerial recon. That cache and another nearby were major finds.

The company continued to XU485166, where the battalion opened FSB Evans; a bulldozer driver was killed when a tree he was pushing fell on him. Securing the larger part of the cache in the vicinity of XU490168, Delta was probed at about 11 PM; the enemy rebounded toward the perimeter at Evans, where they were again engaged, costing the NVA one killed. D Company spent the next day counting and cleaning up the cache, which included 618 SKS rifles, nearly 400 British Enfield rifles, numerous assorted machine guns and mortars, a PA set, an electric welder, and a metal lathe.

Delta was still on Evans on the 6th when two 107mm rockets impacted 100 meters outside the perimeter. The same day, additional ARVN units poured across the border at three points: at the Dog's Head (just north of the Parrot's Beak); northeast of the Fish Hook; and near Phouc Binh.



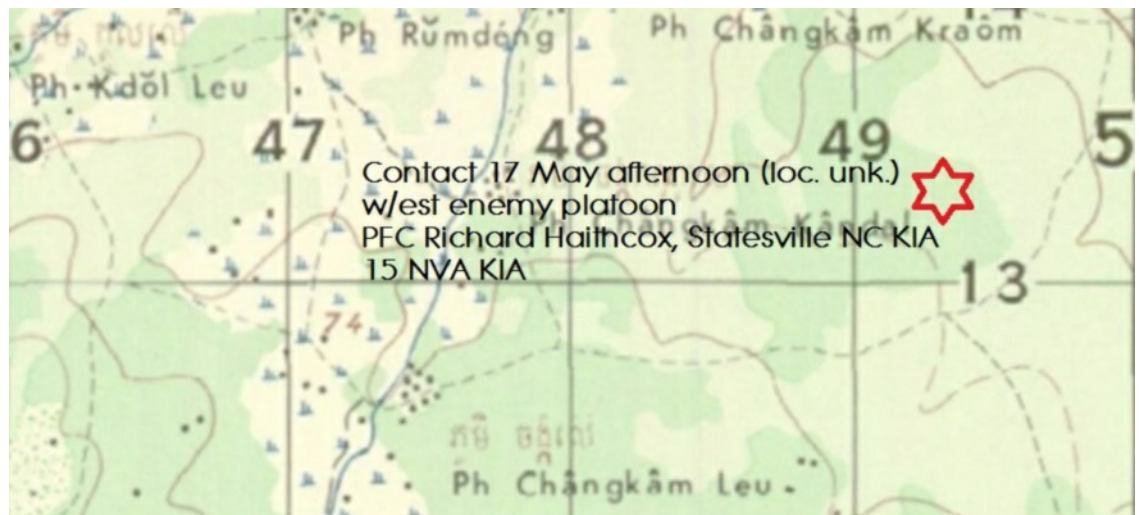
On 8 May Delta flew 8 kilometers west from Evans to XU401153. Moving off the LZ to the southeast, the company's flank security was engaged by a sniper at a distance of about 30 meters. Delta returned fire, and contact was broken off without result or casualties. Elsewhere, D Company 2nd Bn., 12th Cav, fought an engagement with NVA regulars defending another large enemy cache.

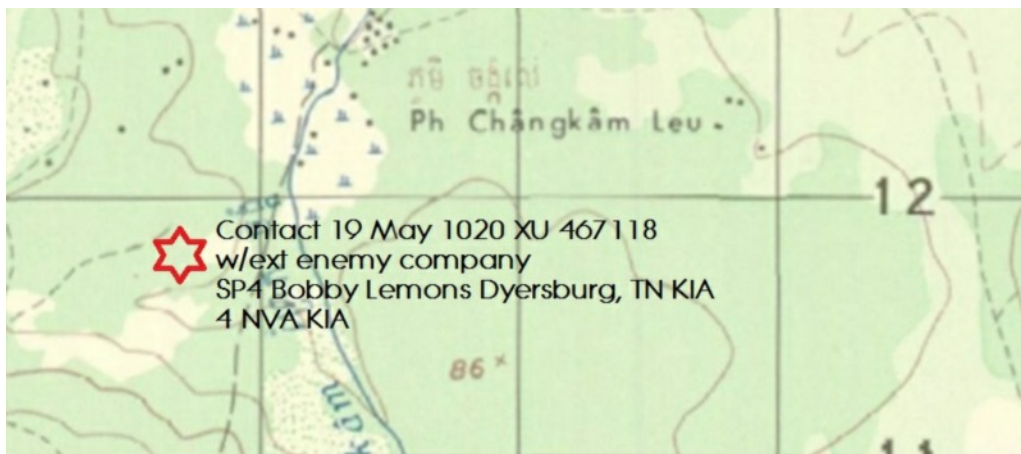
The next day, as Delta moved northeast, contacts with a disorganized enemy continued. At XU410169 D Company engaged three NVA, killing one, and while setting up an automatic ambush, received sporadic small arms fire. On the evening of 10 May, at XU388148 Delta engaged movement near its NDP. Three detainees, two wounded, were evacuated to Tay Ninh.

Over May 10-11, the single deadliest American fire fight of the invasion was fought by 3/506th Inf, 101st Airborne in the Prek Drang base camp, where B Company engaged two NVA companies, killing 47 at the cost of 8 US KIA and 28 WIA.

By this time stories of the shootings at Kent State began to reach US Forces in Cambodia, even dominating the front page of *Stars and Stripes*. The four students were becoming martyrs, while American soldiers killed would be unrecognized and unremembered by all but their families. One soldier wrote home, "I am quite pleased with Cambodia and quite upset with student unrest at home. None of us here can understand it."

May 17 was a log day. Following resupply, as the company moved away from its perimeter, it came in contact with an NVA platoon. Supported by tube and aerial artillery, Delta killed 15 of the enemy. As for Delta, PFC Richard Haithcox, Stateville, NC, was killed in action. Seven were wounded.





Still based on FSB Evans, the 1/12th was the last remaining cavalry battalion in the Fish Hook. South of Evans, a D company automatic ambush killed 1 NVA, and at mid-morning May 19, moving out of its NDP, Delta came into contact at XU467118 with an estimated NVA company. Delta lost one killed in action, SP4 Bobby Lemons, Dyersburg, TN, while

accounting for 4 enemy killed. The Battalion Surgeon came to the field to assist company medics with the wounded.

The 1/12th was relieved from the operational control of the 11th ACR to the OPCON of the 1st Cav's 3rd Brigade on 27 May, and moved the battalion TOC to Fire Support Base Thor at XU910285, 300 meters across the border into Vietnam. Delta and the rest of the battalion began operating within artillery support range of FSB Thor. Delta air assaulted from Thor on June 8 to replace B Company in the field at XU844327 six kilometers west in Cambodia. That day a New Zealand Captain, accompanied by Battalion Sergeant Major James Delmont, joined the company. Delta's point and rear elements were simultaneously engaged within a few hundred meters of the LZ by an enemy element probably shadowing B company. The contact resulted in 4 NVA KIA.



When the point element was engaged on June 10, SGM Delmont went forward and was killed by small arms fire. There were no other casualties, nor did the company report any enemy losses. Due to terrain, Delmont was unable to be extracted until June 13.

Delta walked out of Cambodia to FSB Thor on 29 June; all American units were now out of Cambodia. US ground forces had advanced 19 miles into Cambodia; gunboats reached 22 miles up the Mekong River. 50,659 Americans participated in the campaign on both sides of the border, 19,300 inside of Cambodia. The 1st Cavalry Division committed the most troops—7,401—to the incursion. 382 Americans were killed in Cambodia during the two months and 1,525 were wounded.

In *Into Cambodia*, Keith Nolan wrote, “After the 1968 Tet Offensive, Washington negated its advantage by stopping the bombing and placing its faith in negotiations.” The same wrong-headed policy prevailed after the Cambodian Incursion. Congress repealed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and forced withdrawal by June 30. That the Cambodian invasion saved American lives fell on deaf ears at home, but was validated by the men in the field. One infantry officer said, “After Cambodia, you couldn't pick a fight (with the NVA). If only we had persisted, we would have won the war.”

Even famed advisor and war critic Lt. Col. John Paul Vann concurred, calling the incursion “the most favorable development, other than [the VC defeat in] Tet [1968], that occurred in this war.”

J.D. Coleman in his 1991 book *Incursion* wrote, “The American soldiers who had withstood repeated blows from North Vietnamese regular army soldiers and then watched helplessly as they disappeared into the sanctuaries of Cambodia had few reservations about the morality of the invasion.” Even today, former soldiers are unequivocal when asked whether they would do it again. The answer is, “Hell, yes.”