

Operation Pegasus, April 1968

Relief of the 26th Marine Regiment at Khe Sanh Combat Base

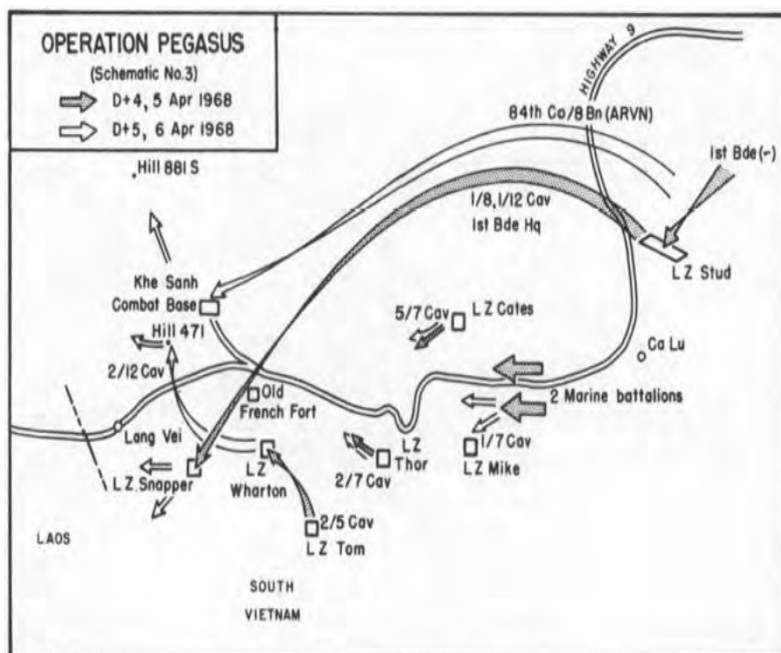
An image of Delta's 3rd platoon sorting through weapons found in an NVA supply depot near Khe Sanh in April 1968 has lately been seen on the web (it's also on Delta's web site, and on the next page of this story). At the National Archives we learned the 1st of the 12th Daily Journals for that period are missing, but the Division's survived, and from 167 pages covering OPERATION PEGASUS, we can outline Delta's activity.

PEGASUS jumped off at 0700 on 1 April 1968, when two Marine Battalions attacked west along Highway 9 toward KHE SANH COMBAT BASE, defended by the 26th Marine Regiment. After the morning weather cleared enough for air operations, the Cav's 3rd Brigade air assaulted, taking control of LZ's commanding the high ground along the highway.

Over the next few days, the Marines fought their way westward against light opposition while engineer units restored the highway behind them. The Cav's 3rd Brigade attacked west and south from LZ's MIKE and CATES, bracketing Route 9. On 3 April, one day ahead of schedule, 2nd Brigade, 1st Cavalry air assaulted into the battle, establishing LZ's TOM, THOR and WHARTON even further toward KSCB.

The 1st Brigade, of which we were a part, did not enter the battle until 5 April; before that Delta was working to the west of Quang Tri. On 2 April at 0632, 2nd platoon's 1st squad received small arms fire while returning from an overnight ambush. A few minutes later (0707), a returning squad on the far side of the perimeter tripped a booby trap; 2 were medevac'd. Later that morning Delta found two dead enemy soldiers, and a TOKAREV 7.62 mm pistol. Early that afternoon Delta air assaulted into a "green" LZ at YD279492 and soon found a cache of rice, 2 rifles, TNT, and ammunition. There's no mention of the company—or of the 1/12th—over the next two days; we assume the battalion was being extracted to LZ SHARON in preparation for joining PEGASUS. SHARON took 25 rounds of 82mm mortar fire the night of the 4th, likely interrupting Delta's short rest.

The morning of 5 April, 1/8th, which would lead the two-battalion air assault into LZ SNAPPER (the 1st Brigade's Commander was Donald "snapper" rattan) was lifted to the staging area at LZ STUD (Ca Lu). Except for a side trip by Delta's 3rd Platoon, which was inserted at noon at YD209408 to secure a 1/4 ton trailer "dropped from an aircraft," 1/12th followed. 1/8th lifted out of STUD at 1300 on the first combat assault into the mountains between Khe Sanh and the Laotian border to establish SNAPPER at XD841345. Fifty minutes later, the first elements of 1/12th were also in the air on the way to



SNAPPER. Barely an hour and a half later, two infantry battalions, two artillery batteries, two Quad 50's, a searchlight, and a bulldozer were on the ground. Thirty-four more sorties were flown by 12 CH47 CHINOOKS before dark.

While others dug into the slopes of SNAPPER, B & D 1/12th, moved west into the AO, where B received SA and mortar fire at 0500 the next morning. Two were wounded, but not medevac'd. At 0945 Delta found 4 NVA bodies with weapons and equipment 800 meters WSW of SNAPPER. Documents confirmed this was the AO of the 24th Regiment, 304th Division, Peoples Army of Vietnam (PAVN, or NVA). At 1915 Delta, at XD833373, having moved 3,000 meters north since 0945, discovered a 37mm anti-aircraft gun with 200 rounds of 37mm ammunition and 5,000 rounds of 12.7mm (.51 cal.).

On the morning of the 7th, 300 meters further north, Delta found B40 rockets and 82mm mortar rounds; a few minutes later, an NVA body "w/steel pot and SKS." Ten minutes later there's another cache, with ammunition and "400 new shovels." It's a giant scavenger hunt. It was also a strange, eerie place. 1/12th's B Company reported a "dead dog in bunker." The next day, "B 1-12 reports the dead dog has moved to a new location."



The morning of the 8th Delta was "moving in the N (North) portion of AO across RED BALL [Route 9] coordinated w/little people [ARVN Abn Task Force] who are to the w." Only 400 meters WNW from our overnight position we walked into our first, and only, firefight in OPERATION PEGASUS. The Division's Journal: "D 1-12 XD829379 0941H made contact w/en sqd. Contact broke at 1030H 5 US WIA medevac completed at 1029H. Delta engaged by AW & SW fire from 4 to 5 positions when moving west," along Highway 9 with two platoons on line in the lead, 3rd on the left, 1st on the right. The

terrain was forest, relatively open at the ground. In the area were many bunkers, most of them storage for ammunition and other equipment. After calling in 2/20th Artillery (ARA), we advanced, the enemy retreating excepting one wounded NVA soldier who remained, but soon died. A search of the contact area confirmed 3 more NVA KIA.

Delta joined Alpha and Bravo in a night defensive position on high ground 800 meters south of its contact. The following morning, the 9th, we again crossed Route 9, and 400 meters further north found the cache pictured here. Included were 5 mortars, 6 machine guns, 1 recoilless rifle, 54 rifles, 2 pistols, medical supplies and ammunition. Nearby was a "large grave w/50 bodies

dumped in a pile.”

The 1st Cavalry began withdrawing from PEGASUS on the 9th, with 1st Brigade HQ, 1/8th, and A Battery 1/19th Artillery off SNAPPER to SHARON at Quang Tri on the 11th. Delta was OPCON to 2nd Brigade on the 10th, and returned to LZ SNAPPER on the 11th. The 1/12th's other companies continued the attack west along ROUTE 9 to the Lang Vei Special Forces Camp, overrun by the NVA 24th Regiment, 304 Division and the 198th Tank Battalion (PAVN) in February. The camp was in the hands of 1/12th troopers on 12 April. The 1/12th returned to the Quang Tri AO early on 15 April, arriving just as OPERATION PEGASUS officially ended at 0800.

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