



**Capt. John Prichard
USMC**

Funeral services will be held on Monday at Arlington National Cemetery for Marine Capt. John Prichard, 23, former Navy football great, killed in Vietnam on Jan. 27.

Prichard, commanding officer of an infantry company of the 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, stationed along the Demilitarized Zone, died of wounds received in a fire fight when his company encountered a large number of Viet Cong troops.

A 1961 Naval Academy graduate, Prichard played on the 1960 football team which was 9-1 and appeared in the Orange Bowl. A halfback, he was the second leading pass receiver and was second to Joe Bellino in punt and kickoff returns. He also was a standout track star. In 1959 he won the Heptagonal broad jump championship.

In addition to his athletic achievements, Prichard was an honor student and a midshipman company commander in his first class year (senior).

A native of Oklahoma City, Prichard has been serving in Vietnam since September 1967. His previous duty station was as assistant football coach at the Naval Academy Preparatory School in Bainbridge, Md. While there he was also the senior Marine officer and was responsible for the military indoctrination of all students at the school.

A memorial service will be held in the Ft. Meyer Post North Chapel at 2 p.m. on Monday. Interment will follow shortly thereafter.

Prichard is survived by his wife, Patricia Anne, his daughter, Kimberly, age 5, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Prichard, and a brother, Bob, all of Oklahoma City.



At the dedication of Prichard Field Mrs. Prichard was presented with the Silver Star and Bronze Star Medals posthumously awarded to Capt. Prichard. Making the presentation is BGen. Poggemeyer, Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, Headquarters USMC.

JOHN L. PRICHARD FIELD

In ceremonies recently held at the U. S. Naval Training Center, Bainbridge, Md., one of the Naval Academy Preparatory School athletic fields was dedicated to the honor and memory of the late Capt. John L. Prichard, USMC, a member of the Naval Academy class of 1961.

Captain Prichard was killed by enemy fire while serving as commanding officer of an infantry rifle company at Jo Lin, Vietnam, on 27 January 1968.

In a previous tour of duty Capt. Prichard had served as Battalion Officer at the Prep School. Formerly an excellent varsity athlete in high school and at the Naval Academy, he took on additional duties on the coaching staff at NAPS. "It is especially fitting," said the commanding officer at the dedication of Prichard Field, "that the field upon which Capt. Prichard spent so many of his Bainbridge hours developing the bodies, minds and character of many of the Navy's future officers, be dedicated in his honor."



VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL FUND

JOHN LEE PRICHARD 35E, 49

To make a donation in memory of **JOHN LEE PRICHARD**, click here.

JOHN LEE PRICHARD
is honored on Panel 35E, Row 49 of
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.



Full Name: **JOHN LEE PRICHARD**
Wall Name: **JOHN L PRICHARD**
Date of Birth: **1/19/1939**
Date of Casualty: **1/27/1968**
Home of Record: **OKLAHOMA CITY**
County of Record: **OKLAHOMA COUNTY**
State: **OK**
Branch of Service: **MARINE CORPS**
Rank: **CAPT**
Casualty Country: **SOUTH VIETNAM**
Casualty Province: **QUANG TRI**

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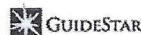
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VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL FUND

Silver Star Citation

Posted for: JOHN LEE PRICHARD:

*PRICHARD, JOHN L. (KIA)

Synopsis:

The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the Silver Star Medal (Posthumously) to John L. Prichard (0-81650), Captain, U.S. Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving with Company I, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, 3d Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on January 27, 1968. By his courage, aggressive fighting spirit and steadfast devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger, Captain Prichard upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

Home Town: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Posted by: A Marine

Email:

Relationship: USMC, Vietnam, 1969

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

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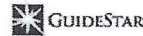
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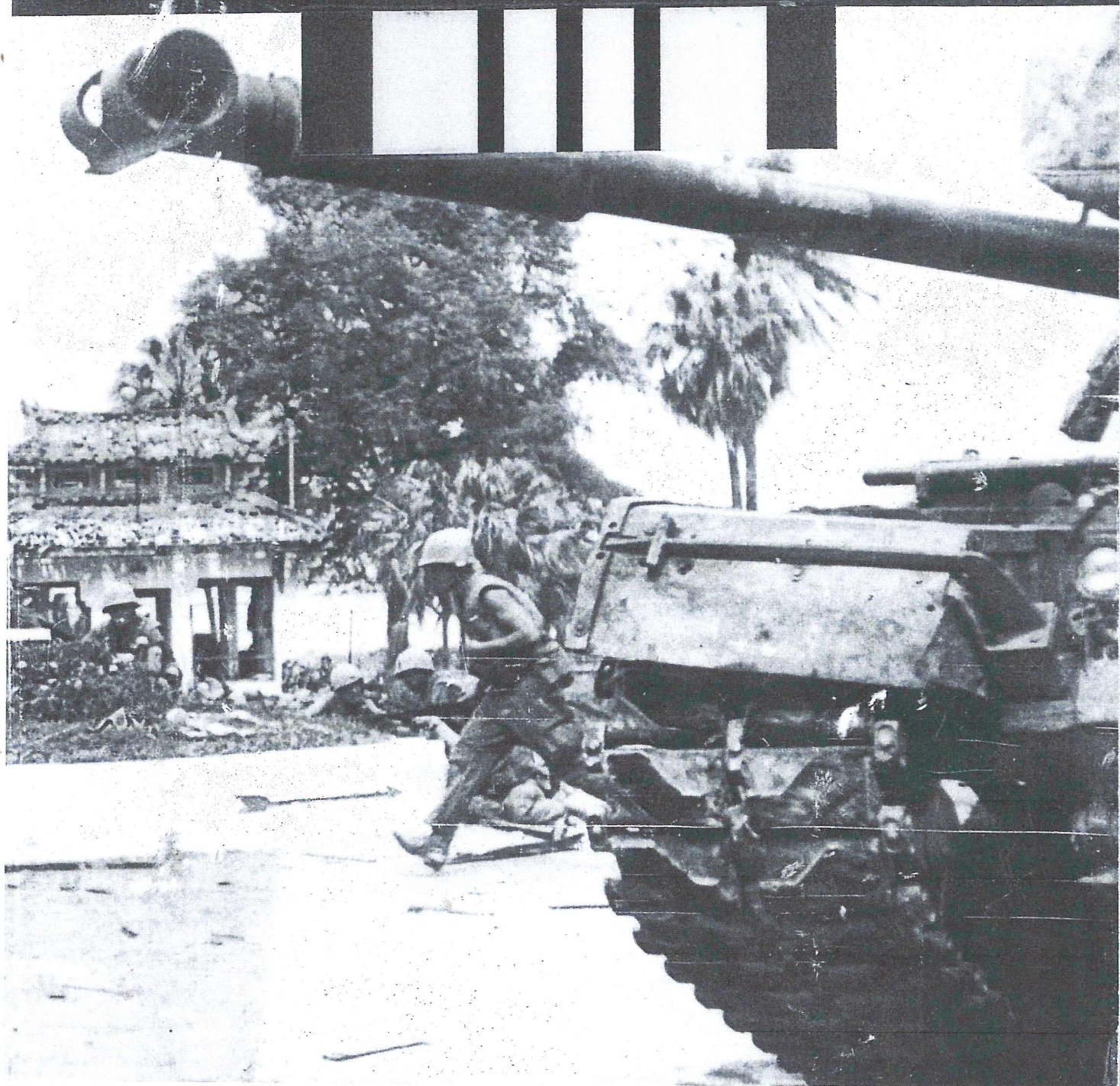


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U.S. MARINES IN VIETNAM

THE DEFINING YEAR

1968



U.S. MARINES IN VIETNAM

THE DEFINING YEAR

1968

by

Jack Shulimson

Lieutenant Colonel Leonard A. Blasiol, U.S. Marine Corps

Charles R. Smith

and

Captain David A. Dawson, U.S. Marine Corps

*James J. Walker, Jr., Charlotte, N.C.
Corporal, USMC Sep 10, 1964 - June 9, 1968*

*PFC with
Fighter Squadron
Marine Aircraft
Air Wing, Fleet
3d Marine Am-*



*Marine All Weather
235 (VMF(AW)-235),
Group 11, 1st Marine
Marine Force Pacific,
Marine Force Pacific,
Marine Force Pacific*

*Da Nang Airbase, Republic of Viet Nam,
4 Feb - 11 August, 1966*

HISTORY AND MUSEUMS DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS, U.S. MARINE CORPS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

1997

reaction force commander, Captain Daniel W. Kent, who was also the tank company commander. Again the Marines fought back and called for support. When two UH-1E gunships appeared overhead, about 1830, the North Vietnamese troops broke contact and disappeared. A second relief column of two more dusters and two trucks armed with quad .50s arrived from Dong Ha and assisted with the evacuation of the dead and wounded. The Marines suffered casualties of 8 men dead and 44 wounded. They killed about three of the enemy. Not only did the vehicles of the original convoy require extensive repairs, but two of the dusters and the one tank hit by the RPG round also sustained damage.

General Tompkins, the 3d Marine Division commander, could not tolerate this situation. It appeared that the North Vietnamese at will could cut Route 9 and thus, in effect, deny access to Camp Carroll and the other Marine bases in Operation Lancaster. Upon learning about the ambush, he transferred Lieutenant Colonel Lee R. Bendell's 3d Battalion, 4th Marines from the Kentucky area of operations to the Lancaster one and returned the battalion to its parent regimental control. The battalion was to clear the ambush site and then sweep Route 9.²³

On the afternoon of 24 January, Marine helicopters brought Lieutenant Colonel Bendell, the battalion commander, a skeleton battalion command group, and Company M to Camp Carroll. At 1900, Bendell and his small headquarters group accompanied Company M under Captain Raymond W. Kalm to the ambush site to assist in the evacuation of casualties. Upon learning that the second relief force had already brought in the wounded and some of the bodies, the Marine company established night positions on a ridgeline, about 1500 meters south of and overlooking Route 9 and also screening "the NVA from Camp Carroll."²⁴ The next morning the company would begin its reconnaissance of the battalion's planned objective area.²⁵

At 0630, on the 25th, the company departed its nighttime positions. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell advised Captain Kalm to occupy a small hill just north of Route 9, about 2,000 meters south of the Cam Lo River. After sending his 3d Platoon under Second Lieutenant John S. Leffen, to occupy the strategic height, the Marine captain led the rest of the company to the ambush site of the previous day, about 1,000 meters to the west.*

*Major John S. Leffen, then the platoon commander, remembered some of the events somewhat differently. He recalled moving to the hill north of Route 9 the previous evening. Maj John S. Leffen, Jr., Comments on draft, n.d. (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Leffen Comments.

The company recovered four of the Marine dead from the earlier action and then began a sweep from west to east on Route 9. About 0915, the lead platoon had no sooner passed by the damaged vehicles still strewn along the side of the road when it came under automatic weapons fire.** With the assistance of Leffen's platoon left on the hill, the company obtained fire superiority. Lance Corporal Jack L. Patton, a machine gunner with the 3d Platoon, sighted the enemy gun. Patton later laconically stated, "my gun returned fire and we killed the enemy." In that action, the Marines sustained casualties of two dead and two wounded and killed three of the enemy. They also recovered the NVA light machine gun.^{26***}

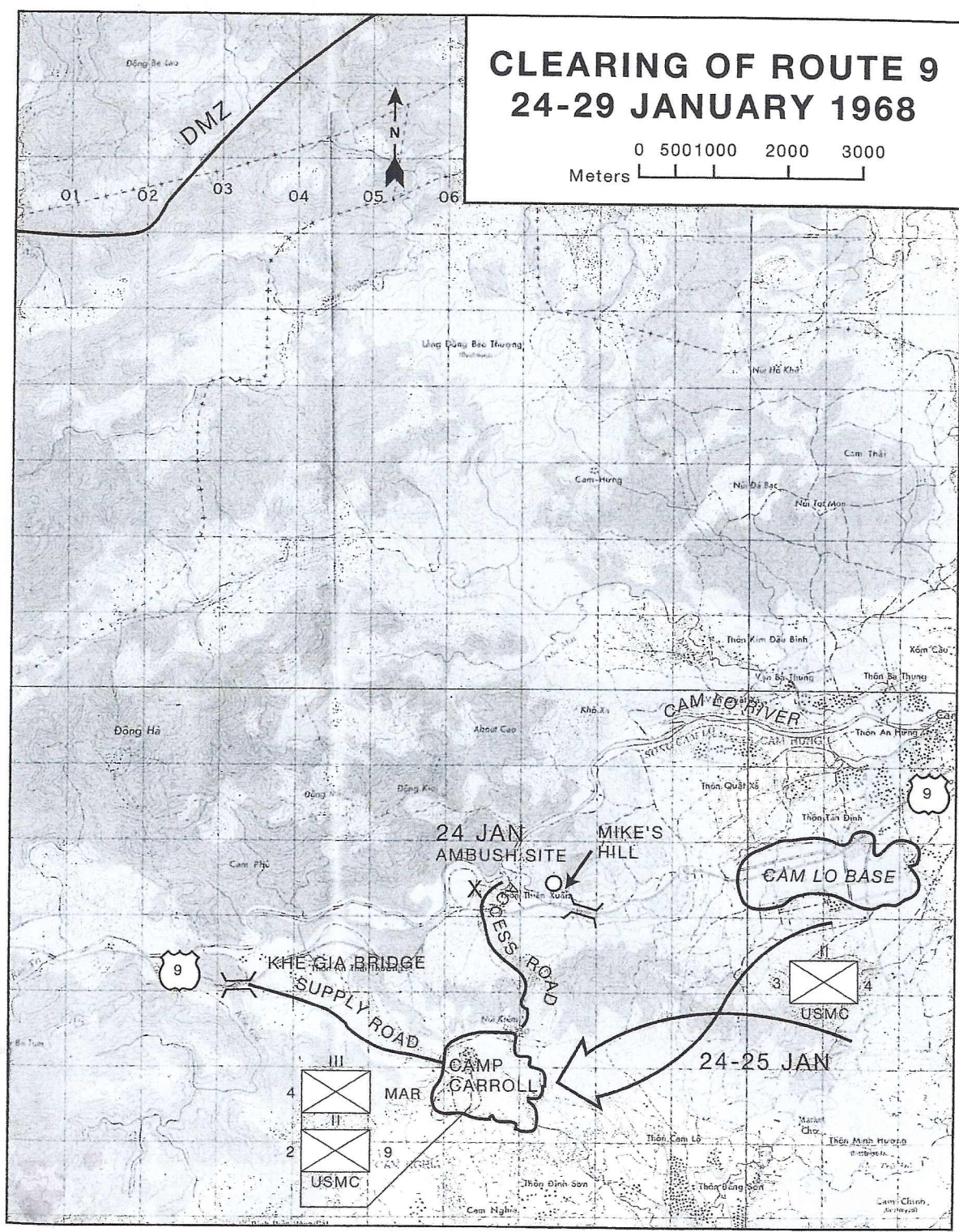
Company M then established a defensive perimeter on the hill and waited for the rest of the battalion to join it. By mid-afternoon, both Companies I and L as well as the rest of the battalion command group had arrived. Although not suffering any more killed, the battalion sustained 17 more wounded from random mortar fire from nearby enemy gunners. That night the battalion "established a three-company, tied-in perimeter" across both sides of Route 9.²⁷

At about 0230 on 26 January, Colonel Dick, the 4th Marines commander, radioed Lieutenant Colonel Bendell that he had received intelligence of large North Vietnamese forces operating just north of the Cam Lo River. The regimental commander wanted the 3d Battalion to secure Route 9 from the Khe Gia Bridge, about 5,000 meters west of the battalion's present position, east to Cam Lo, a distance of about 9,000 meters. Two companies were to deploy north of the river, while the remaining company cleared the road. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell suggested instead that "the mission of securing the road was best performed along the road and south of the Cam Lo River." The regiment, however, insisted that the battalion carry out the mission as originally ordered.²⁸

Lieutenant Colonel Bendell then prepared his plans and started to carry out his new orders. Companies I and L were to cross the Cam Lo and operate

**Colonel Bendell recalled that "one Marine managed to start the abandoned tank and pulled all the convoy vehicles back toward Cam Lo." Col Lee R. Bendell, Comments on draft, n.d. [Nov94] (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Bendell Comments.

***Major Leffen, the 3d Platoon commander, recalled that the captured enemy weapon was a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) rather than a light machine gun. Leffen Comments.



on the northern banks of the river while Company M secured Route 9, south of the river. The enemy, however, forced the Marines to change the original concept of the mission. At 0845 on the morning of the 26th, a Company M patrol discovered that the enemy had blown a bridge on Route 9 over a small streambed, just below the hill, now dubbed "Mike's Hill" after Company M, where the company had established its night defensive position. The patrol reported that the road was "impassable without engineer improvement." Just as Company I was about to cross the river, the regimental commander changed his order about operating on both banks of the Cam Lo.* Colonel Dick directed the battalion to "continue to secure Route 9, to deny enemy access to bridges and culverts, and to patrol and ambush 375 meters north and south of Route 9, occupying the high ground on either side of the route as necessary." In effect, the battalion was to secure that portion of Route 9 that extended from the opening to Camp Carroll eastward to the destroyed bridge.²⁹

During the rest of the morning and afternoon of the 26th, the three companies patrolled the approximately 2,000 meters of Route 9, encountering little resistance except for the occasional sniper and mortar bombardment. Throughout the day, however, the battalion recovered enemy equipment, including pieces of clothing and web gear, ammunition, grenades, and even antipersonnel mines and spotted small groups of enemy soldiers. By nightfall, concerned about the perimeter of the previous night on relatively low terrain, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell ordered the battalion to form three separate company defensive perimeters "on favorable high ground on both sides of Route 9, including Company M on Mike's Hill."³⁰

After returning to its hill for the night, Company M also established several small ambush sites. The 3d Platoon commander, Second Lieutenant John S. Leffen, sent out an ambush squad and established a fire team listening post at the bottom of the hill. According to Leffen, both the squad and fire team as they arrived at their designated positions reported there were North Vietnamese soldiers all around them. Lieutenant Leffen pulled back the listening post, but

*Colonel William L. Dick explained in his comments that once the bridge was blown, "a change in plans was obviously required" and required a "rapid reevaluation." Col William L. Dick, Comments on draft, dtd 1Dec94 (Vietnam Comment File), hereafter Dick Comments.

left the ambush squad where it was because of its "tactical importance."³¹

During the night of 26-27 January, North Vietnamese soldiers attempted to infiltrate the Marine positions through a streambed to the west of Mike's Hill and gullies and other streambeds to the north and east.** On Mike's Hill, Lieutenant Leffen remembered that about 0500 on the morning of the 27th, "we heard what sounded like 'wall to wall' NVA all around our positions." He remarked on the poor noise discipline of the enemy troops. Although the Marines could not hear the sound of the movements of the NVA soldiers, "What gave them away was their constant talking." A Marine mortarman, Frank Craven,** with Company M several years later recalled, "They were at the bottom of the hill and we were at the middle of the hill . . . They didn't know it and we didn't know it until . . . we butted heads." According to Craven, "we heard some noise and then it was automatic machine gun fire from then on. It was terrible."³²

The fight for Mike's Hill would last through the entire afternoon and spread to Route 9 and involve all three companies of the 3d Battalion. On the hill, itself, the battle turned into a wild melee. Clambering up three slopes of the hill, the North Vietnamese employed mortars, rocket propelled grenades, and automatic weapons to cover their advance. The Marines responded in kind. Lieutenant Leffen remembered "when we ran out of bullets we threw grenades and misdelivered .50 cal rounds in a variable and alternating fashion to keep the NVA honest until the helos could bring us more ammunition."³³ From an enlisted man's perspective, Frank Craven recalled that it was "every man for himself. You still work as a team somewhat . . . but as far as a coordinated formal thing, all that gets wiped away. The thicker the battle the more informal and it was very thick." Craven particularly remembered one machine gunner at the top of the hill that kept the enemy back: "He just kept that area sprayed."³⁴

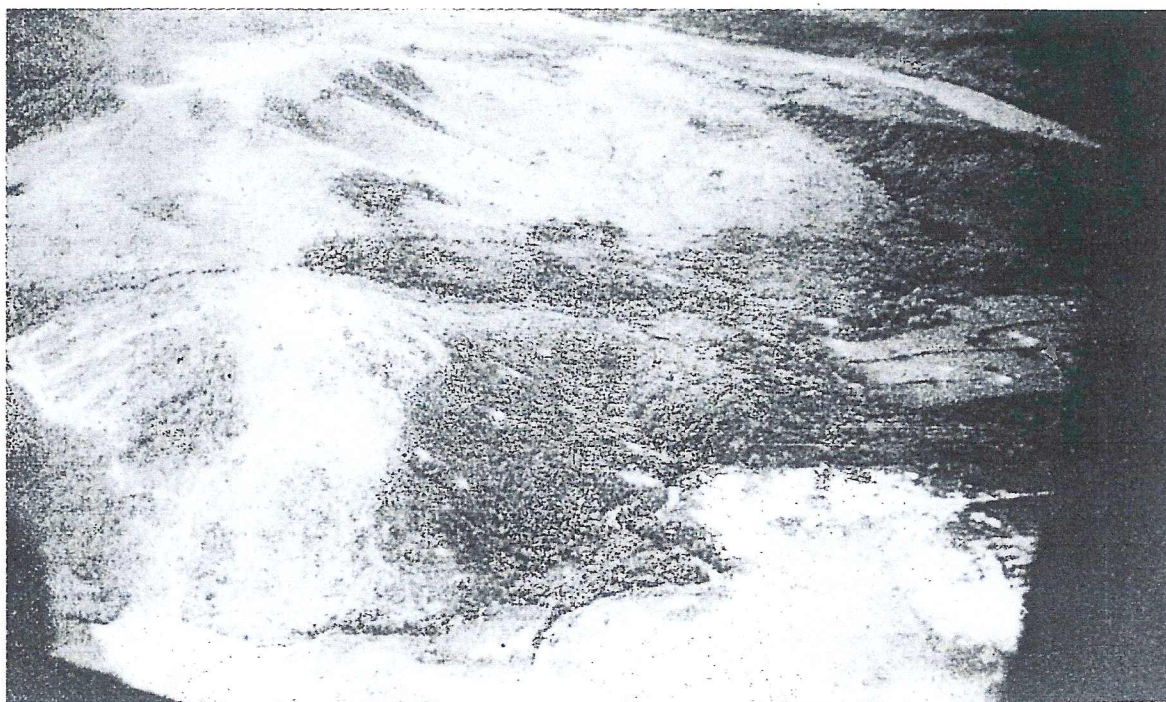
From a nearby hill to the east of Company M, Company L fired 60mm mortars and rifle rounds into an exposed enemy flank. Lieutenant Colonel Bendell, from his temporary command post on

**Colonel Bendell commented that the enemy had moved into attack positions under cover of darkness and that "it appeared their principle attack was along the road where the battalion perimeter had been located the night earlier." Bendell Comments.

***Frank Craven later legally changed his name to Abdullah Hassan.



Top photo is from the John S. Leffen Collection and the bottom is courtesy of Col Lee R. Bendell, USMC (Ret) *The fight for Mike's Hill, named after Company M, 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, would be the pivotal battle in the opening up of Route 9 to Camp Carroll in January 1968. In the top photo, the smoke from a Boeing B-52 Arclight strike on North Vietnamese positions can be seen from a Company M position on Mike's Hill. Each of the B-52 Stratofortresses could hold 27 tons of ordnance. Below, Mike's Hill after the battle has much of its foliage destroyed. Route 9 can be seen in the foreground and the Cam Lo River in the background.*



Mike's Hill, then ordered Captain John L. McLaughlin, the Company L commander, to maneuver his company down to Route 9 and relieve a Company M squad surrounded by North Vietnamese troops at an ambush site near the destroyed bridge. By noon, after overcoming determined pockets of enemy resistance with the assistance of 81mm mortars and coordinated small arms fire from a Company M squad on Mike's Hill, Company L reached the bridge and relieved the embattled Marines there. In the process, the company took some casualties, but killed 23 of the enemy and captured 3 prisoners.

* With the arrival of Company L at the bridge and Mike's Hill now secure, the battalion commander directed Captain John L. Prichard, the Company I commander, to advance eastward along Route 9 from his positions toward Company L, a distance of some 1,000 meters. Because of the nature of the terrain in the sector, open ground interspersed with hedgerows and heavy brush, Bendell called artillery fire upon enemy firing positions north of the Cam Lo River to cover Company I's open left flank.* About 200 meters west of the bridge, a well-camouflaged and dug-in NVA company using streambeds and dense vegetation as cover stopped Company I. Failing to overcome the enemy resistance with repeated frontal assaults, Captain Prichard asked for reinforcements. He ordered up his reserve platoon from his old position and Lieutenant Colonel Bendell directed Company L to send one platoon to Prichard. By 1400, with the support of Huey gunships, the two companies had linked up and began the mop up. For the most part, the battle for Mike's Hill was over.³⁵

About that time, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell received a radio message from Colonel Dick that Major General Tompkins, the 3d Division commander, wanted the battalion to return to Camp Carroll. Concerned that the NVA were still in force north of the river, Bendell failed to see the tactical advantage of "re-seizing terrain fought for earlier" and recommended the battalion stay and mop up the area.³⁶ After first ruling against Bendell, Colonel Dick and General Tompkins decided to permit the battalion to continue

*Colonel Bendell recalled that he directed his operations officer and his artillery liaison officer "to 'seal off' the battle area by artillery fires all along the Cam Lo River at the suspected crossing points. This apparently prevented reinforcements and even made retreat hazardous for those south of the river." Bendell Comments.

with the road-securing mission for another day.** By 1700 on the 27th, "vehicles were able to move without harassment along Route 9 from both directions to the destroyed bridge . . ." ³⁷

After evacuating the casualties, which included the Company I commander, Captain Prichard, who later died of his wounds, Lieutenant Colonel Bendell formed his battalion into two companies. He placed Company I under the operational control of Company M and attached one of Company M's platoons to Company L. According to the battalion commander, instead of having "three short-strength companies," he now had two "full-strength" ones. During the day, the battalion had killed more than 130 of the enemy, captured 6 prisoners, and recovered 3 57mm recoilless rifles, 2 60mm mortars, 35 AK-47s, and extensive ammunition and equipment. The 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, however, had paid a heavy price: 21 men dead and 62 men wounded.³⁸

On the 28th, the now two ad hoc companies continued their patrolling of Route 9 with relatively little incident. About 1430, a Company L patrol happened upon a tunnel. Its entrance was three feet in diameter and it extended about eight feet underground. Five other tunnels, running east to west, intersected with the first one. In these tunnels were several North Vietnamese bodies, some lying on makeshift litters. The Marines buried the bodies and destroyed the tunnels.*** After completing this grisly task, the battalion received orders once more to return to Camp Carroll. Marine helicopters flew Company L to Camp Carroll, while the revamped Company M returned to the base on foot. Once the Marines were a safe distance away, Air Force B-52s in an Arclight mission carpet bombed suspected enemy avenues of retreat and firing positions north of the Cam Lo River.^{39****}

**Colonel Dick later wrote, "it was manifest that the battalion couldn't remain in the area indefinitely and there was no available unit for relief. In any event the position would have to be uncovered . . . when the CG stated his wish for 3/4 to withdraw I certainly wasn't going to 'rule' against him but did demur to the extent that Lee [Bendell] was on the ground and in a better position to make a reasonable estimate of the situation, and could be brought in the following day. Which is what happened." Dick Comments.

***These bodies were included in the figures of North Vietnamese dead listed above for the action of 27 January.

****Major Leffen remembered that an aerial observer "spoke directly to me indicating we were 'in a lot of trouble.' He . . . could see a column of 3's headed south toward our position as far as he could see. We were then told to be five clicks south of the hill by 1700." He wrote that the B-52s struck exactly at that time and "we could see pieces of the enemy in the trees following the arclight." Leffen Comments



Both photos are courtesy of Col Lee R. Bendell, USMC (Ret)
At top a well-camouflaged NVA foxhole was used during the fighting for Route 9. These fighting positions were often interconnected by a complex tunnel network. Below, the first Marine convoy arrives at Camp Carroll after the 3d Battalion, 4th Marines reopened Route 9.

