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MONOGRAPH

ACTIONS AT FORT ESPINAR, REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

20 DECEMBER, 1989

ALPHA COMPANY, 4th BATTALION, 17th INFANTRY REGIMENT

7th INFANTRY DIVISION (LIGHT)

Captain Daniel E. Evans

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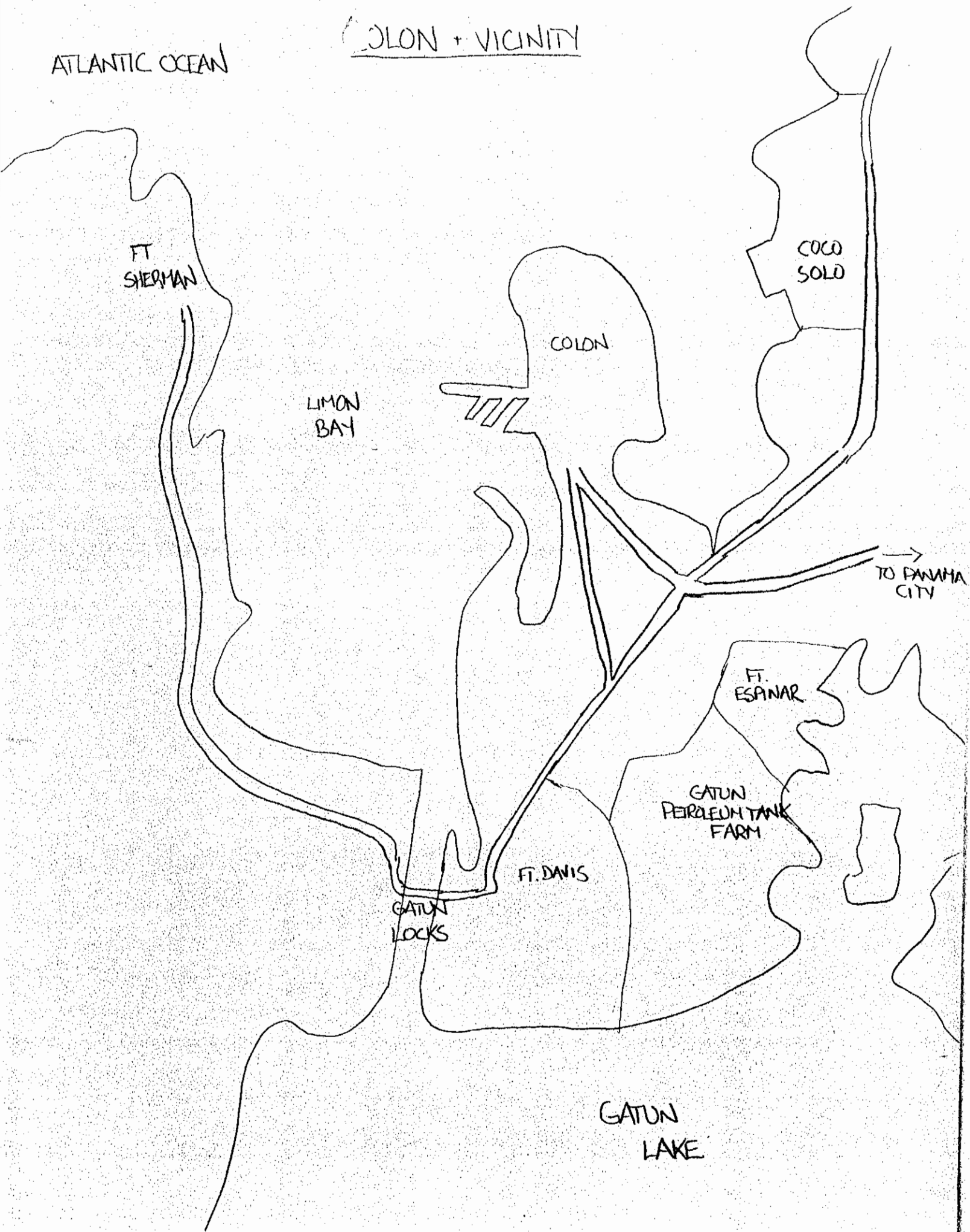
On 25 October 1989, the 4th Battalion, 17th Infantry, deployed to the Republic of Panama for a three-month rotation. The battalion operated under the command of Task Force Atlantic. This Task Force's Headquarters was the 3rd Brigade of the 7th Infantry Division(Light). I was the Executive Officer of Alpha Company, 4-17 Infantry.

The 7th Infantry Division's involvement in Panama began on 11 May 1989. President Bush ordered the initiation of Operation Nimrod Dancer due to increased tensions between the Panamanian and United States governments. The first and second battalions from the Ninth Infantry Regiment and the Regimental Headquarters deployed to United States' installations on the Atlantic side of the former Canal Zone. At the time, there were no infantry battalions permanently stationed on the Atlantic side of the canal. These battalions began to protect American citizens and property from the increasing Panamanian harassment and bullying tactics. These units also ensured that they exercised all United States Rights under the provisions of the Panama Canal Treaty.

The 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry, deployed back to Fort Ord after approximately three weeks and an easing of tensions. The 7th Division then began a rotation of single battalions to Panama. Each battalion deployed to the Atlantic side of the canal for a three-month rotation. The units were stationed at Fort Sherman, Fort Davis, Fort Espinar, and Coco Solo (see map).

ATLANTIC OCEAN

COLON + VICINITY



The 4th Battalion, 17th Infantry, was initially stationed at Fort Sherman. We spent three weeks completing the Jungle Operations Training Course. This acclimatized us to the heat and humidity. We also began the transition with the outgoing battalion, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry.

While at Fort Sherman, each company rehearsed a contingency mission that it was responsible for in the event that hostilities broke out while we were in Jungle Training. The outbreak of hostilities was known by the name of Operation "Blue Spoon." Alpha Company's mission was to seize the major Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) Supply Depot, secure the major power station that supplied the major U.S. installations in the Panama City area, and secure a radio relay station. Alpha Company deployed in CH-47 (Chinook) Helicopters and landed on a golf course near the supply depot. We monitored PDF reaction to our actions and reconnoitered for possible breach points. We then secured our two other objectives and monitored the PDF reaction. After completing the mission, we boarded Landing Craft boats and returned to Fort Sherman. This mission was actually carried out by a company from the 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry, during Operation Just Cause. They, like us, had the opportunity to rehearse this mission.

After completing Jungle School, Alpha Company moved to Fort Espinar. Fort Espinar has been formerly known as Fort Gulick but since the signing of the Canal Treaty it had become a jointly-held post. Two major Panamanian units were located on

the fort. The first was the Eighth Panamanian Infantry Company, known as 8 CIA. This company was a basic infantry company of approximately one hundred-fifty men. In addition to being infantrymen, these soldiers also acted as the local law enforcers. The second unit on the post was a Panamanian Non-commissioned Officers Academy. It had about one hundred students with cadre. The academy also had an arms room, and the students had access to a wide variety of weapons. There were other Panamanian buildings on the post, but many appeared abandoned and some were only seldom used.

The United States did not have any other units located on the post. However, the post housed a major American housing area. Soldiers who mainly worked at Fort Davis lived there. The fort also contained the major Commissary and Exchange for all soldiers and families living on the Atlantic Side of the Canal. The major Ammunition Storage Point for the Atlantic Area was located in a remote corner of the fort. Additionally, the fort housed an American bowling alley, theater, Class VI store, post office and elementary school.

Fort Espinar was jointly controlled, and the areas under Panamanian and U.S. control were interlaced in a confusing pattern(see map). The post contained areas that were Panamanian sovereign territory, U.S. sovereign territory, and areas that were jointly held. U.S. forces could travel through Panamanian territory only if they were traveling from one U.S. area to another.

FT. ESPINAR



BOATING CENTER

JUNGLE

GATUN
PETROLEUM TANK
FARM

GATUN
LAKE

HOUSING
AREA

NCO
ACADEMY

JUNGLE

POF
CONTROLLED

402

403

401

GRICK
LODGE

THEATRE

POOL

218

217

215

POST
OFFICE

GATUN
LAKE

TRUNKS
COURTS

OFFICERS
CLUB

B CIA
COMPOUND

212

213

ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL

AMMUNITION
SUPPLY POINT

JUNGLE

POF
CONTROLLED

211

JUNGLE

MAIN GATE

OFFICERS

Alpha Company occupied two buildings on Fort Espinar. The Company Headquarters and First Platoon occupied the former Fort Gulick Officers Club. The club sat on a steep hill on the eastern edge of the housing area overlooking Gatun Lake and the Panamanian NCO Academy. It was a one-story, concrete building with one large bay, a bar room, a kitchen, two bathrooms, and one shower. The soldiers of Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry had done an exceptional job fortifying the club. The building had a triple-standard concertina perimeter with a sandbagged bunker at each corner. They had used defoliant to clear away the jungle that grew near the perimeter and had placed ground surveillance radar sensors (REMBASS) on the trails in the jungle that led up to the perimeter. Additionally, they had hung chain-link fence from the gutters on the roof to protect the windows from any possible attack from RPG type anti-tank weapons.

The Second and Third platoons occupied Building 217. This building was a four-story, concrete block building with large screens for windows. It was located approximately 200 meters from the 8th CIA compound. This building still housed the local library and Boy Scout hut. Parts of it had been used as a day care center, but it was not operating at the time. The two platoons occupied the top floor of the building. During the first month of our stay, this building began to assume the fortress-like quality of the Officers Club. Sandbags were stacked two deep up against the walls of all occupied rooms.

Sandbagged bunkers were built on each corner of the building, and a wire obstacle approximately ten meters deep was built on the side of the building facing the 8th CIA. Finally, fighting positions were built at the top of all stairwells, and concertina was rigged so that it could be dropped in all stairwells.

Alpha Company had four additional elements that were attached to it. The first was three members of 107th Military Intelligence Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. They monitored the ground surveillance radar from the Officers Club. The second element was a Vulcan anti-aircraft team from the 2nd Battalion, 62nd Air Defense, 7th Infantry Division. This ADA team lived in the Officers Club also and kept the Vulcan in the perimeter. Every night, they would drive it (towed by a Humvee) around post and park in locations that would make good support positions for an assault on the 8th CIA compound. At these locations, they would set up the gun for firing. They would perform this "patrol" at different times every night and would set up for different lengths of time every night. The third attachment was a two-man sniper team from the battalion scouts. The snipers lived in building 217 and had a contingency mission to kill the guards at the front gate of the PDF compound, if necessary. They built several firing positions in the building. They also helped observe the PDF compound and kept notes on the daily routine of the PDF.

The daily routine at Fort Espinar soon became very tedious. Upon arriving, I issued each soldier his basic load of ammunition. Additionally, an ammunition storage room was established in each building. These rooms contained grenades, anti-tank weapons(AT-4's and LAW's), additional 40mm grenades for M-203's, claymore mines, and additional small arms ammunition. Soldiers kept their weapons on their beds at all times. Any time they left the building, they wore what we called our "killer suit." This consisted of Battle Dress Uniform with Body Armor(flak vest), load bearing equipment with basic load of ammunition, protective mask, personal weapon with loaded magazine inserted(no round in chamber), and camouflage face paint. Soldiers never travelled in groups smaller than their fire team, and each element that left the perimeter carried secure communication. Physical Training was conducted twice a day (due to differing schedules). The participants would run in the standard army PT uniform and would be followed by a Humvee with a heavily armed fire team pulling security. Many runs and road marches would have a route that would bring the company past the main gate of the 8th CIA. Our loud cadence or good road march discipline would usually elicit a response from the PDF, usually jeers, pointed weapons, or the occasional sound of a AK-74 bolt sliding forward.

The training conducted at Fort Espinar was conducted in cycles. The three basic cycles were force protection, patrolling, and training. The platoon on force protection cycle

was kept extremely busy. All bunkers were manned by a soldier in "killer suit" 24 hours a day. The soldier would stand by his bunker at "port arms" with his bayonet fixed. His fellow members of the force protection element would either be resting, helping with survivability construction, or waiting as a member of the Quick Reaction Force (QRF), a fire team that had to deploy in 60 seconds. Usually the QRF investigated ground radar sensings in the jungle, but it had to be prepared to reinforce any element on the post that needed help.

The patrolling element constantly patrolled the post. It concentrated on the American housing areas but also patrolled the Ammunition Supply Point and Jungle Trails that led to various areas of post. Many of these trails would come out on PDF facilities, and we would make a point to let them see that we were exercising the U.S. rights under the treaty to the fullest. Later, we would get even bolder with our patrolling. Each patrol was fire-team sized. Each fire team leader had to write an operations order for each hour-long patrol. He had to brief their plan not only to his fire team, but also to an officer in the company. Each building had a planning bay with a sand table and large map of the area.

The training cycle consisted of a platoon size element. During this cycle, I would normally take the platoon to an area where it could train in relative security. These events included conducting live fire training at the Empire Range complex located near Howard Air Force Base, training at Fort

Sherman, or training at the Gatun Petroleum Tank Farm. The platoons also practiced clearing buildings with similar floor plans as the 8th CIA at Fort Espinar.

My company and battalion commanders' intent was to demonstrate to the PDF that our unit had far superior training and discipline. They hoped that this would decrease the number of incidents with the PDF, and if it came to force, it would be intimidated by our demonstrated superiority.

An additional duty became part of the routine. Task Force Atlantic informed the battalion of an increased terrorist threat against U.S. personnel and facilities. This threat caused us to establish check points at the commissary, exchange, and elementary school. These check points would check the identification cards of all personnel using these facilities and inspect cars for bombs or weapons. The most controversial of these check points was one that was set up to check vehicles entering the U.S. housing area. This check point consisted of a wire obstacles and was set up far enough away from the U.S. area that an explosion at the check point would not harm any civilian housing. This check point was on Panamanian territory, and they protested vehemently but they never attempted to remove the barricades as threatened.

As tensions heightened, Alpha Company began to be more aggressive in its actions. A new patrol route was established that moved from Building 217 through the jungle and exited on the west side of the 8th CIA compound. This route was

designated Route Stampede. This route and other actions by U.S. units in Panama occasionally went beyond our rights under the provisions of the Canal Treaty. They were conducted to help rehearse for Operation "Blue Spoon", to measure the Panamanian response to these ever increasing aggressive actions, and to lull the Panamanians' security "to sleep" by conducting aggressive actions on a daily basis.

Tensions reached new heights on 15 December. On that day General Noriega, the Panamanian dictator, declared that Panama was in a "state of war" with the United States. The next day, a Marine officer was shot and killed at a roadblock in Panama City. That same day a Naval Officer and his wife were detained and tortured in Panama City after taking a wrong turn.

On December 18, my company commander, Captain Michael Beech, tasked me to reconnoiter an old trail that connected Fort Espinar with Fort Davis via the Gatun Petroleum Tank Farm. I found the old trail and discovered that vehicles could use it to move between the two posts. When I reached Fort Davis, I met my battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Brooks, and he emphasized that it was important that I knew the route so reinforcements could be brought to Fort Espinar, if necessary.

Rumors ran rampant on 19 December. The soldiers knew something was going to happen. The only question was the date. Some of these questions were answered during the return commute that afternoon of U.S. personnel from Fort Davis. Residents

wished our soldiers good luck and told them to be safe that evening as they passed through our check point entering the housing area. It seemed obvious that if something was planned for that evening, there had been a major security leak. With the large number of local nationals employed at U.S. facilities, the U.S. plan could not have been much of a surprise to the PDF. At approximately 1800 hours, the Panamanian Indians who were employed on Fort Espinar left their quarters above the Class VI store with all of their worldly possessions in boxes.

At 1600 hours, Captain Beech was instructed to report to the battalion command post at 1700 hours. Captain Beech left in a Humvee driven by the company supply clerk, Private John Miller. Once at Fort Davis, the battalion orders group loaded onto other vehicles and travelled to Fort Sherman where Task Force Atlantic Headquarters was located. The orders group received the operation order and was informed that Operation "Blue Spoon" was now called Operation "Just Cause."

Captain Beech returned to Fort Davis at approximately 2030 hours, but Private Miller could not be located. Captain Beech found his Humvee and drove back to Espinar by himself. His route took him through the middle of the 8th CIA compound, alone.

Captain Beech returned to the Officers Club shortly before 2100 hours. I had assembled the company orders group, and he gave the order around 2100 hours. The order had been written

for a long time (at least as far back as when 2-27 IN had been at Espinar). We had made many adjustments to it as we became more knowledgeable of the post and the capabilities of the PDF. About once a week, the officers would gather and wargame the plan and make minor adjustments. The soldiers unknowingly had been rehearsing the plan for about a month. The company definitely knew the plan and terrain very well.

As soon as the order was complete, 1st Platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Hugh Campbell, began to infiltrate to the basement of Building 217. They moved by squad and left at two minute intervals. They used a route that was concealed from observation from either of the two PDF compounds on post. The platoon assembled in the basement around 2115 hours. The platoon leaders briefed their squads and began back-briefs with Captain Beech and with their squad leaders.

I stayed at the Officers Club with the company scout/anti-tank section, mortar section, and the Military Intelligence team. It was at about this time that I received a frantic phone call from Private Miller. He was relieved to hear that it was Captain Beech who had stolen his Humvee and that he had arrived safely. I told him that I had no way to get him back and that he should probably stay at Fort Davis for a while. Showing the great initiative of the American soldier, Private Miller somehow returned to Building 217 by about 2200 hours.

At approximately 2300 hours, the composite platoon from

Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry, arrived at the Officers Club. It was commanded by the Headquarters Company commander, Captain Matthew Halder, and had the company First Sergeant also. I'm not sure about the composition of the platoon, but I think they were soldiers from the battalion headquarters section, cooks, etc. Their mission was to isolate and secure the Panamanian NCO Academy (designated Objective Julie). At this time, I also received an interrogation team from the 29th Military Intelligence Battalion stationed at Fort Davis.

At 2330 hours, 3rd Platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Tyler Osenbaugh, and 2nd Platoon, commanded by Sergeant First Class Jose Western, departed Building 217 on Route Stampede. It was an almost moonless night, and it would be slow going through the thick jungle.

At 0015 hours, 1st Platoon exited Building 217 and established a security perimeter just outside of the building concealed from the 8th CIA compound (Campbell, AAR). It was approximately this time that it was reported that the lights had gone out in the 8th CIA compound. We began to worry about our element of surprise.

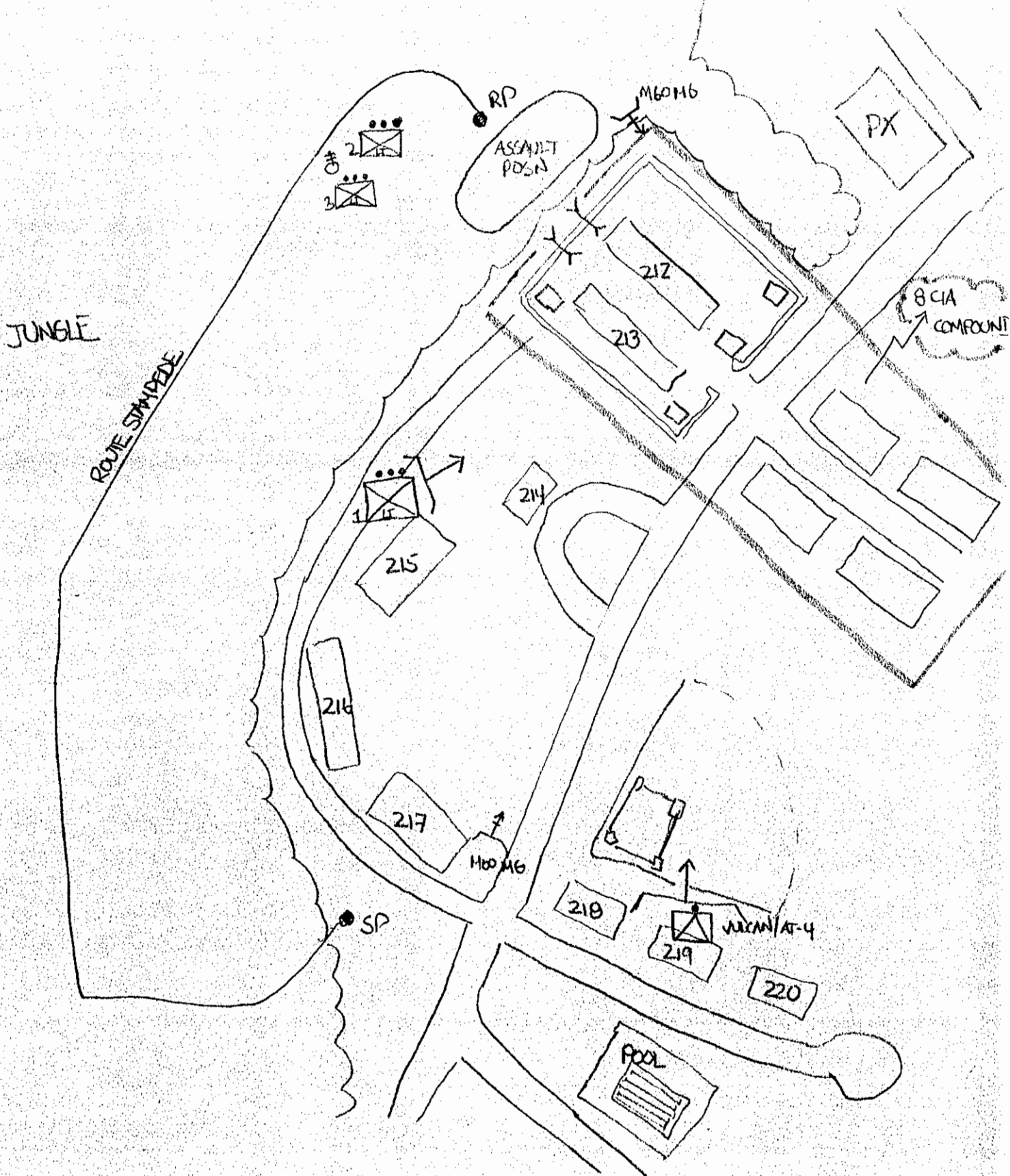
At approximately 0030 hours, the mortar section manned their mortar pits located inside the club perimeter. It would take the battalion commander's approval to fire any indirect fires because of the proximity of the housing area to the objective. The mortars did not fire any missions on that first

night.

I gathered the scout/anti-tank section and the Vulcan team together and went over some last minute details. Our mission was to provide fire from a support-by-fire position on the 8th CIA compound (designated Objective Kathy). The support-by-fire position was located around Building 218 (Class VI store) and Building 219 (unknown PDF building). The soldiers of the Vulcan team had set up in this location frequently, and they knew it would take seven minutes to move from the Officers Club to the support position and be ready to fire. This support element would concentrate Vulcan and AT-4 fire on the main gate, main guard shack, and as much of Buildings 212 and 213 as possible. The Vulcan could only fire 500 rounds before it had to reload. A reload position had been designated in an area that was covered and concealed on a nearby cul-de-sac in the housing area. The support team then had to be prepared to further suppress the 8th CIA compound or to move to the NCO Academy to help there. Our First Sergeant was originally supposed to lead this element, and I was supposed to move with one of the maneuver elements. Unfortunately, our First Sergeant had been relieved just a few days prior because of an incident with a soldier. Captain Beech decided to leave the senior NCO's with their rifle platoons, and I assumed the mission of support leader.

The composite platoon left the club perimeter at 0040 hours. At 0043 hours, firing started at Coco Solo about 4 miles

A SAULT ON 8 CIA



away. Charlie Company, 4-17 Infantry, was engaging the Panamanian Marine company there, and the burp of the Vulcan at that location could be heard quite clearly. The sky also lit up with tracers, increasing the nervousness of the soldiers. It was at this time that the composite platoon was engaged by the guard at the entrance to the NCO Academy. It brought forward the .50 caliber Machine Gun it had with them and began to suppress the main entrance and the closest building.

When the firing began at the NCO Academy, 1st Platoon moved to the rear of Building 215, just behind their designated support-by-fire position (Campbell, AAR). At this time, I tried to contact Captain Beech on the radio to see if the assault element was in its assault position. It was my intent to see if they were ready to begin the attack because it appeared that we had lost the element of surprise. I couldn't get in contact with him, probably because he was traveling through low ground to the west of the 8th CIA compound. Not being able to contact him, I decided to go with the planned H-hour. The assault element at this time abandoned its stealthful movement and began to run to the assault position. They exited the jungle about 100 meters south of the planned spot and quickly moved to the correct spot (Beech, AAR).

At 0053, I exited the club compound in Humvee that contained the scout/anti-tank section. The Vulcan team, pulling the Vulcan followed us. Our route forced us to skirt the area that the composite platoon occupied, and there were still

tracers flying in the air at that time.

At 0057, 1st Platoon armed its AT-4's and LAW's and crawled into its support position (Campbell, AAR). At almost exactly 0100 hours, the Vulcan backed into position and opened fire. Simultaneously, 1st Platoon opened fire from its support-by-fire position concentrating on supporting the breach element's approach and the rooms that were known to contain command and control equipment and personnel. The support positions fired for two minutes, and then a surrender solicitation was read over a loudspeaker.

At this time, two members from Second Platoon crawled forward and leaned a bangalore torpedo on the perimeter fence around the compound. The fence was set into a two-foot high concrete wall and had concertina wire on top. The bangalore had a thirty second time fuse and blew a breach into the compound (Beech, AAR).

After firing 500 rounds, my support position moved to the reload site to prepare the Vulcan for further missions. As we pulled away, we heard the pre-recorded surrender request being read over the speakers. During the initial suppression of the objective, the PDF returned fire, but for the most part, it was high and ineffective. It appeared that our high volume of fire did not allow them to place aimed shots at us. The only casualty sustained by our company was Sergeant Moli Sapatu, a squad leader in 1st Platoon. An RPG-18 round impacted next to

him, and he received fragments in his leg. The expended RPG was later found in the compound.

During the surrender solicitation, 2nd Squad, 1st Platoon, moved up to the Post Office to provide overwatch for the units about to enter the compound. 3rd Squad, 1st Platoon, moved to an adjacent location to cover the main gate of the compound. 1st Squad, 1st Platoon collected up approximately 80 prisoners who had surrendered and moved them to a EPW holding area in the baseball field (Campbell, AAR).

While this was occurring, the Vulcan pulled into the designated cul-de-sac and reloaded. The scout/anti-tank section formed a hasty security perimeter using the houses. It was at this time I confronted a resident of the housing area who was dressed in Battle Dress Uniform and carrying a pistol. He asked me if I needed any help, and I asked him to please return to his home. Looking back, he's lucky he wasn't shot by one of our soldiers because he approached our perimeter without warning.

Meanwhile, the Third Platoon breached the perimeter wire with bolt cutters because the fire team with the demolitions was still moving through the jungle. The 3rd Platoon threw smoke grenades to conceal its movement and gained a foothold in Building 212. At this time, the soldiers had no idea how many PDF soldiers remained in the compound. They began clearing the building systematically. This involved three-man groups clearing rooms by throwing a grenade in them and then spraying

the room with fire. As this lead element cleared the building, they acquired PDF shotguns and used those to clear the rooms and open locked doors. They found that the shotguns were safer than throwing grenades in the rooms. The M203 had a buckshot round but lacked the power of a real shotgun (Beech, AAR).

With the Vulcan reloaded, we began to move in the direction of the composite platoon who were still throwing grenades in the jungle around the entrance to the NCO Academy. Our route to the next support-by-fire position took us through the backyards of some of the houses on post. The Vulcan gunner pointed his barrel straight up as we were moving so he wouldn't point it at friendly troops or any houses. As we passed under a tree, the barrel caught a large branch and destroyed the hydraulics of the gun system. The gun was out of action for the time being.

The composite platoon seemed to have things under control at the NCO academy. It was escorting prisoners who had surrendered at the main entrance to a nearby tennis court, the designated holding area. It hadn't begun clearing the buildings yet, but soldiers were still throwing an occasional grenade in the jungle by the entrance. I contacted Captain Beech on the radio and gave him an update on the situation. He instructed the scout/anti-tank section to take charge of the prisoners. The interrogation team had already started working on them at the tennis court. Soon, we had about fifty prisoners on our

hands.

Back in Building 212, 3rd Platoon requested a squad to help clear the remaining rooms. A squad from 2nd Platoon entered the building and secured the final section. Once Building 212 was cleared, Lt. Osenbaugh shot off a green and white star cluster, signalling 2nd Platoon to clear Building 213. The 2nd Platoon cleared the building using the same techniques as the 3rd Platoon. Neither platoon found any additional enemy in either building (Beech, AAR). The platoons did find a large cache of weapons and ammunition in the basement of Building 212. Approximately 500 automatic weapons were found, as well as a few heavy machine guns. Many of these weapons had had large numbers of loaded magazines by them. At the guard shacks, automatic weapons were found with the magazines inserted and rounds loaded but the rifles had been dropped and the owners had apparently surrendered. The 8th CIA looked liked they had been prepared to fight but, for some reason, did so for only a few minutes. The 8th CIA compound was cleared of all enemy and secured at 0347 hours (4-17 INF Assault CP Log).

Captain Beech was then ordered to clear the NCO Academy. There is still a great deal of controversy about this order. Captain Beech maintains that the Task Force operations order clearly stated that the composite platoon was supposed to clear these buildings unless resistance was met. The composite platoon had isolated the peninsula but had not yet entered any

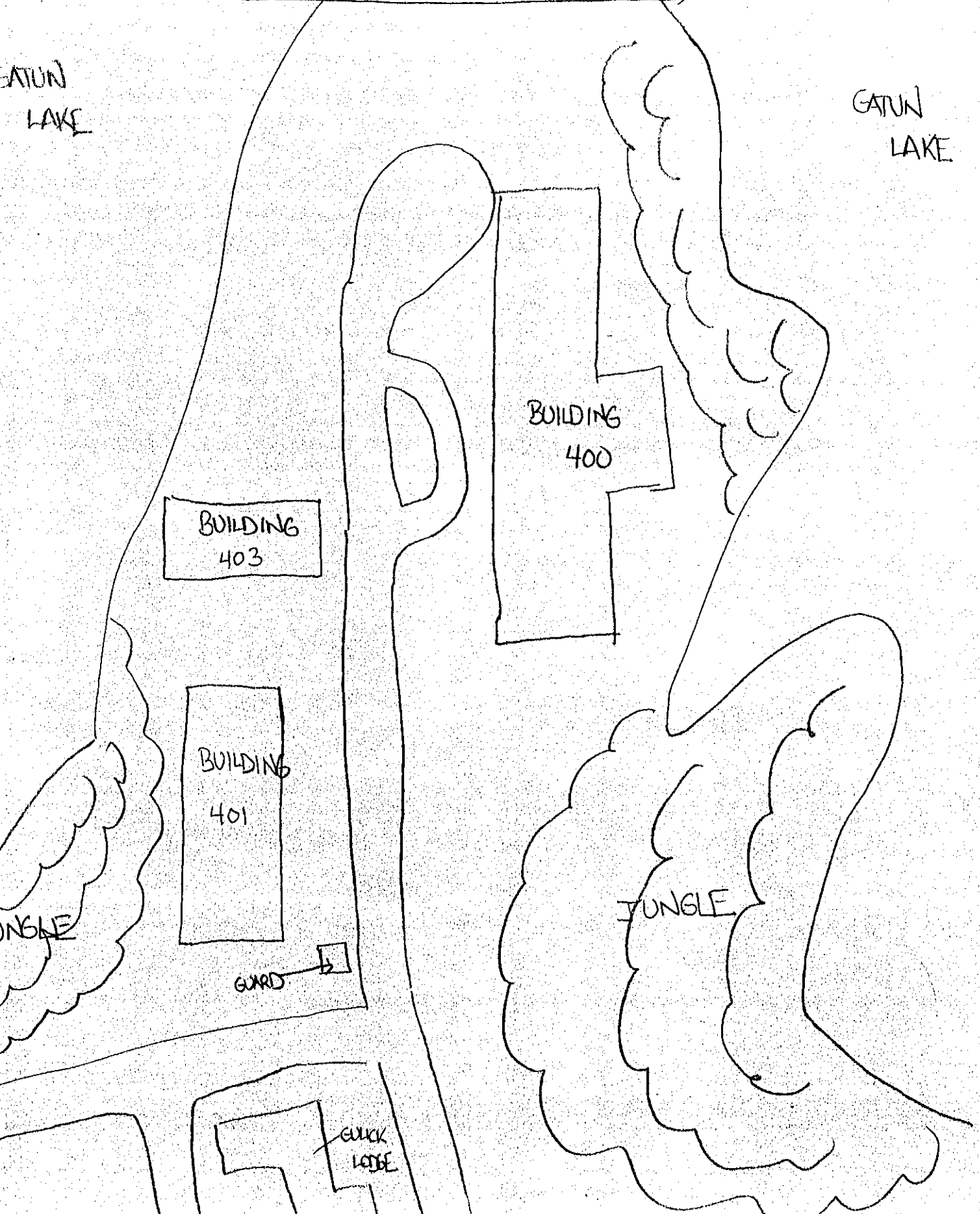
buildings to clear the school of any enemy. The only resistance it had encountered was the initial firing by the sentry at the main gate.

The 2nd Platoon moved from the 8th CIA compound and set up a security perimeter to the west of the Gulick Lodge and the tennis courts. I radioed to Corporal Bennie Jones, the Alpha Company supply sergeant, to bring a resupply of ammunition from the Officer Club ammunition bunker. He gathered up the ammunition and drove it down the hill in a Humvee. The extra ammunition was distributed to the platoon by the squad leaders. Captain Beech also radioed 1st Platoon and ordered Lieutenant Campbell to send a squad to reinforce 2nd Platoon. Captain Beech gathered SFC Western and me together, and we discussed how we were going to clear the buildings. The school compound consisted of three buildings: the main school building (Building 400), a small apartment building known as the BOQ (Building 403), and a barracks building (Building 401) similar to those in the 8th CIA compound. We would start at Building 401 which was closest to the Gulick Lodge. Captain Beech told me that he wanted me to move with 2nd Platoon as it cleared the complex. A squad from 2nd Platoon was set up in a support position, and another squad was preparing to gain a foothold in the building when Captain Beech walked up and told me to go back to the 8th CIA compound. He wanted me to ensure that the captured weapons were being evacuated and to check on the consolidation that 3rd Platoon was conducting. He then told me that he would go with 2nd Platoon instead. It was 0458 hours at this time (4-17 INF

PANAMANIAN DEFENSE FORCE
NCO ACADEMY
(FORMER SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS)

GATUN
LAKE

GATUN
LAKE



Assault CP Log).

The 2nd Platoon suppressed the upper floors of the building with M203, M-60, and anti-armor weapon fire, while the initial clearing team entered the bottom floor. Once again, the soldiers had no idea if any of the buildings contained any PDF holdouts. The platoon had been instructed to use more passive techniques of room clearing. We didn't expect strong resistance from any holdouts, and we tried to avoid any fratricide. The company had been clearing rooms for about four hours, and that initial edge had begun to dull.

Inside Building 401, a soldier from the lead fire team threw a grenade into what he thought was another room. It was really a closet and the grenade bounced back into the room just as the next clearing team, Captain Beech, and his radio operators walked in. Sergeant Steven Johnson, a squad leader in 2nd Platoon, managed to kick it towards the corner before it exploded. The explosion tore a hole in a water pipe and water quickly flooded the room (Beech, AAR). The grenade left a total of nine soldiers wounded. Miraculously, no one was killed. The flak vest and Kevlar helmet had proven their worth. Only one of the wounds was to the torso area. All of the others were to arms and legs. Five of the wounded were immediately evacuated by the medics to Coco Solo hospital by a Humvee ambulance. Within hours, they were on a helicopter to Howard Air Force Base near Panama City. They were then evacuated by an Air Force

Medevac plane to Kelly Air Force Base, Texas.

An example of how quickly wounded soldiers were evacuated was demonstrated by Specialist Tony Palmerio. SPC Palmerio was one of Captain Beech's radio operators. The explosion of the grenade ripped a four inch gash in his abdomen. The cut was not very deep, and he waited until Fort Espinar was secured to seek medical attention. The company medics sent him to the aid station to get his cut cleaned and stitched. He planned to rejoin the company as soon as possible. The next word we heard from SPC Palmerio was a message from him at Kelly Air Base. It was amazing how quickly soldiers were evacuated out of Panama. A footnote--When SPC Palmerio was wounded, PVT Miller, the company supply clerk, became Captain Beech's radio operator and continued for the remaining time the company was in Panama.

Lieutenant Campbell was then instructed to move one of his squads to the school compound to complete the clearing of the buildings. He left one squad guarding prisoners at the baseball field, the other designated holding area. The squad picked up an ammunition resupply near the Gulick Lodge and linked up with the remaining two squads of 2nd Platoon who had completed clearing Building 401. The 2nd Squad of 2nd platoon set up an overwatch position and 1st Platoon entered Building 403. Each squad cleared a floor. One holdout was captured in this building. He had been hiding in a shower in one of the rooms (Campbell, AAR).

Another overwatch position was established while 2nd

Squad, 1st Platoon, entered Building 400, a large four story structure. The rest of the squads entered the building and began to clear each floor. The four squads cleared from the bottom up and captured four additional holdouts (Campbell, AAR).

Meanwhile, I remained at the 8th CIA compound transporting about 500 weapons to a holding area in the basement of Building 217. Captain Beech radioed me and told me of the injuries at the school compound. I linked up with Captain Beech, who had a grenade fragment in his upper arm, and Lieutenant Campbell, and we set up security on the compound. Captain Beech radioed the Battalion Commander and informed him that Fort Espinar was secure. The time was approximately 0700 hours.

That day's activities revolved around pulling security on the fort and taking care of the approximately 130 prisoners. The soldiers also got in some much needed rest. That afternoon, the company loaded onto five-ton trucks and moved to the Coco Solo High School to prepare for the assault on the city of Colon. We left Fort Espinar to the control of the composite platoon from the 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry.

LESSONS LEARNED AND COMMENTS

ISSUE: Flak Vests saved lives.

COMMENTS: Even though the flak vest is extra weight and impedes freedom of movement, it saved the lives of several Alpha Company soldiers. Improvements need to be made to develop lighter and more functional flak vests.

ISSUE: Use of shotguns for clearing buildings.

COMMENTS: Shotguns are safer and more effective in clearing buildings in the environment in which Alpha Company operated. The company did not have to fight from room-to-room and grenades proved to be too much firepower. Additionally, the shotguns were very effective in blowing locks off of doors. Infantry units do not have shotguns as organic equipment. All shotguns used were captured weapons and the unit continued to use them the rest of the time in Panama for looting control and curfew control. The M-203 grenade launcher has a buckshot round but it proved to be too weak to be effective.

ISSUE: LAW more effective on buildings than the new AT-4.

COMMENTS: The AT-4's higher kinetic energy produced very small holes in buildings. Alpha company had anticipated using anti-tank weapons to help make breaches into buildings. The LAW produced a larger blast effect but it would take several shots at the same point to produce a usable hole in a building.

ISSUE: PRC-126 Radios (Squad Radio) are invaluable.

COMMENT: A reliable piece of equipment. It allowed platoons to operate over wider distances with better command and control.

ISSUE: Alpha Company knew the ground it was fighting on.

COMMENT: Alpha Company had the unprecedented opportunity to become intimately familiar with Fort Espinar and the PDF for the two months prior to Operation "Just Cause." The rehearsals, training, and intimidation of the PDF resulted in a very smooth operation with minimal casualties on both sides.

ISSUE: Traditional MOUT training by U.S. Army.

COMMENTS: Army MOUT training almost solely concentrates on room-to-room fighting. This is not realistic in most low-intensity conflicts. The possibility of civilians in the area is usually not taken into account. The emphasis is on active room clearing (maximizing violence). Passive room clearing techniques are usually not taught to regular infantry soldiers. Special Operations soldiers practice them frequently. After Operation "Just Cause," the 7th Infantry Division began to train in MOUT environments of both high and low level intensity.

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MONOGRAPH

ACTIONS AT FORT ESPINAR, REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

20 DECEMBER, 1989

ALPHA COMPANY, 4th BATTALION, 17th INFANTRY REGIMENT

7th INFANTRY DIVISION (LIGHT)

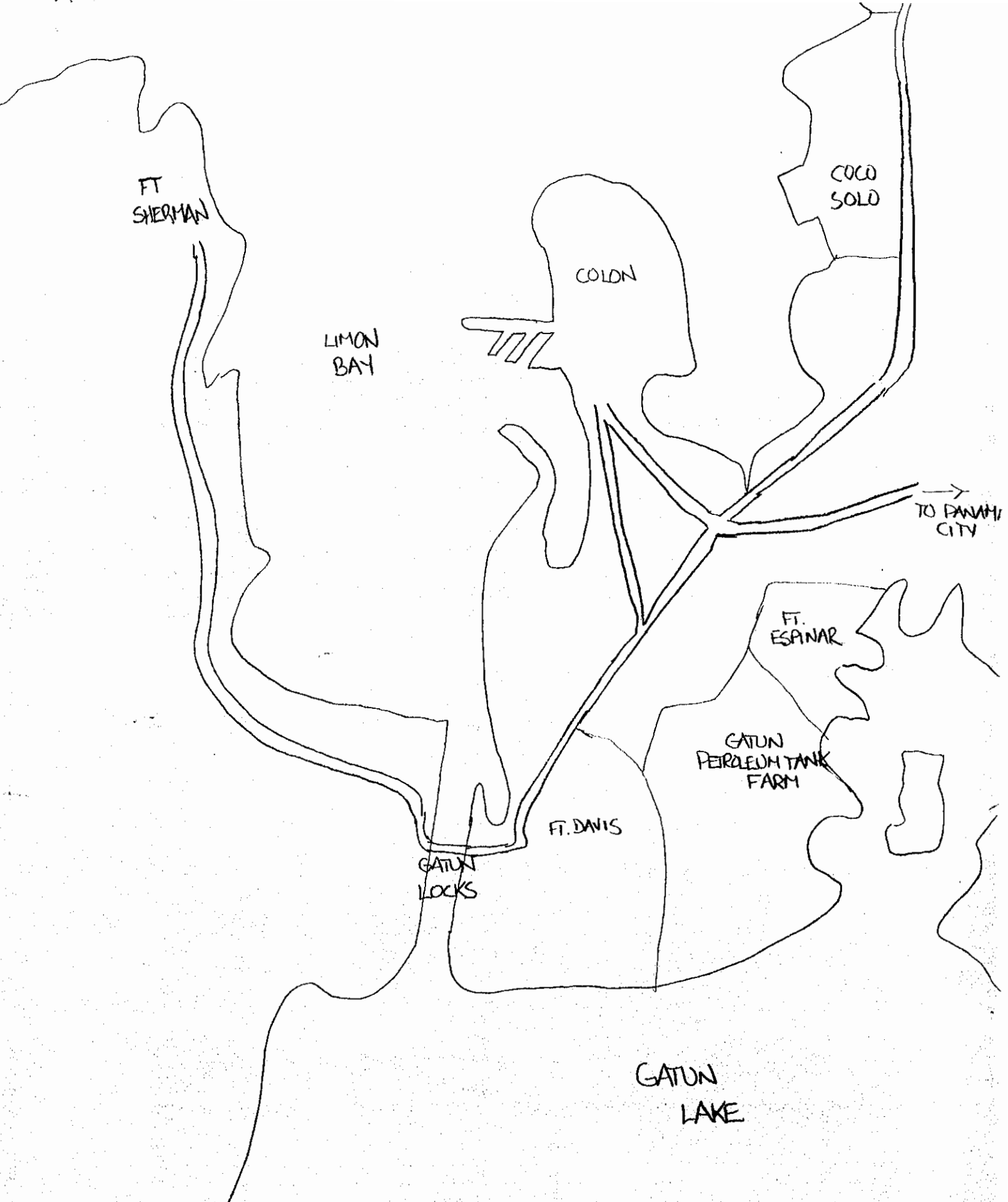
Captain Daniel E. Evans

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On 25 October 1989, the 4th Battalion, 7th Infantry, deployed to the Republic of Panama for a three-month rotation. The battalion operated under the command of Task Force Atlantic. This Task Force's Headquarters was the 3rd Brigade of the 7th Infantry Division (Light). I was the Executive Officer of Alpha Company, 4-17 Infantry.

The 7th Infantry Division's involvement in Panama began on 11 May 1989. President Bush ordered the initiation of Operation Nimrod Dancer due to increased tensions between the Panamanian and United States governments. The first and second battalions from the Ninth Infantry Regiment and the Regimental Headquarters deployed to United States' installations on the Atlantic side of the former Canal Zone. At the time, there were no infantry battalions permanently stationed on the Atlantic side of the canal. These battalions began to protect American citizens and property from the increasing Panamanian harassment and bullying tactics. These units also ensured that they exercised all United States Rights under the provisions of the Panama Canal Treaty.

The 2nd Battalion, 9th Infantry, deployed back to Fort Ord after approximately three weeks and an easing of tensions. The 7th Division then began a rotation of single battalions to Panama. Each battalion deployed to the Atlantic side of the canal for a three-month rotation. The units were stationed at Fort Sherman, Fort Davis, Fort Espinar, and Coco Solo (see map).



FT
SHERMAN

LIMON
BAY

COLON

COCO
SOLO

→
TO PANAMA
CITY

FT.
ESPARAR

GATUN
PETROLEUM TANK
FARM

FT. DAVIS

GATUN
LOCKS

GATUN
LAKE

The 4th Battalion, 17th Infantry, was initially stationed at Fort Sherman. We spent three weeks completing the Jungle Operations Training Course. This acclimatized us to the heat and humidity. We also began the transition with the outgoing battalion, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry.

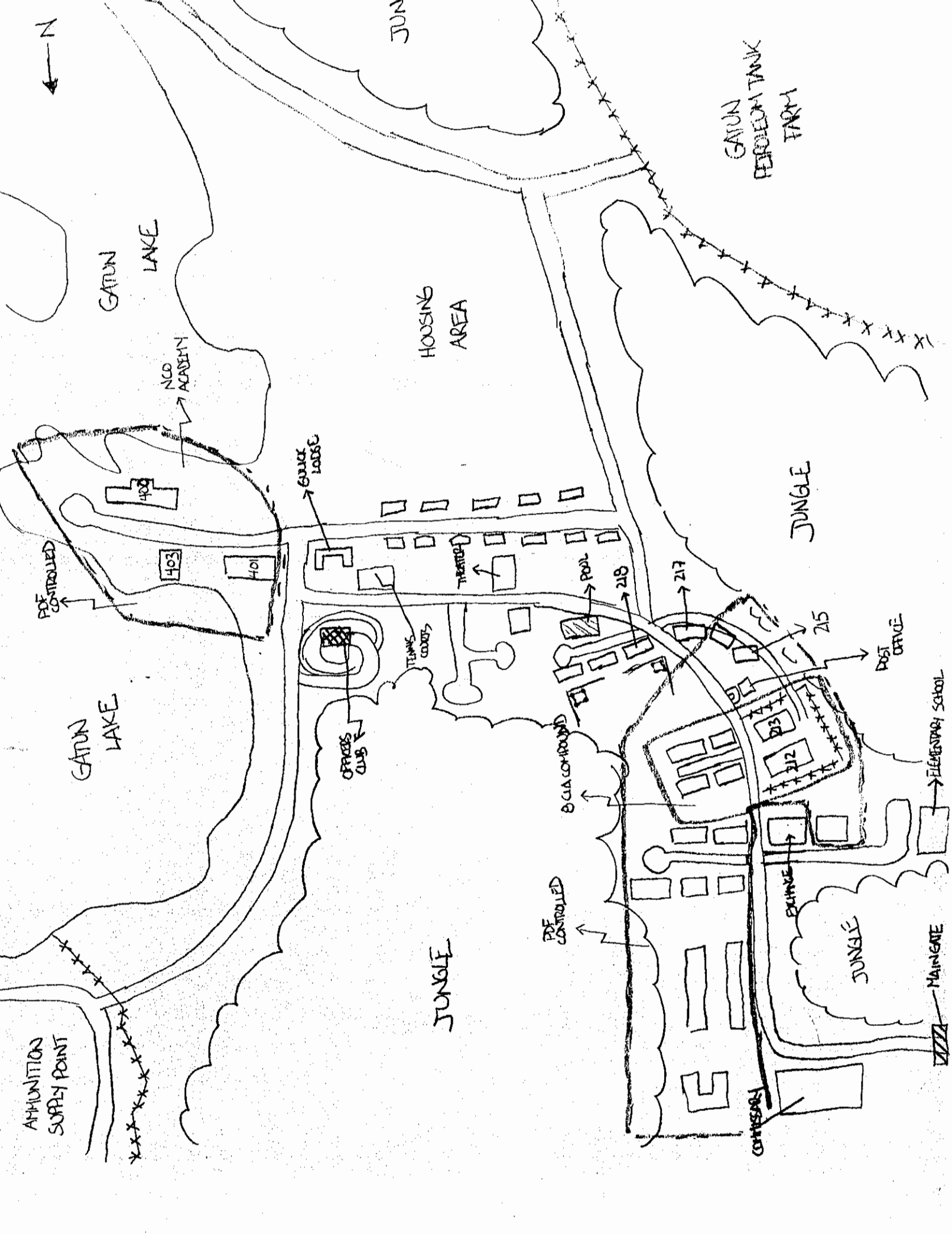
While at Fort Sherman, each company rehearsed a contingency mission that it was responsible for in the event that hostilities broke out while we were in Jungle Training. The outbreak of hostilities was known by the name of Operation "Blue Spoon." Alpha Company's mission was to seize the major Panamanian Defense Force (PDF) Supply Depot, secure the major power station that supplied the major U.S. installations in the Panama City area, and secure a radio relay station. Alpha Company deployed in CH-47 (Chinook) Helicopters and landed on a golf course near the supply depot. We monitored PDF reaction to our actions and reconnoitered for possible breach points. We then secured our two other objectives and monitored the PDF reaction. After completing the mission, we boarded Landing Craft boats and returned to Fort Sherman. This mission was actually carried out by a company from the 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry, during Operation Just Cause. They, like us, had the opportunity to rehearse this mission.

After completing Jungle School, Alpha Company moved to Fort Espinar. Fort Espinar has been formerly known as Fort Gulick but since the signing of the Canal Treaty it had become a jointly-held post. Two major Panamanian units were located on

the fort. The first was the Eighth Panamanian Infantry Company, known as 8 CIA. This company was a basic infantry company of approximately one hundred-fifty men. In addition to being infantrymen, these soldiers also acted as the local law enforcers. The second unit on the post was a Panamanian Non-commissioned Officers Academy. It had about one hundred students with cadre. The academy also had an arms room, and the students had access to a wide variety of weapons. There were other Panamanian buildings on the post, but many appeared abandoned and some were only seldom used.

The United States did not have any other units located on the post. However, the post housed a major American housing area. Soldiers who mainly worked at Fort Davis lived there. The fort also contained the major Commissary and Exchange for all soldiers and families living on the Atlantic Side of the Canal. The major Ammunition Storage Point for the Atlantic Area was located in a remote corner of the fort. Additionally, the fort housed an American bowling alley, theater, Class VI store, post office and elementary school.

Fort Espinar was jointly controlled, and the areas under Panamanian and U.S. control were interlaced in a confusing pattern(see map). The post contained areas that were Panamanian sovereign territory, U.S. sovereign territory, and areas that were jointly held. U.S. forces could travel through Panamanian territory only if they were traveling from one U.S. area to another.



Alpha Company occupied two buildings on Fort Espinar. The Company Headquarters and First Platoon occupied the former Fort Gulick Officers Club. The club sat on a steep hill on the eastern edge of the housing area overlooking Gatun Lake and the Panamanian NCO Academy. It was a one-story, concrete building with one large bay, a bar room, a kitchen, two bathrooms, and one shower. The soldiers of Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry had done an exceptional job fortifying the club. The building had a triple-standard concertina perimeter with a sandbagged bunker at each corner. They had used defoilant to clear away the jungle that grew near the perimeter and had placed ground surveillance radar sensors (REMBASS) on the trails in the jungle that led up to the perimeter. Additionally, they had hung chain-link fence from the gutters on the roof to protect the windows from any possible attack from RPG type anti-tank weapons.

The Second and Third platoons occupied Building 217. This building was a four-story, concrete block building with large screens for windows. It was located approximately 200 meters from the 8th CIA compound. This building still housed the local library and Boy Scout hut. Parts of it had been used as a day care center, but it was not operating at the time. The two platoons occupied the top floor of the building. During the first month of our stay, this building began to assume the fortress-like quality of the Officers Club. Sandbags were stacked two deep up against the walls of all occupied rooms.

Sandbagged bunkers were built on each corner of the building, and a wire obstacle approximately ten meters deep was built on the side of the building facing the 8th CIA. Finally, fighting positions were built at the top of all stairwells, and concertina was rigged so that it could be dropped in all stairwells.

Alpha Company had four additional elements that were attached to it. The first was three members of 107th Military Intelligence Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. They monitored the ground surveillance radar from the Officers Club. The second element was a Vulcan anti-aircraft team from the 2nd Battalion, 62nd Air Defense, 7th Infantry Division. This ADA team lived in the Officers Club also and kept the Vulcan in the perimeter. Every night, they would drive it (towed by a Humvee) around post and park in locations that would make good support positions for an assault on the 8th CIA compound. At these locations, they would set up the gun for firing. They would perform this "patrol" at different times every night and would set up for different lengths of time every night. The third attachment was a two-man sniper team from the battalion scouts. The snipers lived in building 217 and had a contingency mission to kill the guards at the front gate of the PDF compound, if necessary. They built several firing positions in the building. They also helped observe the PDF compound and kept notes on the daily routine of the PDF.

The daily routine at Fort Espinar soon became very tedious. Upon arriving, I issued each soldier his basic load of ammunition. Additionally, an ammunition storage room was established in each building. These rooms contained grenades, anti-tank weapons(AT-4's and LAW's),additional 40mm grenades for M-203's,claymore mines, and additional small arms ammunition.Soldiers kept their weapons on their beds at all times. Any time they left the building, they wore what we called our "killer suit." This consisted of Battle Dress Uniform with Body Armor(flak vest), load bearing equipment with basic load of ammunition, protective mask, personal weapon with loaded magazine inserted(no round in chamber), and camouflage face paint. Soldiers never travelled in groups smaller than their fire team, and each element that left the perimeter carried secure communication. Physical Training was conducted twice a day (due to differing schedules). The participants would run in the standard army PT uniform and would be followed by a Humvee with a heavily armed fire team pulling security. Many runs and road marches would have a route that would bring the company past the main gate of the 8th CIA. Our loud cadence or good road march discipline would usually elicit a response from the PDF,usually jeers, pointed weapons, or the occasional sound of a AK-74 bolt sliding forward.

The training conducted at Fort Espinar was conducted in cycles. The three basic cycles were force protection, patrolling, and training. The platoon on force protection cycle

was kept extremely busy. All bunkers were manned by a soldier in "killer suit" 24 hours a day. The soldier would stand by his bunker at "port arms" with his bayonet fixed. His fellow members of the force protection element would either be resting, helping with survivability construction, or waiting as a member of the Quick Reaction Force(QRF), a fire team that had to deploy in 60 seconds. Usually the QRF investigated ground radar sensings in the jungle, but it had to be prepared to reinforce any element on the post that needed help.

The patrolling element constantly patrolled the post. It concentrated on the American housing areas but also patrolled the Ammunition Supply Point and Jungle Trails that led to various areas of post. Many of these trails would come out on PDF facilities, and we would make a point to let them see that we were exercising the U.S. rights under the treaty to the fullest. Later, we would get even bolder with our patrolling. Each patrol was fire-team sized. Each fire team leader had to write an operations order for each hour-long patrol. He had to brief their plan not only to his fire team, but also to an officer in the company. Each building had a planning bay with a sand table and large map of the area.

The training cycle consisted of a platoon size element. During this cycle, I would normally take the platoon to an area where it could train in relative security. These events included conducting live fire training at the Empire Range complex located near Howard Air Force Base, training at Fort

Sherman, or training at the Gatun Petroleum Tank Farm. The platoons also practiced clearing buildings with similar floor plans as the 8th CIA at Fort Espinar.

My company and battalion commanders' intent was to demonstrate to the PDF that our unit had far superior training and discipline. They hoped that this would decrease the number of incidents with the PDF, and if it came to force, it would be intimidated by our demonstrated superiority.

An additional duty became part of the routine. Task Force Atlantic informed the battalion of an increased terrorist threat against U.S. personnel and facilities. This threat caused us to establish check points at the commissary, exchange, and elementary school. These check points would check the identification cards of all personnel using these facilities and inspect cars for bombs or weapons. The most controversial of these check points was one that was set up to check vehicles entering the U.S. housing area. This check point consisted of a wire obstacles and was set up far enough away from the U.S. area that an explosion at the check point would not harm any civilian housing. This check point was on Panamanian territory, and they protested vehemently but they never attempted to remove the barricades as threatened.

As tensions heightened, Alpha Company began to be more aggressive in its actions. A new patrol route was established that moved from Building 217 through the jungle and exited on the west side of the 8th CIA compound. This route was

designated Route Stampede. This route and other actions by U.S. units in Panama occasionally went beyond our rights under the provisions of the Canal Treaty. They were conducted to help rehearse for Operation "Blue Spoon", to measure the Panamanian response to these ever increasing aggressive actions, and to lull the Panamanians' security "to sleep" by conducting aggressive actions on a daily basis.

Tensions reached new heights on 15 December. On that day General Noriega, the Panamanian dictator, declared that Panama was in a "state of war" with the United States. The next day, a Marine officer was shot and killed at a roadblock in Panama City. That same day a Naval Officer and his wife were detained and tortured in Panama City after taking a wrong turn.

On December 18, my company commander, Captain Michael Beech, tasked me to reconnoiter an old trail that connected Fort Espinar with Fort Davis via the Gatun Petroleum Tank Farm. I found the old trail and discovered that vehicles could use it to move between the two posts. When I reached Fort Davis, I met my battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Brooks, and he emphasized that it was important that I knew the route so reinforcements could be brought to Fort Espinar, if necessary.

Rumors ran rampant on 19 December. The soldiers knew something was going to happen. The only question was the date. Some of these questions were answered during the return commute that afternoon of U.S. personnel from Fort Davis. Residents

wished our soldiers good luck and told them to be safe that evening as they passed through our check point entering the housing area. It seemed obvious that if something was planned for that evening, there had been a major security leak. With the large number of local nationals employed at U.S. facilities, the U.S. plan could not have been much of a surprise to the PDF. At approximately 1800 hours, the Panamanian Indians who were employed on Fort Espinar left their quarters above the Class VI store with all of their worldly possessions in boxes.

At 1600 hours, Captain Beech was instructed to report to the battalion command post at 1700 hours. Captain Beech left in a Humvee driven by the company supply clerk, Private John Miller. Once at Fort Davis, the battalion orders group loaded onto other vehicles and travelled to Fort Sherman where Task Force Atlantic Headquarters was located. The orders group received the operation order and was informed that Operation "Blue Spoon" was now called Operation "Just Cause."

Captain Beech returned to Fort Davis at approximately 2030 hours, but Private Miller could not be located. Captain Beech found his Humvee and drove back to Espinar by himself. His route took him through the middle of the 8th CIA compound, alone.

Captain Beech returned to the Officers Club shortly before 2100 hours. I had assembled the company orders group, and he gave the order around 2100 hours. The order had been written

for a long time(at least as far back as when 2-27 IN had been at Espinar). We had made many adjustments to it as we became more knowledgable of the post and the capabilities of the PDF. About once a week, the officers would gather and wargame the plan and make minor adjustments. The soldiers unknowingly had been rehearsing the plan for about a month. The company definitely knew the plan and terrain very well.

As soon as the order was complete, 1st Platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Hugh Campbell, began to infiltrate to the basement of Building 217. They moved by squad and left at two minute intervals. They used a route that was concealed from observation from either of the two PDF compounds on post. The platoon assembled in the basement around 2115 hours. The platoon leaders briefed their squads and began back-briefs with Captain Beech and with their squad leaders.

I stayed at the Officers Club with the company scout/anti-tank section, mortar section, and the Military Intelligence team. It was at about this time that I received a frantic phone call from Private Miller. He was relieved to hear that it was Captain Beech who had stolen his Humvee and that he had arrived safely. I told him that I had no way to get him back and that he should probably stay at Fort Davis for a while. Showing the great initiative of the American soldier, Private Miller somehow returned to Building 217 by about 2200 hours.

At approximately 2300 hours, the composite platoon from

Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry, arrived at the Officers Club. It was commanded by the Headquarters Company commander, Captain Matthew Halder, and had the company First Sergeant also. I'm not sure about the composition of the platoon, but I think they were soldiers from the battalion headquarters section, cooks, etc. Their mission was to isolate and secure the Panamanian NCO Academy (designated Objective Julie). At this time, I also received an interrogation team from the 29th Military Intelligence Battalion stationed at Fort Davis.

At 2330 hours, 3rd Platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Tyler Osenbaugh, and 2nd Platoon, commanded by Sergeant First Class Jose Western, departed Building 217 on Route Stampede. It was an almost moonless night, and it would be slow going through the thick jungle.

At 0015 hours, 1st Platoon exited Building 217 and established a security perimeter just outside of the building concealed from the 8th CIA compound (Campbell, AAR). It was approximately this time that it was reported that the lights had gone out in the 8th CIA compound. We began to worry about our element of surprise.

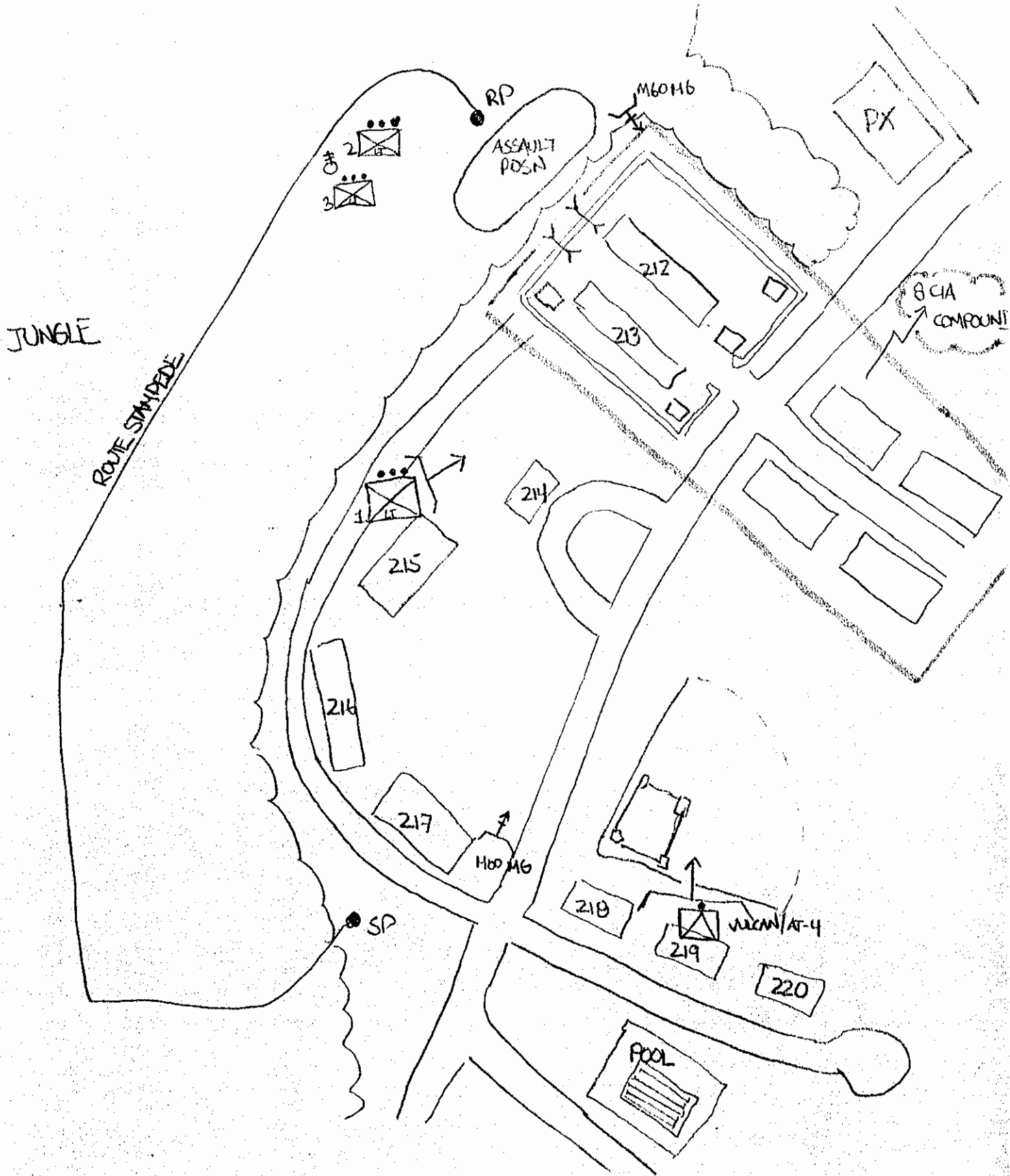
At approximately 0030 hours, the mortar section manned their mortar pits located inside the club perimeter. It would take the battalion commander's approval to fire any indirect fires because of the proximity of the housing area to the objective. The mortars did not fire any missions on that first

night.

I gathered the scout/anti-tank section and the Vulcan team together and went over some last minute details. Our mission was to provide fire from a support-by-fire position on the 8th CIA compound (designated Objective Kathy). The support-by-fire position was located around Building 218 (Class VI store) and Building 219 (unknown PDF building). The soldiers of the Vulcan team had set up in this location frequently, and they knew it would take seven minutes to move from the Officers Club to the support position and be ready to fire. This support element would concentrate Vulcan and AT-4 fire on the main gate, main guard shack, and as much of Buildings 212 and 213 as possible. The Vulcan could only fire 500 rounds before it had to reload. A reload position had been designated in an area that was covered and concealed on a nearby cul-de-sac in the housing area. The support team then had to be prepared to further suppress the 8th CIA compound or to move to the NCO Academy to help there. Our First Sergeant was originally supposed to lead this element, and I was supposed to move with one of the maneuver elements. Unfortunately, our First Sergeant had been relieved just a few days prior because of an incident with a soldier. Captain Beech decided to leave the senior NCO's with their rifle platoons, and I assumed the mission of support leader.

The composite platoon left the club perimeter at 0040 hours. At 0043 hours, firing started at Coco Solo about 4 miles

A SAULT ON B CIA



Squad, 1st Platoon, entered Building 400, a large four story structure. The rest of the squads entered the building and began to clear each floor. The four squads cleared from the bottom up and captured four additional holdouts (Campbell, AAR).

Meanwhile, I remained at the 8th CIA compound transporting about 500 weapons to a holding area in the basement of Building 217. Captain Beech radioed me and told me of the injuries at the school compound. I linked up with Captain Beech, who had a grenade fragment in his upper arm, and Lieutenant Campbell, and we set up security on the compound. Captain Beech radioed the Battalion Commander and informed him that Fort Espinar was secure. The time was approximately 0700 hours.

That day's activities revolved around pulling security on the fort and taking care of the approximately 130 prisoners. The soldiers also got in some much needed rest. That afternoon, the company loaded onto five-ton trucks and moved to the Coco Solo High School to prepare for the assault on the city of Colon. We left Fort Espinar to the control of the composite platoon from the 3rd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry.

away. Charlie Company, 4-17 Infantry, was engaging the Panamanian Marine company there, and the burp of the Vulcan at that location could be heard quite clearly. The sky also lit up with tracers, increasing the nervousness of the soldiers. It was at this time that the composite platoon was engaged by the guard at the entrance to the NCO Academy. It brought forward the .50 caliber Machine Gun it had with them and began to suppress the main entrance and the closest building.

When the firing began at the NCO Academy, 1st Platoon moved to the rear of Building 215, just behind their designated support-by-fire position (Campbell, AAR). At this time, I tried to contact Captain Beech on the radio to see if the assault element was in its assault position. It was my intent to see if they were ready to begin the attack because it appeared that we had lost the element of surprise. I couldn't get in contact with him, probably because he was traveling through low ground to the west of the 8th CIA compound. Not being able to contact him, I decided to go with the planned H-hour. The assault element at this time abandoned its stealthful movement and began to run to the assault position. They exited the jungle about 100 meters south of the planned spot and quickly moved to the correct spot (Beech, AAR).

At 0053, I exited the club compound in Humvee that contained the scout/anti-tank section. The Vulcan team, pulling the Vulcan followed us. Our route forced us to skirt the area that the composite platoon occupied, and there were still

tracers flying in the air at that time.

At 0057, 1st Platoon armed its AT-4's and LAW's and crawled into its support position (Campbell, AAR). At almost exactly 0100 hours, the Vulcan backed into position and opened fire. Simultaneously, 1st Platoon opened fire from its support-by-fire position concentrating on supporting the breach element's approach and the rooms that were known to contain command and control equipment and personnel. The support positions fired for two minutes, and then a surrender solicitation was read over a loudspeaker.

At this time, two members from Second Platoon crawled forward and leaned a bangalore torpedo on the perimeter fence around the compound. The fence was set into a two-foot high concrete wall and had concertina wire on top. The bangalore had a thirty second time fuse and blew a breach into the compound (Beech, AAR).

After firing 500 rounds, my support position moved to the reload site to prepare the Vulcan for further missions. As we pulled away, we heard the pre-recorded surrender request being read over the speakers. During the initial suppression of the objective, the PDF returned fire, but for the most part, it was high and ineffective. It appeared that our high volume of fire did not allow them to place aimed shots at us. The only casualty sustained by our company was Sergeant Moli Sapatu, a squad leader in 1st Platoon. An RPG-18 round impacted next to

him, and he received fragments in his leg. The expended RPG was later found in the compound.

During the surrender solicitation, 2nd Squad, 1st Platoon, moved up to the Post Office to provide overwatch for the units about to enter the compound. 3rd Squad, 1st Platoon, moved to an adjacent location to cover the main gate of the compound. 1st Squad, 1st Platoon collected up approximately 80 prisoners who had surrendered and moved them to a EPW holding area in the baseball field (Campbell, AAR).

While this was occurring, the Vulcan pulled into the designated cul-de-sac and reloaded. The scout/anti-tank section formed a hasty security perimeter using the houses. It was at this time I confronted a resident of the housing area who was dressed in Battle Dress Uniform and carrying a pistol. He asked me if I needed any help, and I asked him to please return to his home. Looking back, he's lucky he wasn't shot by one of our soldiers because he approached our perimeter without warning.

Meanwhile, the Third Platoon breached the perimeter wire with bolt cutters because the fire team with the demolitions was still moving through the jungle. The 3rd Platoon threw smoke grenades to conceal its movement and gained a foothold in Building 212. At this time, the soldiers had no idea how many PDF soldiers remained in the compound. They began clearing the building systematically. This involved three-man groups clearing rooms by throwing a grenade in them and then spraying

the room with fire. As this lead element cleared the building, they acquired PDF shotguns and used those to clear the rooms and open locked doors. They found that the shotguns were safer than throwing grenades in the rooms. The M203 had a buckshot round but lacked the power of a real shotgun (Beech, AAR).

With the Vulcan reloaded, we began to move in the direction of the composite platoon who were still throwing grenades in the jungle around the entrance to the NCO Academy. Our route to the next support-by-fire position took us through the backyards of some of the houses on post. The Vulcan gunner pointed his barrel straight up as we were moving so he wouldn't point it at friendly troops or any houses. As we passed under a tree, the barrel caught a large branch and destroyed the hydraulics of the gun system. The gun was out of action for the time being.

The composite platoon seemed to have things under control at the NCO academy. It was escorting prisoners who had surrendered at the main entrance to a nearby tennis court, the designated holding area. It hadn't begun clearing the buildings yet, but soldiers were still throwing an occasional grenade in the jungle by the entrance. I contacted Captain Beech on the radio and gave him an update on the situation. He instructed the scout/anti-tank section to take charge of the prisoners. The interrogation team had already started working on them at the tennis court. Soon, we had about fifty prisoners on our

hands.

Back in Building 212, 3rd Platoon requested a squad to help clear the remaining rooms. A squad from 2nd Platoon entered the building and secured the final section. Once Building 212 was cleared, Lt. Osenbaugh shot off a green and white star cluster, signalling 2nd Platoon to clear Building 213. The 2nd Platoon cleared the building using the same techniques as the 3rd Platoon. Neither platoon found any additional enemy in either building (Beech, AAR). The platoons did find a large cache of weapons and ammunition in the basement of Building 212. Approximately 500 automatic weapons were found, as well as a few heavy machine guns. Many of these weapons had had large numbers of loaded magazines by them. At the guard shacks, automatic weapons were found with the magazines inserted and rounds loaded but the rifles had been dropped and the owners had apparently surrendered. The 8th CIA looked liked they had been prepared to fight but, for some reason, did so for only a few minutes. The 8th CIA compound was cleared of all enemy and secured at 0347 hours (4-17 INF Assault CP Log).

Captain Beech was then ordered to clear the NCO Academy. There is still a great deal of controversy about this order. Captain Beech maintains that the Task Force operations order clearly stated that the composite platoon was supposed to clear these buildings unless resistance was met. The composite platoon had isolated the peninsula but had not yet entered any

buildings to clear the school of any enemy. The only resistance it had encountered was the initial firing by the sentry at the main gate.

The 2nd Platoon moved from the 8th CIA compound and set up a security perimeter to the west of the Gulick Lodge and the tennis courts. I radioed to Corporal Bennie Jones, the Alpha Company supply sergeant, to bring a resupply of ammunition from the Officer Club ammunition bunker. He gathered up the ammunition and drove it down the hill in a Humvee. The extra ammunition was distributed to the platoon by the squad leaders. Captain Beech also radioed 1st Platoon and ordered Lieutenant Campbell to send a squad to reinforce 2nd Platoon. Captain Beech gathered SFC Western and me together, and we discussed how we were going to clear the buildings. The school compound consisted of three buildings: the main school building (Building 400), a small apartment building known as the BOQ (Building 403), and a barracks building (Building 401) similar to those in the 8th CIA compound. We would start at Building 401 which was closest to the Gulick Lodge. Captain Beech told me that he wanted me to move with 2nd Platoon as it cleared the complex. A squad from 2nd Platoon was set up in a support position, and another squad was preparing to gain a foothold in the building when Captain Beech walked up and told me to go back to the 8th CIA compound. He wanted me to ensure that the captured weapons were being evacuated and to check on the consolidation that 3rd Platoon was conducting. He then told me that he would go with 2nd Platoon instead. It was 0458 hours at this time (4-17 INF

PANAMANIAN DEFENSE FOR
NCO ACADEMY
(FORMER SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS)

GATUN
LAKE

GATUN
LAKE

BUILDING
403

BUILDING
400

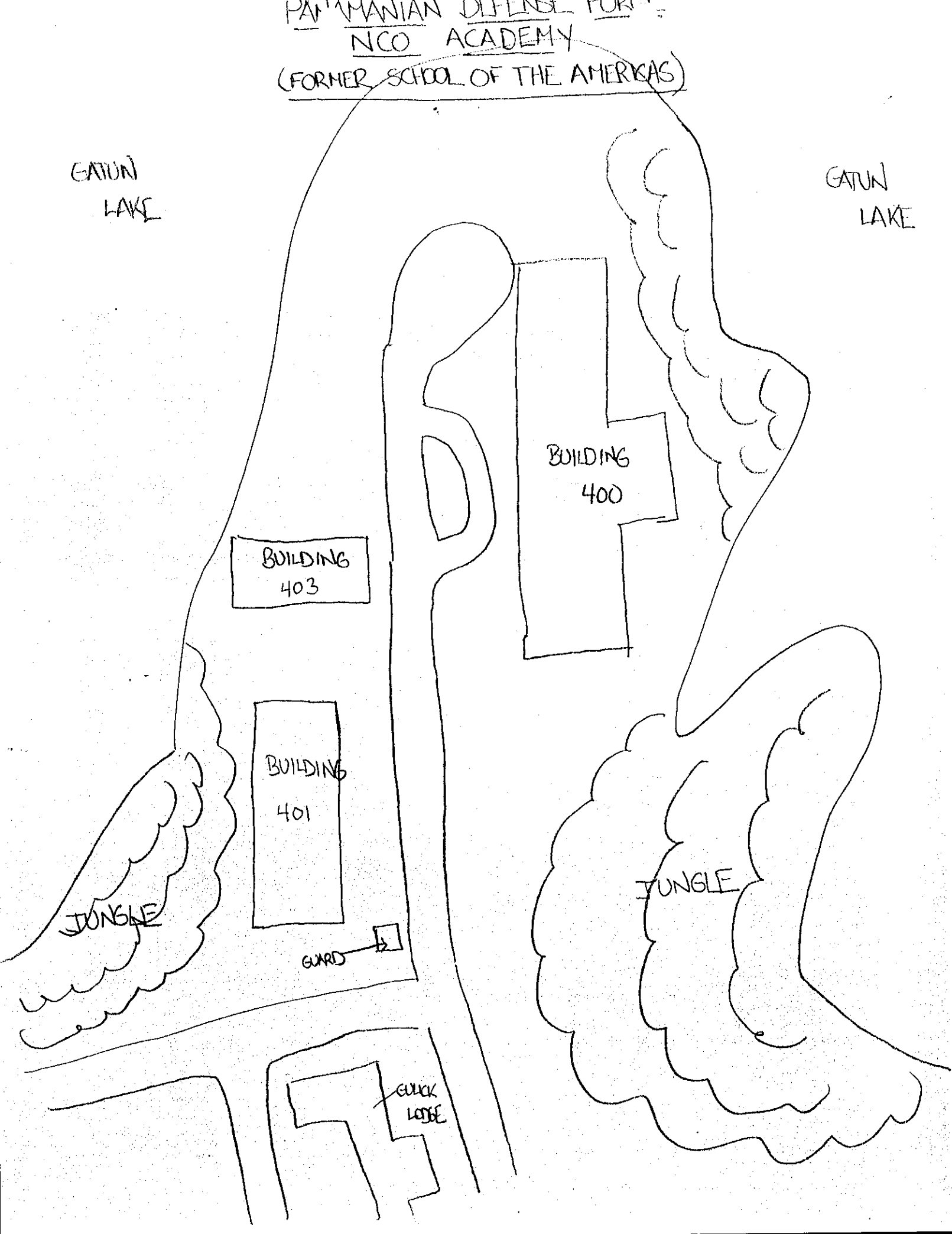
BUILDING
401

JUNGLE

JUNGLE

GUARD →

GUARD
LOBBY



Assault CP Log).

The 2nd Platoon suppressed the upper floors of the building with M203, M-60, and anti-armor weapon fire, while the initial clearing team entered the bottom floor. Once again, the soldiers had no idea if any of the buildings contained any PDF holdouts. The platoon had been instructed to use more passive techniques of room clearing. We didn't expect strong resistance from any holdouts, and we tried to avoid any fratricide. The company had been clearing rooms for about four hours, and that initial edge had begun to dull.

Inside Building 401, a soldier from the lead fire team threw a grenade into what he thought was another room. It was really a closet and the grenade bounced back into the room just as the next clearing team, Captain Beech, and his radio operators walked in. Sergeant Steven Johnson, a squad leader in 2nd Platoon, managed to kick it towards the corner before it exploded. The explosion tore a hole in a water pipe and water quickly flooded the room (Beech, AAR). The grenade left a total of nine soldiers wounded. Miraculously, no one was killed. The flak vest and Kevlar helmet had proven their worth. Only one of the wounds was to the torso area. All of the others were to arms and legs. Five of the wounded were immediately evacuated by the medics to Coco Solo hospital by a Humvee ambulance. Within hours, they were on a helicopter to Howard Air Force Base near Panama City. They were then evacuated by an Air Force

Medevac plane to Kelly Air Force Base, Texas.

An example of how quickly wounded soldiers were evacuated was demonstrated by Specialist Tony Palmerio. SPC Palmerio was one of Captain Beech's radio operators. The explosion of the grenade ripped a four inch gash in his abdomen. The cut was not very deep, and he waited until Fort Espinar was secured to seek medical attention. The company medics sent him to the aid station to get his cut cleaned and stitched. He planned to rejoin the company as soon as possible. The next word we heard from SPC Palmerio was a message from him at Kelly Air Base. It was amazing how quickly soldiers were evacuated out of Panama. A footnote--When SPC Palmerio was wounded, PVT Miller, the company supply clerk, became Captain Beech's radio operator and continued for the remaining time the company was in Panama.

Lieutenant Campbell was then instructed to move one of his squads to the school compound to complete the clearing of the buildings. He left one squad guarding prisoners at the baseball field, the other designated holding area. The squad picked up an ammunition resupply near the Gulick Lodge and linked up with the remaining two squads of 2nd Platoon who had completed clearing Building 401. The 2nd Squad of 2nd platoon set up an overwatch position and 1st Platoon entered Building 403. Each squad cleared a floor. One holdout was captured in this building. He had been hiding in a shower in one of the rooms (Campbell, AAR).

Another overwatch position was established while 2nd

LESSONS LEARNED AND COMMENTS

ISSUE: Flak Vests saved lives.

COMMENTS: Even though the flak vest is extra weight and impedes freedom of movement, it saved the lives of several Alpha Company soldiers. Improvements need to be made to develop lighter and more functional flak vests.

ISSUE: Use of shotguns for clearing buildings.

COMMENTS: Shotguns are safer and more effective in clearing buildings in the environment in which Alpha Company operated. The company did not have to fight from room-to-room and grenades proved to be too much firepower. Additionally, the shotguns were very effective in blowing locks off of doors. Infantry units do not have shotguns as organic equipment. All shotguns used were captured weapons and the unit continued to use them the rest of the time in Panama for looting control and curfew control. The M-203 grenade launcher has a buckshot round but it proved to be too weak to be effective.

ISSUE: LAW more effective on buildings than the new AT-4.

COMMENTS: The AT-4's higher kinetic energy produced very small holes in buildings. Alpha company had anticipated using anti-tank weapons to help make breaches into buildings. The LAW produced a larger blast effect but it would take several shots at the same point to produce a usable hole in a building.

ISSUE: PRC-126 Radios (Squad Radio) are invaluable.

COMMENT: A reliable piece of equipment. It allowed platoons to operate over wider distances with better command and control.

ISSUE: Alpha Company knew the ground it was fighting on.

COMMENT: Alpha Company had the unprecedented opportunity to become intimately familiar with Fort Espinar and the PDF for the two months prior to Operation "Just Cause." The rehearsals, training, and intimidation of the PDF resulted in a very smooth operation with minimal casualties on both sides.

ISSUE: Traditional MOUT training by U.S. Army.

COMMENTS: Army MOUT training almost solely concentrates on room-to-room fighting. This is not realistic in most low-intensity conflicts. The possibility of civilians in the area is usually not taken into account. The emphasis is on active room clearing (maximizing violence). Passive room clearing techniques are usually not taught to regular infantry soldiers. Special Operations soldiers practice them frequently. After Operation "Just Cause," the 7th Infantry Division began to train in MOUT environments of both high and low level intensity.

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