

MONOGRAPH

ACTIONS AT THE COLON BOTTLENECK, REPUBLIC OF PANAMA

20 DECEMBER - 23 DECEMBER, 1989

THIRD PLATOON, BRAVO COMPANY,

4th BATTALION, 17th INFANTRY REGIMENT,

7th INFANTRY DIVISION (LIGHT)

Captain J. Matthew Lissner

The 7th Infantry Division's involvement in Panama began on 11 May 1989, when President Bush ordered the initiation of Operation Nimrod Dancer. This was in response to increased harassment against U.S. citizens by the Panamanian Defense Force (PDF). More than sixty incidents were logged from 19 January 1989 through the end of February, 1989. This brought the total number of incidents to over 1000 since early 1988. (Donnelly, Roth, and Baker, p. 43.)

The 4th Battalion, 17th Infantry, was conducting ARTEP training at Fort Hunter-Liggett when the 7th Infantry Division (Light) was alerted. I was the Third Platoon Leader, Bravo Company, 4-17 Infantry. I had been in the unit for three weeks. Although battalion cancelled the last two weeks of the field training exercise and returned to Fort Ord on alert status, no one really thought about war.

The 2d Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, deployed to Panama on 11 May. It returned to Fort Ord three weeks later, after an easing of tensions. However, as a precautionary measure, the 7th Infantry Division began to rotate single battalions to Panama. Each battalion deployed to the Atlantic, or north, side of the Panama Canal for a three-month rotation. (Evans, p. 1.) The deployment included a rotation through the Jungle Operations Training Center (JOTC). Units were stationed at Fort Sherman, Fort Davis, Fort Espinar, and Coco Solo. These locations were

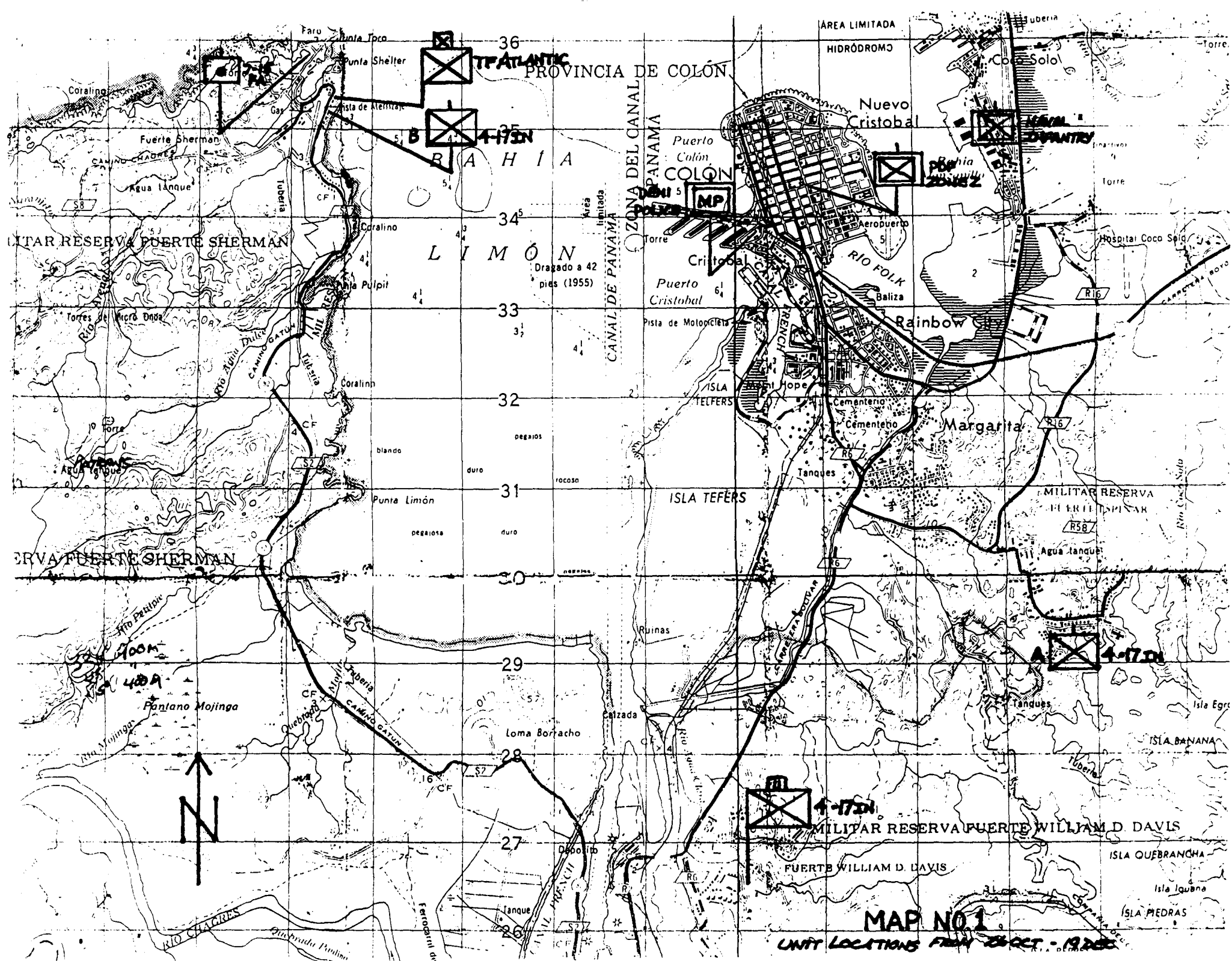
critical to secure Limon Bay. Limon Bay provides the access to the Atlantic, or northern, end of the Panama Canal (see Map No. 1).

On 25 October 1989, the 4th Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, deployed to the Republic of Panama for its three-month rotation. The battalion operated under the command of Task Force Atlantic. The Task Force's Headquarters was the 3d Brigade of the 7th Infantry Division (Light).

Bravo Company occupied building 208 on Fort Sherman. Fort Sherman was the major U.S. training area on the Atlantic side of Panama. The JOTC ran and operated within Fort Sherman's boundaries and the waters surrounding it. Fort Sherman also became the headquarters of TF Atlantic when Operation Nimrod Dancer began. Building 208 faced east towards Limon Bay (see Map No. 1). The city of Colon was visible across the four and one-half kilometers of water.

Fort Sherman's location offered relative security from PDF elements. Only one road led into and out of the military reservation. The reservation was protected on the south by the Mojinga Swamp. The Atlantic Ocean protected the north, and Limon Bay protected the east. Thick jungle and the Chagres River provided a difficult barrier to the west.

Approximately 30 U.S. families lived at Fort Sherman. There was also a Flight Landing Strip (FLS) capable of handling C-131



36
ATLANTIC
 PROVINCIA DE COLÓN

35
BAHIA

34
LIMÓN
 Dragado a 42
 pies (1955)

ZONA DEL CANAL DE PANAMA

CANAL DE PANAMA

PUERTO COLÓN

PUERTO CRISTOBAL

ISLA TEFERS

AREA LIMITADA

HIDRODROMO

NUEVO CRISTOBAL

PUERTO CRISTOBAL

CRISTOBAL

RAINBOW CITY

MARGARITA

ISLA BANANA

ISLA QUEBRANCHA

ISLA IGUANA

ISLA PIEDRAS

MILITAR RESERVA FUERTE SHERMAN

MILITAR RESERVA FUERTE SHERMAN

MILITAR RESERVA FUERTE ESPINAR

MILITAR RESERVA FUERTE WILLIAM D DAVIS

FUERTE WILLIAM D DAVIS

MAP NO. 1

UNIT LOCATIONS FROM 26 OCT. - 19 DEC.



aircraft and all types of helicopters. These factors, including TF Atlantic's headquarters, made Fort Sherman a possible target for PDF harassment or military operations.

The mission of 4-17 IN eventually encompassed four phases: Training at the JOTC for three weeks, security for U.S. property and personnel, combat operations (Operation Just Cause), and police/civil affairs operations.

The initial acclimatization of weather, terrain, and political situation appeared relatively easy for Bravo Company. Within a few days, soldiers staked their claims to bunks and anticipated the challenge of jungle operations training. After three weeks of training in the jungle, the entire company became acclimatized to the hot, rainy weather and welcomed the end of the rainy season. The JOTC taught the soldiers a great number of skills and techniques. Unfortunately, except for a very minimal understanding of the Spanish language, very few of these jungle techniques would come into play in the following months.

In mid-November, Bravo Company Commander, Captain Doug Thorp, assembled his executive officer and platoons leaders. He briefed us on Operation Blue Spoon. The operation was classified, and we were told not to discuss it with our subordinates. The operation included several contingency missions involving combat operations against the PDF. The officers of Bravo Company were psyched-up about the possibility

of a real mission, although there was no apparent necessity for combat operations at the time.

After the completion of JOTC, about 18 November, Captain Thorp was tasked to break the company down into three elements. One was the TF headquarters guard force, one was the convoy guard force, and one was the training element. Each element was platoon-sized and rotated responsibilities about every week. Security for U.S. property, civilian, and military personnel was the primary focus of Bravo Company during this phase of deployment to Panama.

The TF headquarters guard force was responsible for security of Building 212. Guards maintained posts at each of the outer entrances, the main floor inner entrance, and the entrance to the Tactical Operations Center (TOC) on the second floor. A four-man detail also patrolled the air FLS and the fuel depot. Guard shifts were eight hours on, 16 hours off. This duty was the most boring of all, but it provided the soldiers a sense of duty by protecting the TF commander and his staff. They also were able to catch some news first hand.

The convoy guard force ensured the safety of the weekly logistics convey between Fort Sherman and Howard Air Force Base. This force was platoon-sized and carried a basic load of live ammunition. Soldiers kept their weapons locked and loaded during the convoy movement. Kevlars, flak vests, and camouflage were

worn during movement also. The convoy missions offered the soldiers a chance to see some of the countryside and the native people and their culture. The missions also offered the leaders the opportunity to recon possible routes, terrain, and fixed PDF locations.

The training element conducted localized training. Common Task Training (CTT), patrolling, first-aid, and live fire exercises (LFXs) were part of this localized training. One squad of the platoon was designated the quick reaction force (QRF), in case of an emergency. The designated squad had to react within one minute of notification. The remaining two squads had to conduct training near enough to reinforce the QRF squad within 30 minutes.

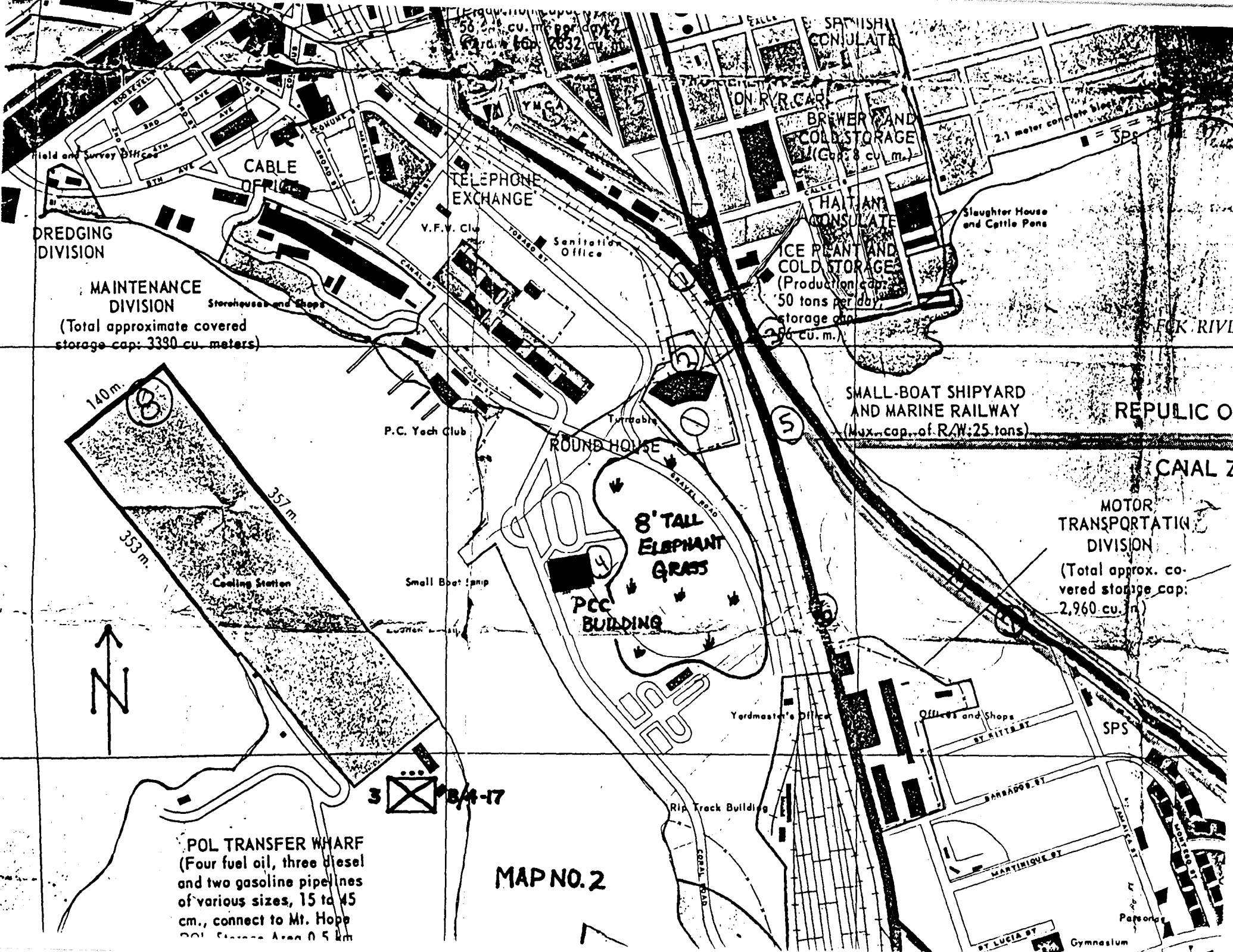
One of the training missions involved working with a Navy small boat team. We conducted joint operations with the team along the Chagres River. Several members of the boat team were Navy SEALs including their skipper, Lieutenant Adams (Thorp, AAR).

Operating and training in a hostile foreign country had its good and bad points. One of the bad points was that anything we lost could be used against us. Therefore, accountability of equipment and ammunition was checked on a daily basis. Each platoon in the company had its own arms room. Every round of live and blank ammunition was counted daily. Either one of my

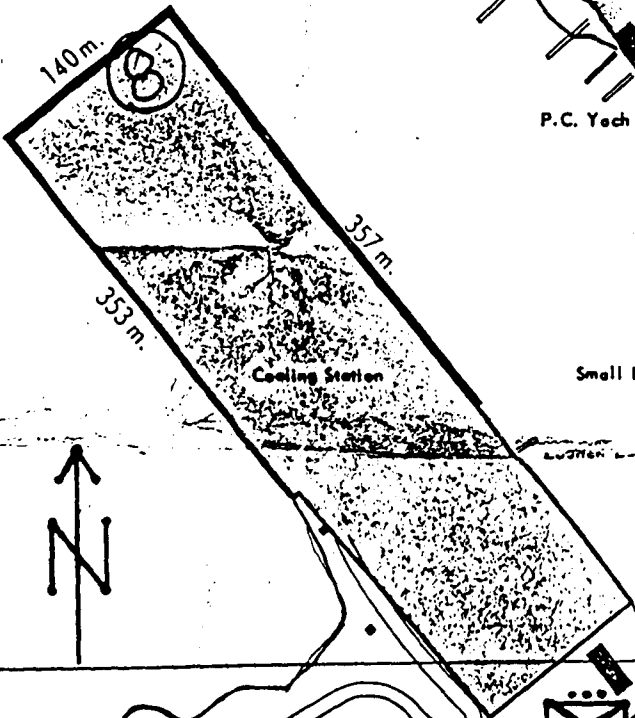
NCOs or I conducted serial number checks on all weapons and sensitive items daily, also. Each soldier learned to realize the importance of constant accountability.

The accountability of individual equipment was stressed during layout inspections before and after "Sand Fleas." These Sand Fleas were short duration readiness exercises. The intent was to expose leaders and their soldiers to different types of contingency missions. Initially, in November, troop motivation was quite high. The company completed a successful and rewarding JOTC rotation. The Sand Fleas kept everyone interested because of the variety of missions and distribution of live ammo.

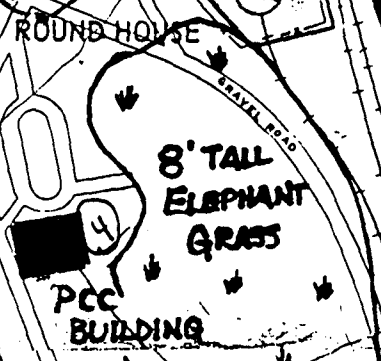
One particular Sand Flea gave 3d Platoon a short recon of what would be its actual objective at the Bottleneck of the city of Colon. The company moved from Fort Sherman after dark, as usual, to Fort Davis. Fort Davis was the company staging area. We drove north to Mount Hope and dismounted at the POL Transfer Wharf (see Map No. 2). From this location, we could observe east across French Canal to the Panama Canal Commission (PCC) building. The only intelligence we obtained from this "recon" was that the PCC Building was concrete, about 75 feet by 150 feet, and 3 stories high. There was a large sliding metal door on the south side. The building was surrounded by a ten-foot high chain link fence, and the exterior was very well lighted.



MAINTENANCE DIVISION
 (Total approximate covered storage cap: 3380 cu. meters)



POL TRANSFER WHARF
 (Four fuel oil, three diesel and two gasoline pipelines of various sizes, 15 to 45 cm., connect to Mt. Hope POL Storage Area 0.5 km)



SMALL-BOAT SHIPYARD AND MARINE RAILWAY
 (Max. cap. of R/W: 25 tons)

MOTOR TRANSPORTATION DIVISION
 (Total approx. covered storage cap: 2,960 cu. m.)

MAP NO. 2

The company moved back to Fort Sherman at midnight. The Sand Flea was supposed to be a recon for the leaders of Bravo Company. It helped me a little but was practically useless for the other platoon leaders. Neither of the other two platoon leaders could see their objectives or the route leading to them.

Morale in the company remained high through Thanksgiving. However, morale began to drop and boredom began to increase in the early weeks of December. This was probably due to the repetition of the cyclic missions and the thought of spending Christmas away from home.

The intensity and urgency of our mission in Panama reached a new height on 15 December. Soldiers at Fort Sherman and throughout TF Atlantic began hearing rumors that the U.S. was at war with Panama. Most of us never thought Manuel Noriega or the PDF would do anything to create a state of war.

On 15 December, Noriega deposed Francisco Rodriguez and installed himself as head of government, declaring before a Panamanian legislature packed with his cronies that Panama was in "a state of war" with the United States. (Donnelly, Roth, and Baker, p. 93.)

On 16 December, the "state of war" got personal. Marine Lieutenant Robert Paz was shot and killed in downtown Panama City. A Navy lieutenant and his wife witnessed the shooting. He and his wife were interrogated, beaten, and finally released.

(Donnelly, Roth, and Baker, p. 94-95.) The next day, I learned from Captain Thorp that the Navy officer was Lieutenant Adams.

Captain Thorp and the other company commanders reported to TF Atlantic headquarters around mid-day on 19 December. Word spread quickly that something was "going down." My platoon had TF headquarters guard duty that day. Therefore, I had only two squads to operate with until a relief force formed. In addition, my platoon sergeant returned to Fort Ord two weeks earlier to be with his wife who was having surgery.

Captain Thorp was still in the TF TOC as the company was drawing and distributing ammo. This was just like every other Sand Flea, and no one knew for sure if this one would be real or not. Bravo Company reached Fort Davis at 1900 and staged at the sniper range as usual. We knew it was real when First Sergeant Durham began unwrapping the AT-4s, LAWs, and grenades. Until this time, everything except small arms ammunition remained in the wrapper.

At approximately 2100, 4-17 IN executive officer, Major Jim Coggin, and Captain Thorp returned from TF headquarters. Captain Thorp briefed the company XO and platoon leaders. Operation Blue Spoon was now Operation Just Cause. We were going into combat. Bravo Company's mission was to secure the Bottleneck of Colon. The Bottleneck was an isthmus approximately 300-400 meters wide. Whoever controlled the Bottleneck at the southern end of Colon

controlled the only rail, vehicular, and dismounted avenue of approach into or out of the city.

Sealing off Colon was an important mission. The city was a Dignity Battalion stronghold, with thousands of Noriega loyalists among the unemployed stevedores and duty-free port workers, who had fallen on hard times during the two years of American economic sanctions following Noriega's criminal indictment. The officers who had written the Blue Spoon OPLAN fully anticipated armed resistance from the civilians of Colon. (McConnell p. 149.)

The actual mission statement was "B Co, 4-17 IN, attacks 200100 Dec 89 to secure the Bottleneck of Colon to prevent enemy movement out of the city." (Thorp, AAR.) My platoon's mission was to attack 200100 Dec 89 to secure the Panama Canal Commission (PCC) Building to prevent enemy movement out of the city and protect 2d Platoon's right flank.

As part of the plan, each platoon in Bravo Company would detach a squad to assist the engineers in constructing a wire obstacle at the Bottleneck. The squads used civilian school buses to haul the wire and as barricades.

I briefed my acting platoon sergeant, Staff Sergeant George Hodge, and the squad leaders about our mission. Except for a few detail changes, the plan was similar to the Sand Flea conducted earlier in December. The biggest problem I faced was manpower. One squad remained at Fort Sherman as the TF HQ guard, and one squad was about to be detached to assist the engineers. When I questioned Captain Thorp about my personnel shortage, he assured

my that my squad at Fort Sherman would rejoin me before we left Fort Davis.

Major Coggin assembled his task force at 2300. Team Coggin's task organization was: B Co, 4-17 IN (-), 7-15 FA FIST, one Advance Trauma Life Support (ATLS) team, one MP platoon (549 MP Co), a transportation section from JOTC, two sniper teams from 4-17 IN Scout Platoon, and four school buses.

In the warm, muggy darkness, Major Coggin addressed the leaders and soldiers. He spoke calmly and assuredly. His message was clear to everyone. We were going into combat, and we were prepared for our mission.

Although I believed that the company was trained and prepared for the mission, I could feel the apprehension within the company. Only two platoon sergeants and the first sergeant had been to combat before.

Another problem I faced was determining a vehicular route to my objective. None of the maps indicated a road leading to the PCC Building. The main map of Colon was so old it did not even show the PCC Building at all. Major Coggin informed me that the MPs had an aerial photograph of Colon. I never got to see the photograph. A sergeant from the MP platoon told me he would point the way to the PCC Building as the convoy approached the Bottleneck. That turned out to be very poor coordination.

The squad that remained as TF HQ guard finally joined us before midnight. I briefed the squad leaders again on my plan and they backbriefed me. Everyone understood the plan and were prepared to execute it.

My plan was to use one squad as left and right security on the objective. The two M-60 machine gun teams would provide an overwatch position. The remaining squad would provide rear security and, on order, clear the PCC Building. My RTO, Specialist Jones, my Spanish speaker/interpreter, Specialist Cora, and I would breach the wire and gain a foothold into the building.

Team Coggin was lined up and ready to move at 0030 on 20 December. The convoy consisted of four school buses, six or seven five-ton trucks, two ambulances, three command HMMWVs, and six MP HMMWVs mounted with M-60 machine guns.

It was 0043 on D-Day. My platoon was last in the order of movement. Two MP gun trucks pulled in front of my five-ton just as the convoy began to roll. This was not a part of the original plan, but I thought it was the MP sergeant with whom I had coordinated for directions earlier. The MPs stopped at the first major intersection outside of Margarita, which was a small suburb south of Colon. I stopped my two vehicles and asked for directions to the PCC Building. The MPs had no idea where it was.

I ordered my driver to continue north along road R6 towards Colon. As we approached the Bottleneck, I heard gunfire from the direction of Fort Espinar. It did not occur to me that Alpha Company was in contact prior to H-Hour. In that brief time of two minutes, we passed our turn and ended up with the rest of Team Coggin as it was dismounting. I quickly ordered the driver to turn around and head south. The entrance to a small road was barely visible about 300 meters down the road. We turned onto it.

I halted the trucks about 150 meters past the turn to get my bearings. I could not determine where the PCC Building was located. A hail of gunfire erupted from the vicinity of Team Coggin's detrucking point. I could see tracer rounds passing 15 to 20 feet over our heads. Soldiers from the second truck dismounted and deployed into the bushes on the side of the road. I did not believe that my platoon was under direct enemy observation or fire. First Sergeant Durham gave the order to dismount from the second truck. I found him a moment later, and we argued about our location and the deployment of my soldiers from the second truck.

I ordered Sergeant Hodge to collect the dismounted squad and "give me an up" when it was back on the truck. We turned around and headed back to the main road to confirm our location and determine the correct route to the PCC Building. I found the MPs

again and asked once again if they knew the route to my objective. The response was negative.

The first sergeant and I decided to try the same small road we were on when the tracers passed overhead. This time we had our compasses out and observers dedicated to watch for the building. My driver followed the small road 150 meters past the original dismount point to a bend in the road which put our objective into plain view. I halted the trucks and gave the order to dismount at 0115 on 20 December. Finally, things were going according to plan.

Sergeant Hodge took charge of the M-60 teams in the overwatch position. Sergeant Jordan directed his squad to provide left and right security at the flanks of the PCC Building. Sergeant Wooston's squad provided rear security and prepared to clear the objective on my order.

My three-man element moved along the edges of eight-foot tall elephant grass to the edge of the chain-link fence when Sergeant Jordan radioed that his squad was in position. At 0130, I radioed Captain Thorp and told him we were beginning our breach of the wire. Specialist Cora gave a verbal warning in Spanish and English. The warning demanded anyone in the building to identify themselves and throw out any weapons. Our entire task force had strict rules of engagement. Minimal collateral damage with preservation of human life had to be maintained unless

absolutely necessary. After three warnings with no response from within the building, I surmised it was probably empty.

I cut through the fence with my bayonet and moved to the edge of the building with Specialists Jones and Cora close behind. We tried to shoot out the exterior lights to give us more concealment, but the ricochets proved too dangerous for adjacent units. The mercury vapor light relit themselves anyway. My small breach element circled the entire building and found the two large metal doors were locked from the outside. At this point, I concluded that no hostile forces were inside.

Specialist Jones radioed Sergeant Hodge, and I ordered one soldier to try to breach the rear door with a LAW round. The soldier fired into the third floor by mistake. My next choice was to blow a hole through the outer wall with a claymore. However, my platoon did not receive demolition equipment prior to mission deployment. I radioed Sergeant Wooston to bring two claymores to my location. When he reached my position, he realized that he lost the clackers. I radioed for Sergeant Hodge to send another soldier forward with a clacker. Finally, I set the charge and blew a three-by-five foot hole in the side of the building. At approximately 0150, Specialist Cora threw a grenade through the hole, and we entered, gaining a foothold.

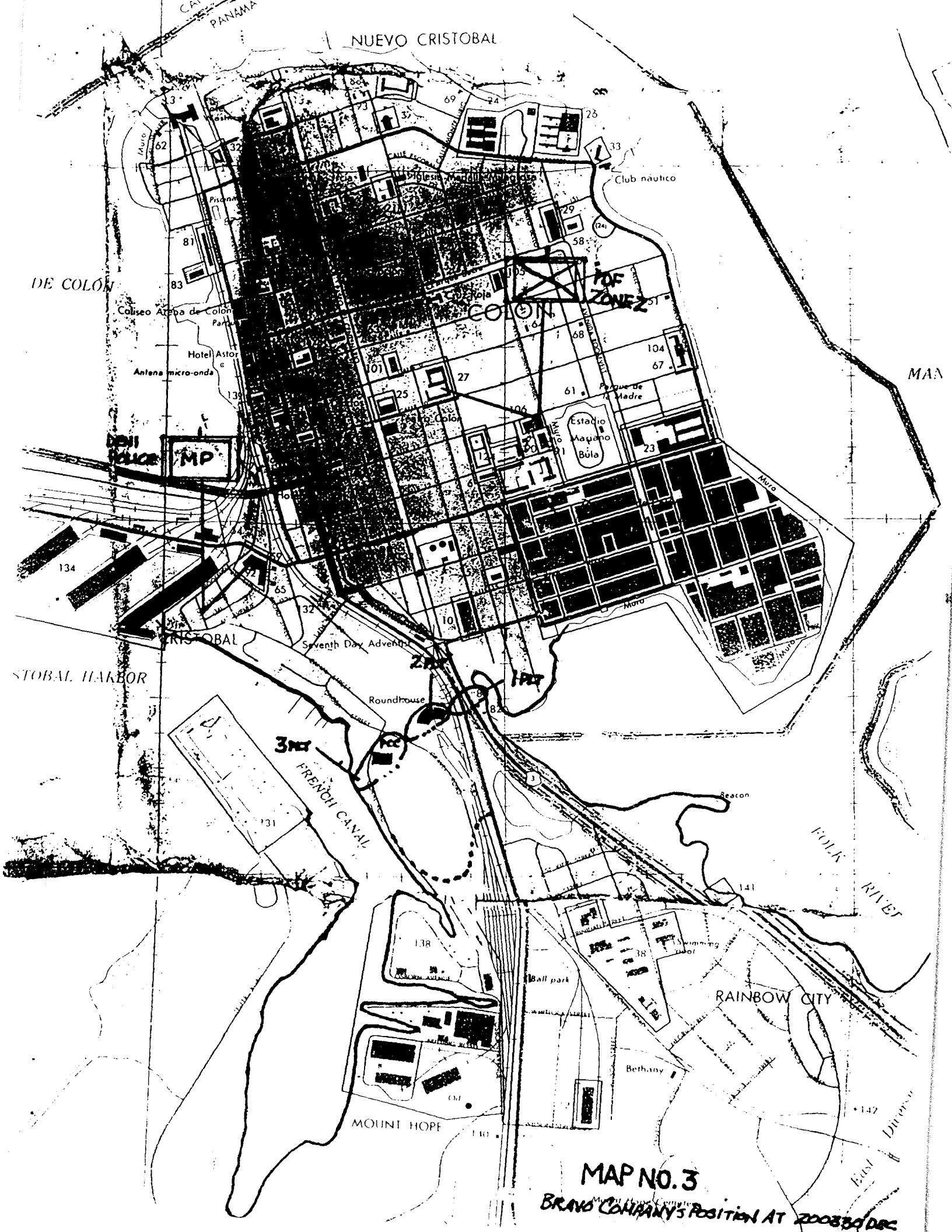
Specialist Cora repeated the warning once we secured the first room. There was no reply. Specialist Jones radioed

Captain Thorp that we had a foothold. Sergeant Wooston was monitoring the radio and brought his squad through the breached wall. My three-man element quickly continued to clear the rest of the building up to the top floor. There were no PDF or civilians in the building. Sergeant Wooston's squad occupied positions on the top floor, oriented towards Colon. I radioed Captain Thorp at approximately 0220 and informed him that my platoon objective was secure.

At approximately 0230, Staff Sergeant Kusinski radioed that he was enroute to my location. His squad suffered one KIA and one WIA while assisting the engineers with the obstacles. Specialists Gibbs and Velotta were shot from behind. Gibbs died instantly and Velotta, after refusing evacuation to the states, returned to the platoon. Specialist Velotta reported that he thought the gunfire that engaged Gibbs and him came from an MP gun truck.

Sergeant Jordan completed a link-up with 2d Platoon at 0320. The tying in of 2d and 3d platoons sealed the Bottleneck and ensured Bravo Company's mission success. Captain Thorp reported the Colon Bottleneck secure to battalion headquarters at 0330, 20 December 1989 (see Map No. 3.)

Bravo Company received sporadic small arms fire throughout the remainder of the night and into midday. I could observe massive looting in the container yard 800 meters north of my



PANAMA

NUEVO CRISTOBAL

DE COLON

Coliseo Atiba de Colon

Hotel Astor

Antena micro-onda

MP

COLON

DE ZONEZ

MAN

STOBAL HARBOR

CRISTOBAL

Seventh Day Advent

Roundhouse

3RD FRENCH CANAL

FOLK RIVER

RAINBOW CITY

MOUNT HOPE

MAP NO. 3

BRAVO COMPANY'S POSITION AT 200830 DRC

position from the top of the PCC Building. Our orders were to prevent looting. Private First Class Summers fired his M-60 over the looters' heads several times. The looters scattered for cover momentarily and then returned to the goods they were stealing. I did not want to risk shooting unarmed civilians, and my platoon was in no danger from the looters. Therefore, I ordered my soldiers not to fire into the container yard again without my authorization.

I received a FRAGO in the late afternoon on 21 December. My platoon's mission was to screen forward through the container yard to pass B Company, 3/504 IN (Airborne), into position to attack the National Department of Investigation (DENI) Police Headquarters. My platoon received Class I and V resupply, rehearsed the mission, and was ready to execute by 1900. At approximately 2300, the mission was postponed until further notice.

Major Coggin ordered me to execute a reconnaissance plan to include recording personnel movement, vehicular movement, and planning a dismounted route recon in and around the container yard. We maintained constant surveillance from the rooftop of the PCC Building.

A four-man sniper team from SEAL Team Two co-located with my platoon on the morning of 22 December. Its attempts to deter looters by shooting was unsuccessful also. The team helped with

reconnaissance and route planning through the container yard. At 1400, Major Coggin informed me the screen mission was a "go" for 1900 and that the SEAL sniper team would leave our area of operations before nightfall.

Staff Sergeant Kusinski's squad breached the wire into the container yard at 1830. The remainder of the platoon began clearing the 500 meters through the container yard. At 1905, I radioed Major Coggin that the container yard was clear as I set my platoon into a small perimeter. One squad oriented south to prevent any enemy from following us from the rear. The other two squads oriented north. There was very little cover and concealment. Only a small guard shack and two semi-trailers masked my platoon from the flood lights of the adjacent streets.

Bravo Company, 3/504, moved into its assault position. Simultaneously, two towed 105-mm howitzers, escorted by two 549MP gun trucks, pulled in front of my platoon position. The artillery guns positioned 150 meters north of my location in direct lay mode. The howitzers were emplaced to suppress any enemy in the DENI headquarters as Bravo Company, 3/504, attacked. The two MP vehicles parked approximately 75 meters north of my platoon.

When the artillery opened fire on the DENI Building, the MPs fired also. However, the MP fire partially cut off Bravo Company's advance, and several M-60 bursts were directed back at

my platoon. The MPs had engaged my platoon twice in three days. Sergeant Jordan and I immediately moved to determine if any of his squad members had been hit. Luckily no one was injured, although the semi-trailers they used for cover had several holes.

Sergeant Jordan and I stood up and walked towards the chain-link fence that separated our platoon from the MPs. We waved our hands and shouted "cease fire." The MPs finally stopped shooting after two more bursts from the M-60s. Apparently, they recognized our rag top Kevlars and decided we were friendly troops.

Bravo Company, 3/504, secured the DENI Headquarters at approximately 2200. Captain Dyer radioed for me to bring my platoon into Bravo Company's perimeter. I linked-up with Captain Dyer at his command post and coordinated to position my platoon within the company's perimeter. My mission was to act as the company reserve until further notice.

At 2315, I located Major Coggin. He was reprimanding the MP platoon leader for not controlling the small arms fire of his element. I was still enraged because my platoon received fire from the same friendly unit twice within three days.

Captain Thorp radioed me at approximately 2350. My platoon was to move through the ravaged streets of Colon to link-up with the rest of Bravo Company, 4-17 IN. Ten minutes later, I completed the link-up and received new orders. This was the end

of combat missions in the city of Colon. My platoon conducted police and civil affairs missions in the city from 23 December 1989 to 2 January 1990.

Overall, Operation Just Cause was very successful. The squads, platoons, and companies of 4-17 IN performed well. However, there were problems that could have led to disaster if the Colon Bottleneck had been defended more strongly or if the PDF had counterattacked.

The reconnaissance plan did not help anyone below company level. The lack of intelligence both on the construction of the PCC Building and the route to it could have caused a high number of casualties. If the PDF had occupied the PCC Building, my platoon would have been attrited and not been able to secure 2d Platoon's flank.

Coordination with the MP unit was far from acceptable. It was in the wrong position on more than one occasion. This was evident during the convoy from Fort Davis to the Bottleneck and along the forward edge of battle area (FEBA) at the Bottleneck.

The MPs apparently did not know or follow the ROE. They fired without confirming their targets as friendly or enemy at least three times.

The soldiers of 3d Platoon, Bravo Company, 4-17 IN maintained discipline throughout the entire operation. They adhered to the known Rules of Engagement. Training prepared the

soldiers for many situations encountered during the combat operation. However, the situations not covered in training became leadership challenges. These challenges were most evident when conducting police/civil affairs operations and dealing with friendly casualties.

Knowing the mission and retaining flexibility to operate enabled all elements of 4-17 IN to achieve success during Operation Just Cause.

LESSONS LEARNED

LEADERSHIP - "Just Cause was hallmarked by good leadership from the commanders at the top downward to the officers and noncommissioned officers in the field." (Watson and Thomas, p. 189.)

The success of Just Cause was due in great part to good leadership, which is one of the facets of relative combat power. Our leaders, from battalion commander to fire team leader, knew the mission and how to accomplish it while conforming to the rules of engagement.

DISCIPLINE - "The instinct for survival runs very high on the battlefield, and accomplishing the aims of Just Cause ran counter to that feeling. The result was a very low loss of life, directly reflecting the great discipline and high professional standards of the combat forces involved." (Watson and Thomas, p. 191.)

My platoon acted professionally under adverse circumstances. Two soldiers were engaged by friendly fire and suffered various extent of casualties. Although comrades of the casualties wanted revenge, the soldiers remained professional and adhered to the rules of engagement (ROE). Third platoon kept collateral damage to an absolute minimum throughout combat and civil-military operations.

TRAINING - The soldiers of third platoon, B Co, 4-17 IN, were highly trained for the combat operations during Just Cause. Countless hours of Military Operations on Urban Terrain (MOUT)

training were conducted in the months prior to deployment to Panama. Also, ROE training was practiced repeatedly under various conditions to ensure safety of civilian life and minimize collateral damage. This training enabled my platoon to complete all missions while adhering to the ROE.

FLAK VESTS - Flak vests save lives in combat. Specialist Velotta received only minor wounds while wearing his flak vest. The vest stopped two M-60 rounds from penetrating and slowed one enough to cause only minor injury.

RECONNAISSANCE - Thorough reconnaissance is critical to any combat operation. The amount of time it took my platoon to reach the objective could have been critical if an enemy element occupied the PCC Building. If I had been able to see an aerial photograph, an updated map, or been allowed to drive by the area of operations, no time would have been lost trying to reach the objective.

COORDINATION - Coordination with friendly units is imperative. Operating with non-habitual units requires extra time and rehearsal. Infantry battalion operations regularly include training with Field Artillery, Armor, Aviation, Engineer, Signal Corps, and Air Defense units. The introduction and use of

Military Police along the forward edge of battle area (FEBA) cost one soldier his life and wounded another. The MPs should not operate along the FEBA with maneuver units.

MASSING FIREPOWER - Firepower is one element that makes up relative combat power. During operations at the Colon Bottleneck, firepower was massed to overcome any enemy threat. This massing occurred through numbers of troops, types of weapons, and amount of ammunition. However, if an enemy element had occupied the PCC Building with the intent to hold it, my platoon (-) would have had a lot of trouble securing it.

SPEED/SURPRISE - Speed and surprise are two key factors for success in offensive operations. Team Coggin achieved mission success at the Bottleneck by reaching the objective quickly. Although Alpha Company engaged the enemy before the planned H-Hour, Team Coggin still surprised the enemy forces within Colon. Team Coggin's speed in securing the Bottleneck helped TF Atlantic to secure the northern end of the Panama Canal Zone.

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