

## Chapter 5

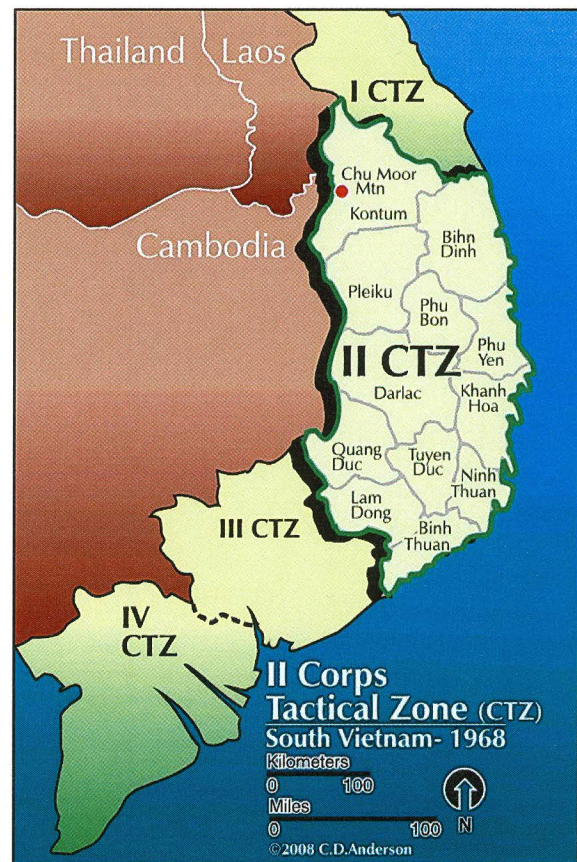
### Prelude to the Battle of Chu Moor Mountain

By April 1968, the area around Chu Moor Mountain had seldom, if ever, seen American troops in force. There had been several recent reports that aircraft flying near the mountain had taken enemy anti-aircraft fire. It appeared that this was an area worth investigating and to perhaps engage the enemy on the Vietnam side of the border, as the offensive, countryside strategy of the **MACV Commander, General William C. Westmoreland**, dictated. Therefore, the **4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's Commanding Officer, Major General Charles P. Stone**, ordered some of his Division's assets into the area.

Chu Moor Mountain lay in a valley in the II Corp Tactical Zone's Central Highlands. It was west of Kontum and just a few miles east of the Cambodian border where it formed a narrow finger, meeting both Vietnam and Laos. The Ho Chi Minh Trail crossed into Vietnam in the immediate vicinity.

The surrounding valley and mountain were heavily vegetated with jungle and large trees. **Specialist-4 and senior medic, Bud Roach**, with C/1/22 recalled, "The mountain was really a peak in a ridge line running north and south. There was a saddle on the south side of the peak that rose to another crest not quite as high. The hillside was very steep and overgrown with dense double or triple canopy forest. The NVA must have been using the area as a staging point off the Ho Chi Minh trail for many years. The entire vicinity was crawling with well-equipped and dug in NVA regulars. They had tunnels, spider holes, and snipers tied in the trees."

**Corporal Doug Stanek** described, "The enemy lived underground like moles and remained hidden most of the time. Their deep complexes had been hand dug and were vast underground living quarters, complete with hospitals, kitchens, sleeping areas and ammo dumps." The tunnels were nearly impervious to most bombing attacks.





Approximately 2,000 meters to the east of Chu Moor Mountain, and across a stream laden valley, was the 1/22's temporary operating base and the fire support base (FSB) of C Battery, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion 42<sup>nd</sup> Artillery (4/42) with their five, 105mm howitzers. The base was called LZ C-Rations.

LZ Swinger, another FSB and temporary home of the Golden Dragons of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 14 Infantry, was situated on a hill about 3,000 meters to the northeast of the Chu Moor Mountain complex.

Besides 1/22 and 1/14, several other units would be committed to the upcoming battle, including A/1/12, B/1/8 and several aviation, artillery and engineering support units.



In late April 1968, 1/22 and C Battery, 4/42 were relocated to the newly constructed LZ C-Rations. **Roach** remembered, "What we went to was the roughest site for a firebase I had ever seen. Engineers had to clear the trees with explosives and then a bulldozer was brought in by helicopter to push the trees aside."



**Blowing an LZ**



**Dozer being transported to LZ C-Rations**

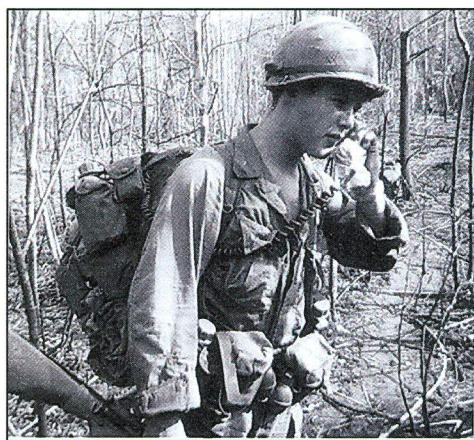


“The LZ was on the lower slope. While we were setting up, units of 1/22 plus other units were air assaulted into the area around Chu Moor,” continued **Roach**. As soldiers moved into the two firebases, company-size patrols were sent out in all directions to stir things up and see if the NVA had indeed made another incursion from their Cambodia sanctuaries. Company E/1/22 provided LZ security for the artillery batteries, which besides C/4/42 included C/5/16, C/5/22 and B & C/1/92 for a total of 25, 105mm artillery howitzer guns. The 5/16 and 1/92 Artillery were all 155mm howitzers and C/5/22 were 175mm and 8 inch howitzers.

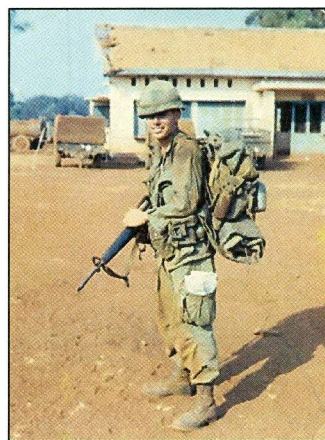
On 20 April, Company C/1/22 patrolled the area north of LZ C-Rations and southwest of LZ Swinger. An unfortunate friendly mortar round landed near their location and wounded one soldier. This was an ominous beginning to what would become a tragic week in the days ahead.

In the early morning hours of 22 April, D/1/22 under the leadership of **Captain James Burke**, slipped away from their night position, just below LZ C-Rations, and moved off in a southwesterly direction, exploring the area below Chu Moor Mountain.

Accompanying the unit was **Corporal Doug Stanek**, who was the Acting Recon Sergeant and temporary RTO (radio telephone operator) for the FO (Forward Observer), **1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant John Snellings**. They were both part of the artillery battery (C/4/42) on the LZ, and were assigned to D Company to provide them with protective and offensive 105mm gun fire.



**FO-RTO, Corporal Doug Stanek,  
C/4/42**



**FO, Lt. John Snellings,  
C/4/42**

The 42nd Artillery has a long association with the 1/22 Infantry and the 4th Infantry Division. In Vietnam the 4th Battalion of the 42nd Artillery was a towed 105mm howitzer battalion assigned to the 4th Infantry Division, to render direct support to the 2nd Brigade, of which the 1/22 Infantry was a part.

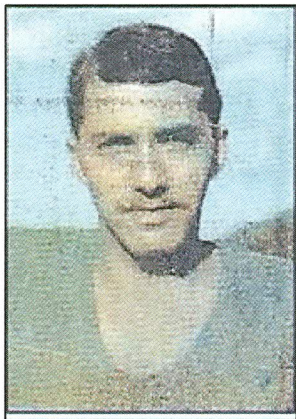


In 1966 the 4/42 Artillery deployed to Vietnam on the same ship as the 1/22 Infantry.

Its personnel shared the same firebases as the Regulars and provided forward observers to 1/22 units in the field. Many Regulars are alive today, because of the fire support given to them by the Red Legs of 4/42. The 4/42 Artillery served in Vietnam from 1966-1970. The 42nd's motto is *Festina Lente* (Make haste slowly).



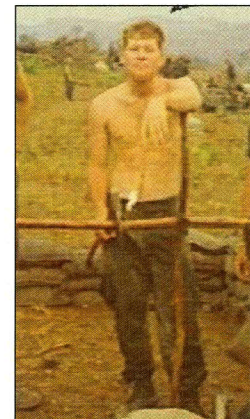
At about 0800, **Captain Burke** sent out an advanced reconnaissance patrol to reconnoiter about 500 meters in front of his main force to act as an early warning should the enemy be sighted. The small patrol consisted of **1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant John McKee**; his RTO, **Ronnie Colson**; point man, **Private Herbert 'Herbie' Hammond**; **PFC Tony DeVito**; M-79 man, **PFC Toby Van Skike**; machine gunner, **Specialist-4 Rainer Guensch**; 4.2 Mortar FO, **Specialist-4 Elbert Lynn Shadoan** and his RTO, **PFC Ray 'Skip' Diepenbrock**. At 0900, **Captain Burke** ordered his company to saddle up and to move out in the same direction as the recon team.



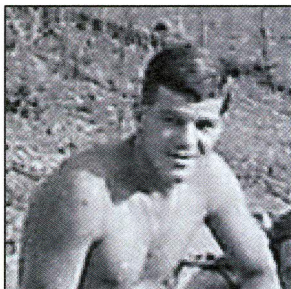
**1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant John McKee**



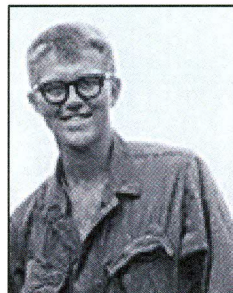
**Ronnie Colson**



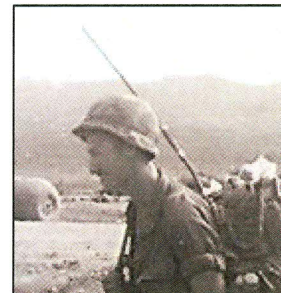
**Toby Van Skike**



**Rainer Guensch**



**Elbert Lynn Shadoan**



**Ray 'Skip' Diepenbrock**



The advanced element soon came across several well concealed, freshly made, but empty bunkers. In a high state of alertness, the team waited for a short period of time and then quietly began their return march back to the company. "I'm still not sure how **Herbie** saw them. Suddenly he opened fire and immediately received return fire from both left and right," remembered **McKee**. **Diepenbrock** reported, "**Hammond** had seen several NVA crossing our trail and opened up, killing one. We all hit the ground." The 4.2 FO tried calling in mortars but it was denied as being too dangerous because the enemy was between the team and the company, despite the fact that **Shadoan** knew their exact position as he always kept a close eye on his map coordinates.

As **Lieutenant McKee** ordered his men forward again, point man **Hammond** was fatally wounded at 1345. Small arms fire immediately broke out on both sides. The NVA were observed wearing full packs and gear.

**Guensch** started to blaze away with his M-60 to provide protective cover for the rest of the team. "I fired that 60 so much that I had a cook-off and had to break the belt to stop it."

**PFC Van Skike** was not far behind and spotted movement ahead of him as the incoming bullets filled the air. He saw an enemy soldier hiding in a hole with his left arm raised to throw a grenade. He immediately shot his M-79 in the direction of the NVA and killed him before he could toss the deadly explosive.

"I was just a few yards behind **Hammond** and moved up under fire and dragged him back about 20 yards," recalled **PFC DeVito**. "**Lieutenant McKee** then hoisted **Hammond** on his shoulders and **Guensch**, **Diepenbrock** and myself provided cover fire while the team retreated." **Tony DeVito** would later be awarded with the Army Commendation Medal with V device for this action. **Rainer Guensch** earned the Bronze Star for his bravery under fire during the fighting.

As **Colson** called in a medevac on the move, the team headed back to an LZ position about 350 meters up the trail where they set up a small perimeter. At first, the evacuation helicopter was reticent to pick up **Hammond** as the enemy was all over the area and it had difficulty in seeing and identifying friend from foe. A quick thinking **Colson** pulled out his machete and chopped out a spot in a bamboo clump. He then waved his Confederate flag that he had brought from Georgia and finally convinced them to move in and lower their basket. **Hammond's** last words were, "Somebody, please help me breathe."

According to **PFC Diepenbrock**, "**Guensch** was on the trail, **DeVito** to the right and I was on the left front and the rest of the patrol was behind us." Several minutes later, seven more NVA soldiers silently moved around their position and were just 20-feet away to their rear.

**Guensch** heard something and turned his head in the direction of the sound. “As soon as I took a quick glance behind me, I swung my machine gun around and opened up on the seven soldiers before they began to fire back.” Three of the NVA went down. The NVA returned fire and shot **Guensch’s** M-60 right out of his hands. “That’s when I saw they shot one of my bipods off, smashed my forward hand guard and put a round into my receiver. I couldn’t get it to work after that. All I had now was my .45 pistol with just three rounds.”

**Lieutenant McKee** continued, “The enemy had thrown a grenade that slightly wounded **Guensch** and his assistant gunner when I ordered the patrol to fire in all directions.”

**Diepenbrock** stated, “I slid around to the side of a tree to see if any enemy were coming on to me on my left side and spotted three NVA soldiers approximately 20 feet away shooting at the M-60 gunner on my right. I opened up on them with a short burst and killed them.”

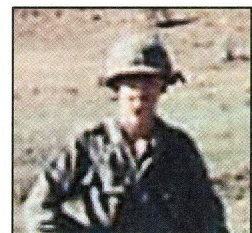
The patrol quickly bolted further back along their original route, calling in an effective gunship run of rockets and mini-gun fire on smoke grenades that were left behind to cover their retreat.

The team was eventually able to link up with the rest of their company. **Lieutenant McKee** would later state, “To this day, I think of **Herbie**, and the fact that, but for his observant eye, I might not be saying this, and the remaining elements of that patrol might also have our names displayed on The Wall.”

At 1540, D Company continued to back track its way through the valley and eventually established a nighttime position.

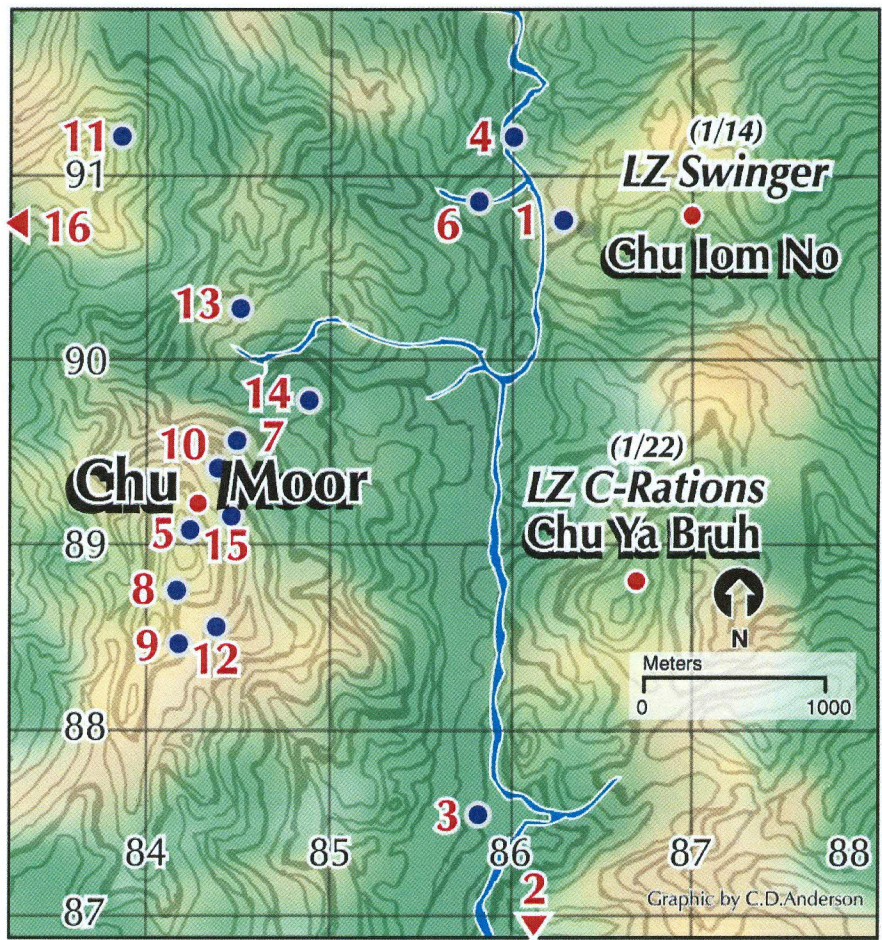
The next morning, 23 April, the Company headed back to LZ C-Rations where they regrouped, re-supplied and rested up for what would soon be one of the biggest fights of their lives.

**PFC Roger Salber** had just arrived in country and had been assigned to D Company 1/22. He met up with his Battalion on the LZ on 23 April. The next day, he would be tested in battle for the first time.





- Co/Bn/Reg : Date/time
- 1. A/1/22 : 20Apr/
  - 2. D/1/22 : 22Apr/
  - 3. D/1/22 : 24Apr/0844
  - 4. A/1/22 : 24Apr/1140
  - 5. D/1/22 : 24-26Apr/
  - 6. A/1/22 : 25Apr/1350
  - 7. A/1/22 : 26Apr/1220
  - 8. C/1/22 : 26Apr/1708
  - 9. C/1/22 : 27Apr/
  - 10.A & B/1/22 : 26-27April/
  - 11.C/1/14 : 27Apr/1600
  - 12.C/1/22 : 27Apr/1916
  - 13.D/1/14 : 28Apr/1555
  - 14.C/1/14 : 28Apr/1920
  - 15.B/1/22 : 29Apr/
  - 16.B/1/14 : 29Apr/0510



Information is based on radio log transmissions from 1/22 (24 to 27 Apr, 1968) & 1/14 (24 to 30 Apr, 1968), Operation Reports from the 4th Infantry Division (1 February to 30 April, 1968), and original map provided by Rainer Guensch D 1/22.

### Chu Moor Mountain Area- April, 1968