Extract Of Lessons Learned Ending 31 Oct 68

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20310

ACAM-P (M) (12 Mar 69) FOR OT UT 684286

19 March 1969

SUBJECT: Extract from Operational Report - Lessons learned, Headquarters,

25th Infantry Division, Period Ending 31 October 1968 (U)

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2. Information contained in this report is provided to insure that the Army realizes current benefits from lessons learned during recent operations.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY:

KENNETH G. WICKHAM

Major General, USA

The Adjutant General

1. ---------ORLL, 2nd Bde, 25th Inf Div
2. ORLL, 3rd Bde, 25th Inf Div
3. Combat Action Analysis
4. Recovery of Mired Vehicles

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

HEADQUARTERS 2ND BRIGADE, 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION

APO 96225

SUBJECT: Feeder Report for Operational Reports - Lessons learned

Commanding Officer

25th Infantry Division

ATTN: Division Historian

APO 96225

In accordance with USARV Reg 525-15, 25th Div Reg 525-15 and UNCLAS MSG TL 10-8494

Subject: Operational Report - Lessons Learned for the period 1 August - 31 October 1968

Dated: 5 October 1968, the attached enclosure is submitted

FOR THE COMMANDER:

3 Incl. DONALD W. SCHILTZ

1. Schematic Major, Infantry
2. (Encirclement Operations) Adjutant
3. Installation of AN/PRC 77

with antenna

1. Significant Activities:

2. Lessons Learned

a. PERSONNEL: none

b. OPERATIONS:

(1) Establishment of Pattern:

(a) OBSERVATION: Units and individuals have tendencies to establish operational patterns when conducting tactical operations from static positions for sustained periods.

(b) EVALUATION: On or about 1840 hours, 25 October 1968, a platoon size ambush patrol-element of 2-14 Infantry was departing FSB Keane, at 6001. The point element had cleared the gap in the tactical wire and was in the process of clearing the area forward of the wire. The patrol proper was halted within the gap (see attached schematic) awaiting instructions to proceed. This procedure had been employed extensively with the time of departure remaining almost constant, therefore, unknown to the personnel concerned, a pattern had been established. At above mentioned time sporadic sniper fire initially prevented movement of the patrol. The sniper was immediately supported by one 60MM mortar with the gunner placing fire vicinity of the gap, then "walking" the (mortar) rounds through the gap and back to vicinity of the initial burst, causing all rounds to impact within the gap. Results: One US KIA, 13 US WIA.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: That all Fire Support Bases or night laager positions (static) have sufficient avenues of departure and return; that time and place of departure vary daily and that command emphasis be placed on the prevention of establishing operational patterns.

(2) Identification of Command Vehicles (Mech):

(a) OBSERVATION: Recent activities involving armor and Infantry (Mech) units have resulted in the destruction of numerous vehicles to include an excessive number of command and control tracks.

(b) EVALUATION: Command and Control are easily distinguishable because of the dual or triple antennas affixed to the vehicle. Sapper or killer teams armed with RPG launcher, supported by riflemen, concentrate their efforts on the command tracks, occasionally firing one or two RPG rounds at close range then effecting a hasty withdrawal.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: That an antenna similar to the one presently in use be devised for test/evaluation. Said antenna should be positioned around or under track vehicles to prevent "marking" of the command and control tracks. However, if the present antenna remains in use, dummy antennas should be mounted on each vehicle to confuse enemy gunners and prevent "marking" of the command and control tracks.

3. Encirclement Operations: (See Incl. 2)

4. Landing Zone / Pick-up Zone:

a. OBSERVATION: Many times, either because of poor planning or necessity, landing zones / pick-up zones have been established within twenty-thirty meters of built up areas or hedgerow complexes, thereby placing the aircraft and personnel in an extremely compromising position.

b. EVALUATION: Preparation of landing zones by employment of Air /Artillery exists when participating in airmobile operations - combat assaults. When employing the Eagle Flight concept of airmobile operations and engaging targets of opportunity, landing zone /pick-up zone preparations are not feasible.

c. RECOMMENDATION: That landing zones /pick-up zones be prepped when possible. If the mission or tactical situation does not permit the employment of preparation fires, make maximum use of available terrain: i.e., open rice field a safe distance from hedgerow complexes or populated areas.

5. Detection of Booby Traps:

a. OBSERVATION: Recently, units in the 2nd Brigade TAOI are sustaining an excessive number of casualties from manufactured and home made booby traps.

b. EVALUATION: Past Lessons Learned pertaining to detection and destruction of booby traps have been made available to units. Proper techniques are, in many instances, not being employed; i.e. mine detectors, killer eye device, observation and movement, bamboo poles etc.

c. RECOMMENDATION: That past Lessons Learned in the area of mines /booby traps be reviewed and proper techniques implemented. Further, that commanders place command emphasis in this casualty producing area to reduce and minimize unnecessary casualties. Note: Scout dogs are extremely proficient in locating recently emplaced booby traps.

6. Airmobile Operations (Eagle Flight - Combat Assault)

a. OBSERVATION: During recent Eagle Flight operations it was noted that once helicopters were on the ground and the ground elements had committed themselves to a direction of advance, numerous personnel (possible VC) were departing the areas without restriction.

b. EVALUATION: An effective method of restricting freedom of movement personnel within the axis of advance of a sweeping element must be employed.

(p5)

c. RECOMMENDATION: When possible, employ a blocking force in close proximity of the sweep element. However, when this is not feasible and contact with a large enemy force is unlikely, a tested concept is for one of the helicopters utilized to insert the sweep or blocking elements, with two infantrymen remaining aboard, and with gun-ships support, to go airborne above the operational area to perform a “spotter” mission. As personnel are observed fleeing the area, the helicopter (with two riflemen) supported by the gun-ships, effects a quick apprehension.

7. Stowage of 90MM Recoilless Rifle Ammunition:

a. OBSERVATION: When an APC is hit by an RPG anti-tank round, the 90MM recoilless ammunition stowed in the vehicle often detonates destroying the vehicle and causing numerous casualties.

b. EVALUATIN: Protection of this ammunition from other than a direct hit by an anti-tank weapon will serve to significantly reduce loss of personnel and equipment.

c. REOMMENDATION: An armored ammunition storage container should be fabricated and issued on a basis of one per 90MM recoilless Rifle in a mechanized Infantry unit. As an interim measure, double walled foot-locker size boxes, containing sand and other non-combustible material should be used for storage of said ammunition.

8. Mine Detectors:

a. OBSERVATION: The loss of armored vehicles and cargo vehicles has increased significantly due to the increased use of non-metallic mines by the enemy.

b. EVALUATION: The present metallic mine detector is incapable of detecting non-metallic mines, and the present density mine detector can not differentiate between a non-metallic mine and laterite, thus rendering present detectors of little value on most roads in RVN

c. REOMMENDATION: Immediate steps should be taken to obtain and issue mine detectors capable of locating non-metallic mines in laterite roads.

9. Track Tension when operating in Rome-Plowed Areas:

a. OBSERVATION: If the track tension on the M-113-A1 armored personnel carrier is not maintained at the proper adjustment, when the vehicle is operating in Rome-plowed areas, an unusually high rate of thrown tracks results.

b. EVALUATION: Operating APC's in the unusual amount of debris on the ground resulting from Rome-plow operations, often results in thrown tracks. Proper track tension appears to solve the majority of these problems. However, it is difficult to maintain due to the unusual amount of track strain caused by crossing logs, tree stumps and piles of dirt.

(p6)

c. RECOMMENDATION: That frequent checks be made to insure that track tension is maintained at the proper adjustment

10. Route Security Problems Resulting from Rome Plow Operations:

a. OBSERVATION: Rome plowed strips parallel to supply routes in rubber plantations allows greatly increased aerial observation, however poses a significant problem to the unit assigned the route security mission.

b. EVALUATIN: The dead fall resulting from land clearing operations, if not removed, prevents rapid movement. This is particularly true in areas where rubber trees are cut and not removed. If the flank security elements are outside the Rome-plowed strip and become engaged, it is extremely difficult to reinforce the security element from the main body on the road, or to withdraw the security element to the main body.

c. RECOMMENDATION: That the dead fall resulting from Rome-plow operations adjacent to supply routes be removed as a standard portion of the land clearing operation. As a minimum, the trees should be pushed into windrows, which will allow lateral movement.

11. Aircraft Interference with Indirect Fires:

a. OBSERVATION: Often, during route security operations, normal indirect fires can not be employed because of air traffic.

b. EVALUATION: Movement of aircraft operating in coordination with the route security force can easily be coordinated, thus interference with indirect fires, and danger to the aircraft can be avoided.

Aircraft on administrative flights and routine operations often do not coordinate prior to entering an area in which indirect fires are being employed.

c. RECOMMENDATION: That temporary flight restricted areas along supply routes be established. Aircraft desiring to enter the restricted area should be required to coordinate with the headquarters controlling the operations. As an example, the route security force on Hwy 14 from Dau Tieng (XT495468) to Thanh An (XT335377) is supported by artillery from Dau Tieng or Than An as a normal practice. A restricted area one kilometer on each side of Hwy 14 would allow aircraft operations from either location. However aircraft not working in coordination with the route security force would be required to take a slightly extended route. This would allow constant and timely artillery or mortar support.

(p7) (p8duplicate)

(something missing?)

c. TRAINING: None

d. Intelligence:

(1) Tagging of POW:

(a) OBSERVATION: The escalation of enemy activities during the reporting period resulted in the processing of numerous detainees. The present identification system necessitates tagging each individual with an identification card to facilitate organized processing.

(b) EVALUATION: A system tagging detainees /POW's is essential for organized processing and accurate accounting of personnel.

(c) RECOMMENDATIONS: That a water repellent identification card be devel9ped and issued in lieu of existing cards to prevent unnecessary confusion in personnel identification due to non-legible ID cards caused by inclement weather.

e. Logistics: Installation of AN/PRC 77 in the Light Observation Helicopter (LOH)

(a) OBSERVATION: the 2nd Brigade presently has found “LOH” helicopters assigned for tactical and general support missions. Subject aircraft is equipped with one FM radio AN /PRC-54 and one UHF radio to facilitate radio communications. In a tactical support role, the aircraft is normally utilized by Battalion `commanders and /or Artillery LNO causing inadequate communication facilities.

(b) EVALUATION: Aircraft utilized for Command and Control ships must have adequate communication facilities to insure control. *i.e*. Capability for pilot, the Battalion Commander, and the Artillery LLNO to communicate simultaneously.

(c) RECOMMENDATION: That two PRC-77's with associated antenna AT-271 be installed in the LOH (OH-6) attached to Infantry Brigades for tactical support missions. (See incl. 3)

3. Escape, Evasion and Survival:

a. SITUATION:

In March 1965, Major Francis D. Lynch, 073105, Executive officer, 1st Battalion 27th Infantry, was involved in a survival escape and evasion mission. Major Lynch, then a captain, was battalion commander of the 21st Vietnamese Ranger Battalion.

The battalion was operating in a thickly vegetated, mountainous portion of Kon Ton Province. The operation carried the battalion to the finger of a mountain where they united after having been separated into platoon and company size elements. The unification of the battalion was for an attack on an important objective. The battalion became surrounded by the 101st NVA Regiment. Heavy losses were inflicted on the enemy, however, the position of the enemy and the size of the force enabled them to wear down the Ranger Battalion. Massive use of supporting arms was not sufficient to quell the attacks, and even two additional battalions of RVN troops could not break through the enemy to unite with the Rangers.

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It became necessary for the Battalion to break down into eight to ten man teams for ex-filtration. Major Lynch and seven others (two of which were wounded), made up one team. The mission lasted a total of seventy-two hours.

b. ORGANIZATION:

There can be no confusion or talking while moving. Each man must know his particular job. A chain of command must be designated, and each man must be given a job. Individuals must be used where they can perform best.

c. MOVEMENT:

Movement must be at night. The days should be utilized for rest and thickets can be employed for concealment. Security is a must while moving or stopped. Traveled areas, the tops or military crests or hills should not be used. The gulley or stream bed areas often make for extremely difficult movement and also tend to be used by the enemy. The area about three quarters of the way down a mountain tends to be the safest area to travel. Movement should be slow and deliberate. Every effort must be made to be quiet and concealed. The wounded must be taken, but maximum effort must be made to get them mobile. The team which Major Lynch led constructed a crutch for a man with a foot wound. A means of disrupting trails left by the element is to have rear security drag a branch along behind them.

d. SUBSISTANCE:

Water is plentiful; however, it is rarely pure. Purification of water can be accomplished by utilization of tablets. Smoking must be eliminated or rarely done. The light is too easily seen, and the smoke has a distinct odor.

e. SIGNAL COMMUNICAIONS:

The team had no means of communication outside their group. They reached a clearing, secured the area and waved their T-shirts at a passing aircraft. The craft was on a search mission for the men, and they were extracted by the aircraft.

(p10)

(p11 diagram)

FSB Pope?

Un-titled Report:

This would be the development prorotype of the Patrol Base type used for the bait and trap operations on the Cambodian Border in late 68 and into 69 Thisis believed to be FSB Pope and occured in Mid summer 68. This will have to be verified as the information becomes available.

It was common knowledge that the fire support base was being placed in a “hot” spot: smack in the middle of “VC Country”. The enemy had been using the area as a major line of communication (LOC) for the infiltration of men and supplies from WAR ZONE C in the north into HAU NGHIA Province and the SAIGON-CHOLON to the south. In ordering the fire base constructed at this location, the Division Commanding General was giving the enemy an option: cease using his LOC or come out and fight in order to keep it open. The battalion commander's orders were to build a “hard” installation and be prepared for a fight. (See sketch #1 for the location of the fire support base.)

The old-fashioned ingenuity and hard work that the commander demanded (and received) from his unit in carrying out his orders and the professionalism and discipline his unit displayed in coping with the fight when it came, are classic examples of how the job is to be done. It all resulted in a predictable outcome: a badly mauled and beaten enemy force. Here's how it happened.

As soon as the word came down from higher, the battalion commander and his S-3 made an aerial reconnaissance of the proposed fire support base site. The battalion commander provided his S-3 guidance concerning what was required relative to the fire support base construction and directed that a construction plan be ready for an infantry company and engineer platoon that would move into the location at first light the following morning to begin work. The fire support base was to be prepared for occupation within 24 hours.

(p1)

The S-3's initial move was to get down on the ground with the artillery battery commander whose unit would move its guns into the base. The young commander checked the lay of the land and indicated where he desired to place his six 105mm howitzers. With this formation firm, the S-3 then plotted a base construction plan predicated on the lay of the land and the commander's guidance that the base must accommodate the artillery battery, a battalion field head-quarters, and two defending

infantry companies. (See sketch #2 for the fire support base construction plot.) Material requirements were passed on the battalion S-4.

When the advance infantry company and the engineer platoon landed in the base site the following morning, the S-3 was along and prepared to direct the construction effort.

On the ground, the S-3 staked out a center point for the camp. He then paced off 100 meters on azimuths on 90 and 270 degrees to stake out the eastern and western extremities of a primary bunker line. The northern and southern limits of the primary bunker line were staked by pacing off 150 meters on azimuths of 360 and 180 degrees from the center point.

With the circumference of his primary bunker line thus determined, the S-3 moved around the circle staking bunker positions at approximately 20 meter intervals. A total of 32 bunkers were to form the primary bunker line. A secondary bunker line was then staked out with a bunker between every second primary bunker and five meters to the rear. Sixteen secondary bunker positions were designated in this manner.

(p2)

The S-3 then completed marking off his fighting bunker positions by dividing the bunker line into two company sectors and eight platoon sectors. A platoon command post (CP) bunker was staked off to centrally control four primary bunkers and two secondary bunkers. The two company CP bunker positions were marked so as to centrally control four platoon bunker line sectors.

With his bunker lines and unit sectors staked out, the S-3 moved 35 meters beyond the primary bunker line and marked off the exact trace of an inner wire barrier to be constructed of three-wire cow-fence and triple concertina barbed wire. Thirty-five meters beyond the inner wire, a trace for an outer wire barrier of the same construction was made on the ground. In marking off his wire line, the S-3 provided for four staggered safe lanes through the wire: one at the north, east, south, and west points of the barriers. Three moveable barriers were plotted and to be constructed for each safe lane, and a tangle-foot barbed wire barrier was staked out beyond the outer wire safe lane entrance extending 50 meters to each side of the entrance.

(p3)

As the digging and wire stretching commenced, the S-3 moved to stake out “icing for his cake.” Immediately beyond the outside wire, he marked the positions for 28 “super claymore”mines, each consisting of a 40 pound command detonated shaped charge fronted by 18 inches with a bale of

compressed concertina wire (See sketch #3). Each mine location was staked so that it could be easily camouflaged. Immediately inside the inner barrier, the S-3 staked out the exact location for 34, 55-gallon command detonated and double primed "fougas" bombs. The area beyond the outer wire, the outer wire, the lane between the wires and the inner wire were ordered to be liberally seeded with trip flares. To complete his anti-intrusion scheme, the S-3 ordered that each primary and secondary bunker line position be equipped with five command detonated claymore mines and two command detonated trip flares.

The fighting bunker positions now well under preparation were being constructed to a detailed plan provided by the S-3 (See sketch #4). Each was to be dug waist deep; six feet, six inches long, and four feet wide. Sloped walls for the front and sides were designed with a four to one sandbag configuration. Two corner firing ports and one center port were provided. At least one firing position in each bunker contained a shoulder high machine gun parapet. The rear wall consisted of double thick, four sand bag high construction broken by a center entrance way. The entrance was to be screened by a double thick, four sand bag high blast wall. Overhead cover was to be provided by a twin layer of sandbags beamed by 8 feet engineer stakes.

Directly behind each fighting bunker, the S-3 ordered construction of a one man sleeping bunker with a double sandbag overhead cover. The sleeping bunker was to have a trenched access to the fighting bunker.

(p4)

Within the fire support base, the S-3 marked off clearly delineated locations for the artillery guns, 81mm and 4.2 mortar positions, the battalion reconnaissance platoon (ready reaction force), the tactical operations center (TOC), heliports, command and administrative tents and a third infantry company. Sufficient space was allocated in each plot for all personnel to dig shelter bunkers with overhead cover and to revet necessary above ground facilities (See sketch #5).

To round out his fire support base construction plan, the S-3 plotted a wire communications system which included a telephone line between each fighting bunker and the respective platoon CP bunker. The platoon CP bunkers were tied in by wire to the respective company CP bunker which in turn, had two lines running to the TOC: one a "hot line" terminating in a battery of field phones, the other terminating in a switchboard for the entire fire support base. These wire communications would be backed up by FM radio.

Throughout the day and night, construction according to plans continued at a fast clip, broken only by a brief barrage of 60mm mortars after dusk. When the main elements moved into the fire support base the following morning, the construction effort was well along to final completion. Although much remained to be done to put the final touches on the installation, the battalion commander was relatively free to concentrate on the second part of his orders: Be prepared for a fight.

(p5)

The following three days and two nights in and around the fire support base were relatively quiet. Daylight company size reconnaissance-in-force sweeps and night platoon sized ambush patrols in the vicinity surrounding the base failed to develop major contact with the enemy. Further “hardening” of the camp continued until the fourth night when the S-3's proud creation received its acid test and the battalion commander got his fight.

The battalion commander's; operational plan for the night called for three platoon size ambush patrols and eight two-man listening posts. One ambush patrol was assigned to a trail junction one kilometer northwest of the fire support base. The second ambush site was to be spotted at a trail junction 800 meters northeast of the base, and the third was to be emplaced at another trail junction one kilometer due south. The eight listening posts were to ring the fire base at a distance from 100 meters from the outer wire; three each to the east and west, and one each to the north and south. (See sketch #6).

At approximately 1930 hours the listening posts and ambush patrols moved through the safe lanes enroute to their respective locations. Thirty-one men each comprised the northern two ambush patrols, and eighteen men moved to occupy the southern ambush site. By 2015 hours, all units outside the fire support base had radioed the TOC that they were in position.

(p6)

All was quiet until 2145 hours when the patrol leader of the north-west ambush site reported that an estimated enemy platoon was moving into his “kill zone” and that he was preparing to engage. Within minutes, the sound of exploding claymore mines and fragmentation grenades and the clatter of small arms and machine gun fire drifted into the fire base. A short time later, the firing ceased as abruptly as it started, and the ambush patrol leader reported that the enemy formation had scattered in the face of point-blank fire, and his men no longer had a target. Moments later, the TOC was further advised that the patrol had moved forward, stripped eight dead North Vietnamese soldiers of their weapons, ammunition and equipment and returned to its position.

The ambush patrol's company commander when advised of his unit's ;contact, recommended to the battalion commander that he lead a second platoon into a blocking position along the north-south road that ran to the west of the fire support base, and that the ambush patrol be ordered to push against the block. This, the company commander reasoned, would be a means of eliminating some of the enemy who had escaped the ambush. The battalion commander approved the recommendation, and within minutes the company commander was leading the blocking force through the northern safe lane enroute to the designated blocking position 700 meters north of the base.

(P7)

As this was taking place, the TOC received an excited call from the patrol leader of the southern ambush patrol. The lieutenant reported that at that moment he was looking out at a force of approximately 450 enemy troops, 50 meters to his north. The enemy, moving rapidly in column formation at sling arms, were fanning to the north and northeast towards the fire support base. They were armed with AK-47 rifles, rocket propelled grenade launchers (RPG) and 60mm and 82mm mortars. A command group equipped with radios and large antennas had moved off to the northeast and several supply laden oxcarts were moving down the trail with the column.

The ambush patrol leader was ordered not to engage the enemy force unless absolutely necessary, but to remain in position to adjust artillery fires that would be placed upon the enemy around his position. Within minutes, the first rounds whistled from the fire base only to land 200 meters west of the enemy column. By the time the artillery could be adjusted properly, the bulk of the enemy forces had hustled off into the darkness. But, later events would prove that the hidden patrol's dilemma had only begun.

Within the fire support base, the “red alert” that was passed when the northwest ambush patrol reported its contact was really sharpened with the report of the large enemy force moving on the base from the south and east. The artillery battery firing crews swung into immediate action and poured fire to the south and east into the approaching enemy. (Before the attack was over, the artillery within the fire base would expend 900 rounds of high explosive and 500 rounds of illumination ordnance. Many rounds were also fired in support from outside the fire base.) All fighting bunkers on the perimeter were primed for the action that came in short order.

(p8)

The enemy attack commenced according to a long familiar pattern - a hail of incoming mortars and RPG rounds. The heavy barrage continued for approximately five minutes during which time the majority of the casualties which were sustained within the fire base during the night occurred (one killed and 37 wounded). All casualties were suffered by the artillery and mortar firing crews and other personnel whose duties required them to be outside of fighting or shelter bunkers. The lone fatality was

an artillery medic who fell while administering aid to a wounded cannoneer. Throughout the furious attack, not one individual within a fighting or shelter bunker was injured. The S-3's bunkers withstood all the enemy could throw at them.

The intensity of the mortar barrage subsided rapidly for good reason. To the south, the ambush patrol was able to fix the location of the enemy mortar position 200 meters to the northwest by the sound of the rounds coming out of the tubes. This information was radioed to the TOC, and the artillery liaison officer responded immediately with a barrage of counter battery fire that silenced the mortars. Minutes later, another hurried call came in from the ambush patrol to the effect that numerous enemy were fleeing from the mortar positions dragging their dead and wounded to the south and were headed directly at the ambush patrol. The artillery was immediately adjusted to a position where it ringed the ambush site with a protective screen that was maintained throughout the attack. Although fleeing enemy passed within five meters of personnel of the ambush patrol and were kicking over the claymore mines the patrol had emplaced, the enemy in his haste and confusion did not detect the patrol's position.

(p9)

Along the bunker line of the fire support base, riflemen and machine gunners laid down a steady stream of fire on the enemy now visible beyond the outer wire in the glare of flares being fired by an artillery piece, and mortars inside the fire base. A check of the area the following morning indicated that only in two places were the enemy able to penetrate the withering bunker line fire and the devastation of the “super claymores” to move up to the outer wire. At these two locations, a group of 10 to 12 enemy crawled up to the wire with wire cutters and Bangalore torpedoes. These groups were detected at the wire and promptly incinerated by fougas bombs.

Within minutes after the attack commenced, requested helicopter gun-ships were on station overhead and requesting firing instructions. These aircraft were joined shortly by the first of six Air Force fighter bomber sorties equipped with 500 and 700 pound bombs and napalm, and three AC-47 “Spooky” aircraft with their rapid fire gattling guns. A C-47 “Moonshine” flare ship soon joined this overhead armada to assume the illumination mission from the artillery and mortar tubes on the ground. The battalion commander's chief occupation now became the pleasant problem of coordinating the devastating supporting fires that were at his disposal. But this task however was simplified by the artillery liaison officer who adjusted all artillery from impact reports coming in from the bunker line and the out-lying ambush patrols. Adjustments were based on the previously plotted defensive concentrations.

(p10)

The ambush patrol to the northeast which as yet had not revealed its position reported that it could observe enemy formations moving along the east edge of the fire support base. The battalion commander promptly turned over control of a helicopter gun team to the patrol leader who talked the gun-ships through pin-point rocket and mini-gun passes up and down the eastern flank of the fire base.

To the south, the ambush patrol leader reported that he was in continuing danger of being detected and over-run as the enemy was establishing rallying points in his vicinity to regroup and reorganize troops as they fled south away from the fire base. The battalion commander seized the opportunity in this situation by turning over control of an orbiting AC-47 “Spooky” to this ambush patrol leader. Marking his position with flashlights inserted in the bores of grenade launchers, the platoon leader called in the mini-gun fire with deadly accuracy on the assembled enemy moving about his position. Throughout the night, the patrol's position remained undetected.

As the battle progressed to the south and east of the fire support base, action also picked up to the northwest. The blocking force had moved to its position, and the company commander directed his ambush patrol to sweep on an azimuth of 90 degrees into the block. In a matter of a few minutes, approximately 50 enemy troops moving east came into view of the blocking position platoon and were taken under fire. The company commander then directed his moving ambush patrol to swing to the south and link up with the blocking force from the rear.

(p11)

The fire fight on the northwest continued for approximately 30 minutes before the enemy finally broke contact and dispersed to the north. The company commander then received directions to move his force back to the fire base, and shortly after midnight the two platoons moved through the western safe lane with three slightly wounded personnel.

The enemy's efforts to move on the fire base continued until approximately 0230 hours. At that time, another five minute concentration of mortar rounds rained down on the base as the small arms and automatic weapons fire subsided and the enemy began his withdrawal to the east and south.

In the pull back, a large contingent of enemy moved to the northeast and soon was within range of the ambush patrol in that direction. Although the ambush patrol had controlled gun-ships throughout the night and had called in artillery from impact reports to the fire base, it had not been in a position to fire on the enemy until this time. As the enemy streamed away from the fire base, however, the patrol took them under fire. In a short time, however, the patrol leader found himself surrounded and

receiving fire at close range from all directions. In the fierce fight that ensued, three patrol members were killed and eight wounded.

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To relieve the pressure on the encircled ambush site, the battalion commander turned control of a helicopter gun team which was still on station to the ambush patrol leader. With the ambush patrol site marked by flashing strobe lights, two Cobra gun-ships delivered a screen of rocket and mini-gun fire around the ambush position. By 0300, the enemy right around the position was broken with the enemy force dispersing to the north and east. With this, the attack was over.

Inside the fire base it was determined that one 105mm howitzer had been destroyed and one damaged. In addition, one 4.2 inch mortar tube and numerous vehicles had been damaged, but were still operational. Of the 48 personnel wounded throughout the night, 20 required medical evacuation.

At first light, the battalion commander sent his three infantry companies sweeping around the fire support base and the out-lying ambush patrol sites. A total of 137 enemy bodies had been left behind by the enemy as he withdrew, and four dazed and wounded prisoners-of-war were captured as they wandered about the battlefield. As the enemy withdrew, he was observed carrying many dead and wounded. In addition to the four prisoners, the battalion policed up six AK-47 rifles, one carbine, one light machine gun, three RPG launchers, three RPG-7 rounds, five RPG-7 boosters, ten 60mm mortar rounds, twenty-four hand grenades, five rifle grenades, 1100 small arms rounds, one field radio and four claymore mines.

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LESSONS LEARNED

Perfection is a difficult, but not impossible goal in the planning an execution of a military operation. In the action we have just reviewed, the commander and his unit came just about as close to perfection as one can expect to come. The over-all operation stands as an outstanding example of how the job should be done. But, it did not just happen to turn out that way: it was made to happen. The lessons to be noted are quite clear.

1. Never leave anything to chance. In carrying out his instructions to build a “hard” fire support base, the S-3 saw to it that nothing was left to chance. He designed his installation down to the last minute detail and personally insured that each detail was executed to exactness. Each bunker position was staked out. Each “super claymore” and fougas bomb location was clearly marked. The wire barriers

were emplaced to exact specifications. Each bunker was dug and constructed to a specific design. Supporting fires were plotted and practiced well in advance. Nothing was left to chance; hard work and ingenuity prevailed. When the test came, the dividends were handsome.

2. Anticipate the enemy's move. It's not hard to outwit the enemy. The battalion commander knew that his fire base was in a position that invited enemy attack. It was not so much a matter of when he would come, but how he would come. The commander also knew that the enemy is a creature of habit who likes to move and guide on clearly marked trails as much as anyone. In positioning his screening ambush patrols, he took this into full consideration. It was not accident that the enemy was detected and his attack foiled before it began. The enemy did just what it was anticipated he would do.

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3. Use the concealment afforded by darkness. The success of the ambush patrols in serving as the pivotal elements in the flow of the battle is directly attributable to their excellent use of concealment afforded by darkness. The enemy simply didn't know his movements before and during the battle were being constantly monitored. How could he? He couldn't see us. We had the advantage of being able to see him in the dark, and we exploited it beautifully. We're the best night fighters in the world!!

4. Trained and disciplined troops will win every time. The young patrol leader of the southern ambush patrol readily admitted that he and his men were “scared to death”. There is nothing at all unusual about such emotion when one suddenly finds himself surrounded by a battalion of enemy soldiers. But, the officer and his men did not panic from their fear or predicament. They stood fast, made full use of their advantage of concealment, stealth and communications, trusted implicitly in the protection that was theirs from supporting elements, and carried out their mission to completion. That they emerged unscathed after the battle from their somewhat precarious ambush position was no accident. They survived and won because they were and are well trained, well disciplined soldiers.

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(Six maps & diagrams follow)

Encirclement Operations

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

HEADQUARTERS, 2ND BRIGADE, 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION

APO San Francisco 96225

October 1968

SUBJECT: Encirclement Operations

A. GENERAL

1. Once the commander determined that he may have made contact with significant enemy force, he must make a hasty visualization of how an encirclement should be executed, and a rapid assessment of the force required. In this regard, all other unit missions within the brigade should be reevaluated and units alerted for movement to the contact area, beginning with those elements which are available immediately for commitment.

2. The commander must realize that only in very rare instances will he be able to physically encircle the enemy force with maneuver units. Rather, he must analyze the surrounding terrain to determine which area can be covered with surveillance and fire power, and which areas must be physically occupied by maneuver elements. The actual "encirclement" must be accomplished by applying a combination of all available combat power: air and artillery firepower; maneuver forces; armed reconnaissance elements; and all available surveillance means.

3. In developing his scheme, the commander must be cognizant of a number of restrictions which may haunt him in execution. Among these are:

a. <u>Danger limits on air and artillery fires.</u> Against an enemy force dug in along hedgerows and under large trees, it requires large caliber artillery and aerial bombs employing fuse delay to reduce such positions. This usually means a safe distance of 300 meters which can be reduced to 200 meters if the friendly troops are well dug in and have over-head cover. On several occasions, the appropriate weapon could not be brought to bear on the most critical target because of the close proximity of friendly forces.

b. Direction and range of organic weapons of the maneuver forces: By placing maneuver forces completely around the target area, the commander faces the possibility of sustaining casualties from friendly fires being delivered across the encircled area. In this regard, he may find that he has reduced the amount of firepower he can bring to bear by having forces too close to the enemy force before he has completed the "softening" process with firepower.

c. Requirement to adjust artillery into the circle. The commander must allow himself an axis to adjust artillery into the target area. All batteries available to support the action should be adjusted into the target area as soon as possible and before too many maneuver forces are employed around the periphery.

d. Need for security of maneuver forces around the periphery. Major contacts which may lead to an encirclement operation normally stem from a combat assault and a vo---nt to contact. Subsequent insertion of additional maneuver forces is also normally accomplished with helicopters. Whereas the commander has a fairly accurate assessment of the enemy situation in the contact area he does not have time to develop a similar assessment in the other area of insertion. Therefore it is essential that all forces on the circumference maintain all-around security. Because of the normal concentration of aerial surveillance means, this does not represent a serious problem during daylight hours: however, the problem becomes critical during the hours of darkness. Whereas he may have an overall superiority in combat power, the commander must be constantly aware of the fact that the enemy may achieve superiority in any area if he chooses to do so. He must be aware, also, that this superiority can be achieved from without as well as within the encircled area. A case in point: Evidence indicated that the enemy which attacked the perimeter during the night of 7-8 October, was not the same force which was in the target area during our daylight attack. Both forces were estimated to have been of approximately battalion size. Had destruction of the enemy force not been accomplished in the daylight hours, and had the decision been made to orient the forces toward the initial target area, the result could have been disastrous.

e. Necessity to evacuate casualties and effect re-supplies by helicopter. The commander must keep this requirement upper-most in his mind, particularly if it appears that he will be unable to reduce the enemy position before nightfall. This has a long range impact. The troops must know that if they are wounded they will be "dusted off" in a reasonable period of time, and they run short of ammunition, they will be re-supplied. This was mentioned more than once by the troops who sustained the attack on their perimeter during the night of 7 -8 October. Four "dust offs" and nine re-supply sorties were flown into the perimeter.

B. TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

1. General: The actual encirclement plan must be geared to the terrain surrounding the area of contact, therefore there is no set method which can be applied in all cases. As pointed out above, each element of combat power should be applied where it will do the most good, and in the quantity required to fulfill its ole in the encirclement area.

2. Maneuver Units: Maneuver units should be inserted initially along covered avenues of withdrawal beginning with the most likely avenue open to the enemy. These forces must be of sufficient size to secure their assigned positions. By inserting a number of small forces around the periphery, the commander may be creating a situation where instead of fighting a single offensive battle, he may be fighting a series of defensive battles. It is better to insert a significant force initially and then, after the assigned position is secured, maneuver a portion of the force to the next critical blocking position, either on the ground or by helicopter.

3. Artillery:

a. Artillery fires are usually the most responsive at the time of initial contact. It is essential that these fires be adjusted rapidly to impact in the area of contact. If the maneuver forces are unable to eliminate the enemy strong point using their organic weapons, then they should pull back to a covered area as close to the area of contact as safety restrictions will permit. When the commander determines that the encirclement will be attempted, he should adjust a portion of his artillery fires to cover the more critical avenues of withdrawal available to the enemy until such time as he has positioned maneuver forces to cover them. If the maneuver forces have not left any wounded in the area of initial contact, the commander has full freedom to employ the fires where he feels they will do the most good,. In this instance, it would be better to use the fires initially to assist in fixing the enemy and denying his withdrawal. Actual destruction of the force can be begun once all combat power is in position on the periphery.

b. Because of the enemy's tactic of withholding his fire until he has the point men in position where he can wound them and deny the advance of rescue personnel, the application of supporting fire becomes more complex. On both occasions when this brigade made contact with a large enemy force, friendly wounded were exposed in the forward area. The enemy positions were well camouflaged, dug in, and mutually supporting, and despite the expenditure of large amounts of organic fire by the maneuver forces, they were unable to reduce the enemy positions and extract the wounded. Therefore,

the fires which could have been used to deny enemy withdrawal had to be used in an effort to either reduce the initial enemy position encountered, or attempt to pin the enemy down until the wounded could be extracted. This is a time consuming process for both the artillery and the maneuver forces. The big problem here is that because of the close proximity of the wounded to the enemy positions, the large caliber artillery weapons could not be used against the most critical targets. Some of the means which have been employed by this brigade to cover extraction attempts have included helicopter smoke ships, artillery smoke and white phosphorous rounds, chemical agents (CS), helicopter light fire teams, napalm, as well as 90mm RR, M-79's fragmentation, white phosphorous, and smoke grenades, and also all available small arms fire from the maneuver units.

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c. Once the extraction has been accomplished (or it has been determined beyond a shadow of a doubt that our friendly personnel are dead rather than wounded) the artillery fire can be brought to bear on the enemy positions, as well as to cover the escape routes.

d. When maneuver forces are in the critical blocking positions, the artillery fires can be shifted to cover the gaps between the maneuver forces, but they should be employed initially <u>within the periphery</u> of the target area. In the event that the encirclement must be maintained during the hours of darkness, blocking fires should be registered in the gaps outside the target periphery so that the artillery can be shifted rapidly if the enemy decides to attempt escape. During the softening process every effort should be made to continue delivery of artillery fires while gun-ships and TAC Air are employed in the target area. This should be coordinated between the artillery FO and the FAC (gun-ships) before they enter the target area.

4. <u>Army gun-ships and TAC Air:</u> Army gun-ships should be employed immediately to supplement the fires of maneuver forces in an effort to eliminate enemy strong-points. If this fails, the gun-ships should be used to cover the temporary withdrawal of friendly forces or the rescue of wounded personnel. Once the encirclement decision has been made, the gun-ships should be employed, when possible, to cover peripheral areas not occupied by maneuver forces, or to engage targets of opportunity in proximity to the contact. TAC Air should be used to begin the “softening process”. Napalm should be employed against hedgerows and other heavy growth areas. 500# and 750# bombs (with fuse delay) should be employed against known or suspected bunkers and dug-in positions. The commander should make his special air ordnance flights can be programmed into the area to cope with special targets. Between TAC Air strikes, artillery should be shifted back into the target to continue the softening process.

C. EXECUTION:

1. General: There is no set method of executing an encirclement since each operation will differ based on the terrain, enemy strength and disposition, time of initial contact, availability of friendly troops and air assets to reinforce, competing tactical requirements of other units, and a myriad of other considerations.

2. Initial Actions: The success of an encirclement depends on the speed with which it is executed. Normally numerous units are RIF-ing within the brigade TAOI, any one of which may make the initial contact. Therefore it is important that the brigade commander have one reinforcing element that he can move on a moment's notice, and additional units which can be assembled and moved in a minimum period. While fixing artillery fires are being adjusted, warning orders should be issued to the reinforcing maneuver units stating the proposed time of commitment, PZ's and LZ's responsible headquarters for the air movement, mission, and status of the unit (whether under parent unit control, OPCON to another unit, or under brigade control). The brigade commander must formulate his control plan immediately. As soon as major elements outside the battalion in contact are inserted into blocking positions, a second battalion control element should be introduced and control of the action assumed by the brigade headquarters.

3. Developing the Situation: The unit making the initial contact should pull back only to the first covered area which provides protection against effects of friendly artillery and air fires. It is imperative that these units, and all subsequent units participating in the encirclement, dig in and secure whatever overhead cover they can during the “softening” phase. As additional blocking force units are available, they should be inserted rapidly and close enough to the point of contact so that the enemy does not have covered routes of withdrawal. Until such time as these forces are inserted, artillery fires should be used to block the enemy movement. They serve two purposes: reducing the possibility of a hot LZ, and denying enemy withdrawal from the area of contact. Once the blocking forces are in position they should move in as close to the enemy as possible, denying him opportunity to occupy positions from which he can deliver flanking fires on the blocking forces. During movement to contact by the blocking forces, intensive reconnaissance by fire should be employed to draw enemy fires and provide an assessment of the enemy strength and disposition within the contact area. This also provides the brigade commander with an evaluation of various attack axis available to him. Reconnaissance elements must focus their efforts on the areas between the blocking forces to prevent exfiltration. Too often all surveillance elements become mesmerized by the immediate contact area and lose sight of the critical adjacent areas.

4. The Softening Process:

a. Until the blocking forces are in position, supporting fire should be employed along the covered areas of withdrawal on the periphery. After the fixing forces are positioned, a portion of these fires should be shifted into the major contact area. During this period, all fires should be controlled from the brigade C&C helicopter.

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b. The brigade commander should consult with his ground commanders to obtain an assessment of where the enemy strong points appear to be within their assigned sectors, and determine the types of ordnance which can best be used to reduce the designated targets. During this period the brigade commander should provide aircraft to the battalion commanders so that they may obtain perspective of their positions, adjacent friendly positions, the enemy positions, and the terrain over which they must advance.

c. Every effort must be made to continue all available fires during the “softening” period. The brigade artillery controller should work this out with armed gun-ships and the FAC so that they may enter the contact area through fire free corridors. Direction of attack and breaks off the target should be programmed in such a way that the artillery fires may be shifted and continued rather than “check-fired”. In the event that a check-fire is required, the FAC or gun-ships should give the brigade C&C a 2-minute warning when he is ready to attack and a 2-minute warning before the attack is terminated. This allows the artillery controller to maintain his fires until the last possible moment, and resume immediately upon completion of the strike. This same technique should be employed when planning and executing the insertion of maneuver forces into the blocking positions.

d. During the “softening process” the brigade commander should formulate his final attack plans and brief his S-3 in detail. If the enemy position extends over a large area, the commander can conduct a series of limited objective attacks during this period to reduce the size of the enemy positions, further fix the enemy in place, or spoil/disorganize his withdrawal plans.

e. All battalion control headquarters in the operation should have a “commo secure” capability so that the brigade commander may discuss attack plans without compromise. When possible, the brigade S-3 should visit each of the command groups on the ground, discuss assigned missions with the commanders, conduct air reconnaissance with them as necessary, and resolve any coordination and control problems encountered.

5. The attack:

a. Execution of the attack in an encircling operation is considerably more complex than in other type operations. Fire limits must be established so that friendly fires will not impact in friendly blocking positions. The attacking force must be provided a clearly defined axis of advance and, if required, a limit of advance. During one such operation conducted at this brigade, a battalion attacked across one-half of the encircled position, while a second battalion blocked with one company and maneuvered a second company to sweep the other half of the circle. Gun-ships and C&C were used to cover the open rice paddies toward which the sweep was made.

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b. When possible, the attack should be from a direction other than the initial point of contact. Movement to contact, reconnaissance by fire and limited objective attacks by other forces can serve to determine which elements will have the greatest chance of success in the final assault.

c. Prior to the attack, all available fires should be employed in the zone of the attacking force. Once the assault has begun, the fires should be used to prevent reinforcement of the enemy units in the zone of the attacking forces. As the attack progresses, the fires should be shifted to cover gaps in the periphery or to engage targets of opportunity developed by the assault.

d. Timing is critical. If the attack is begun before the enemy strong points have been reduced, the attack will be down almost immediately and precious time will be consumed while the attacking forces regroup and additional fires are brought to bear. Against automatic weapons in camouflaged bunkers, the commander should concentrate on “over-kill” to be sure that these positions have been neutralized. One automatic weapon so disposed can stop a battalion in its tracks. Don't hope that the weapon has been eliminated - make certain that it has. 750# bombs with fuse delay can serve as good insurance.

e. To maintain the momentum of the attack, a follow-on force should sweep behind the attacking forces. They should do the job of attending to and evacuating the wounded, blowing up enemy defense structures, scaring up enemy weapons, conducting a body count, and policing the battlefield for enemy wounded and by-passed forces. Troops in blocking positions around the periphery should be instructed not to fire on targets greater than 100 meters to their front, and use only the quantity of fire required to do the job. Indiscriminate firing in the perimeter by troops in blocking positions could slow down or stop the momentum of the attacking forces if stray rounds are received from their front or flanks.

f. Immediately upon completion of the battle, a detailed report should be accomplished. Many valuable documents and other evidence may still remain in bunkers, or be buried under debris, or in close proximity to bomb craters and large shell holes. Several such cases can be cited: finding of the 7th Cu Chi Battalion Commander buried with only a hand exposed; finding documents of the 101st NVA regiment in an ammo box half buried in a collapsed tunnel. The final success of such an operation is measured in terms of total value received for combat power expended. This value lies in the bodies, weapons, combat material and documents of the enemy force.

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6. Night Operations:

a. Although every effort should be made to eliminate the encircled force before nightfall, often times this cannot be accomplished. Therefore, the commander must visualize adjustments be must make in his plan for continuing enemy containment during the night.

b. Continuous and effective concentration on the target area must be provided from dusk until first light. Additional illumination means must be available to the blocking forces for spot illumination between blocking positions. Moonships and spooky should provide area illumination. Mortars, artillery and M127A1 hand held flares can handle the spot illumination requirements.

c. The decision to remain on position for the night should be made as early as possible, and necessary defense material delivered to the blocking positions. Battalion assigned /OPCON to this brigade are required to maintain night kits on stand-by at all times. Kits include barbed wire, concertina, claymores, flares, shovels, etc. to permit the creation of hard spots around the periphery in a minimum period of time. In addition to the hard-spots located outside areas of exfiltration, extensive use must be made of LP's, AP's (when possible) and accurate blocking fires.

d. H&- artillery fires should be concentrated along the periphery of the enemy positions to disrupt any efforts to withdraw. They should be capable of rapid shift to the gaps between the blocking positions. Gun-ships should be on standby to provide close-in fires if the enemy chooses to attack the blocking positions.

e. The brigade C&C helicopter should be orbiting over the target area to control the fires and coordinate shifts in fires. Against a major force attempting to exfiltrate, determination of priority of fires will be a necessity and this is a responsibility of the brigade commander.

f. Each blocking position must have a landing site for aero-medical evacuation and re-supply. This should be selected during daylight and any obstacle in close proximity eliminated before nightfall. The perimeter commander must develop a fire suppression plan which will cover the entry and exit of dust-off and re-supply helicopters. This plan does not mean indiscriminate spraying of the area around the blocking positions. Rather, before dark, the commander should determine which areas around his perimeter provide the enemy a good position from which to deliver effective fires into his position. Specific gunners should been be assigned specific targets to fire upon when a helicopter landing is essential. Short bursts are more effective than continuous fire since the gunner is better able to maintain accuracy on the assigned target.

D. Summary.

1. An effort has been made in this report to cover a maximum number of considerations associated with the planning and conduct of encirclement operations. In reality, it only scratches the surface. There are a number of key points, however, which the commander should keep uppermost in his mind.

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a. Time is irretrievable. Once the decision has been made to attempt an encirclement, all actions must be made "on the double". Plans and orders must be made rapidly, fires must be adjusted boldly. Troops must be inserted promptly, and all commanders must be imbued with a sense of urgency. If at all possible, the encirclement and destruction of the enemy force should be accomplished before the sun sets.

b. Apply the principles of mass and economy of force. Study the terrain and enemy situations carefully. Determine where a minimum force can do the job, and identify where mass must be applied. Remember that ROF and mass considerations include the participation of maneuver, firepower, reconnaissance and surveillance elements.

c. The insertion plan should be based on "first things first". Determine the critical blocking positions, and use blocking fires to contain the enemy until such time as maneuver elements are in periphery and shift forces rapidly as requirements change. Remember that it takes considerably more force to take a position than it does to hold it. Once the blocking force is in position, evaluate its strength requirements based on the mission of the unit, and move that portion of the combat power not required for another critical position. Whenever possible such shifts should be accomplished within companies or battalion sectors. However, if cross attachment is necessary, do not hesitate to do so.

d. Plan the final attack in such a manner that maximum fires can be employed and maximum surprise can be achieved. Avoid an axis that places restrictions on the fires of the attacking elements or forces a blocking element to “hide in their holes” to preclude casualties from friendly fires. Coordinate the attack from the air - it's the only place where potential successes or failures can be identified readily and exploited or rectified promptly.

e. Remember that some adjustments in posture may be required if the battle continues during the hours of darkness. The commander must keep this in mind when formulating his initial plan so that minimum shifts are required subsequently. Plans should include continuous illumination, surveillance and fire support to include that required to engage mass targets of opportunity in the event the enemy attempts to ex-filtrate in mass or over-run a single blocking position.

f. Finally, insure that the entire operation represents the epitome of unity. This must be reflected in the planning and execution. Every subordinate commander and leader must know the over-all plan, the role which other units will assume, and his part in the action. The best laid plan of a brigade is only as good as the success of each small unit within the platoons, companies, and battalions of the brigade. Once every individual knows his job, the brigade is ready to deal the crushing blow. It must be delivered simultaneously and effectively by all concerned - from the brigade commander to the rifleman in the rice paddy.

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2. Tabs A and B are examples of encirclement operations conducted by this brigade. The only regret is that the successes visualized in the plan were not achieved on the ground. This is the curse of two-sided war.

Quarterly Report Period Ending 31 Oct 68

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

HEADQUARTERS 3RD BRIGADE 25TH INFANTRY DIVISION

APO San Francisco 96268

AVDCTB - C 4 November 1968

SUBJECT: Operational Report - Lessons learned for the Quarterly Period Ending 31 October 1968

Commanding General

25th Infantry Division

ATTN: AVDCDH

APO 96225

1. Section 1, Operations: Significant Activities: Omitted

2. Section 2, Lessons learned: Commander's Observations, Evaluations and Recommendations.

   a. Personnel: None

   b. Operations:

OBSERVATION: The encirclement of VC/NVA elements after initial contact is the most efficient and least costly method of destroying the enemy.

EVALUATION: It has been found that the enemy force can be destroyed with minimum casualties if he is encircled and fixed after initial contact, and then subjected to an intense pounding by tactical and artillery prior to an attack.

RECOMMENDATION: That after initial enemy contact is made, a rapid estimate and the decision to encircle be made. Blocks should be placed along all escape routes and intensive fires be brought to bear on the fixed enemy. The final attack should be delivered against a point other than the point of contact only after the enemy has been neutralized by supporting fire.

OBSERVATION: Any operational pattern is quickly detected and exploited by the enemy.

EVALUATION: The VC/NVA are quick to detect and exploit operational patterns. RIF's which use generally the same route or LP's and AP's which habitually depart perimeter at the same point are eventually the target of an enemy operation.

RECOMMENDATION: That imaginative efforts be made to avoid patterns and keep the enemy off balance. Examples are: out-posting and sweeping of AP sites and routes prior to darkness, firing of "Killer Junior" along AP routes, and liberal use of air assets for Eagle Flights.

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OBSERVATION: Taking of Chieu Hois.

EVALUATION: The taking of Cieu Hois, on occasion, can result in friendly casualties if care is not exercised to make sure that the Chieu Hois are unarmed and that they have no weapons close at hand.

RECOMMENDATION: That an interpreter can be used to instruct the Chieu Hoi to come forward to the friendly unit's location with hands and arms raised, and also stripped of all but the minimum of clothing. This will help insure that the Chieu Hoi has not booby-trapped himself with the intention of detonating explosives upon reaching the friendly unit.

OBSERVATION: Amount of troops to be used when making multiple air-mobile insertions into the objective area.

EVALUATION: When a days operations calls for multiple insertions, a considerable amount of valuable time consumed by the picking up and setting down of the troops that can be transported in one lift is used.

RECOMMENDATION: When such operations are planned, one lift would be the most economical number of the troops employed. This would save time in the picking up and setting down of troops, thus making another insertion possible. The remainder of the company could remain on the initial Pick-Up-Zone as a reaction force.

c. Training:

OBSERVATION Additional training under combat environmental conditions is needed for crew-served weapons crews.

EVALUATION: Crews must be trained to act as a team with each member being cross-trained to take over for a casualty.

RECOMMENDATION: That training programs be initiated for all crew served weapons and that back-up crews be trained to take over for casualties among entire crews.

d. Intelligence:

OBSERVATION: Immediate information gained from detainees, Hoi Chans, and POW's is fairly reliable in planning execution of reaction missions.

EVALUATION: It has been found that immediate exploitation of intelligence gained from sources in paragraph 2d usually pay off in dividends of additional personnel in the above categories, enemy weapons, and/or body count.

RECOMMENDATION: That IPW Teams and document read-outs be made available to capturing units as a source is captured and that speedy exploitation operations be executed. Also recommend that Hoi Chans be allowed to remain with unit to which he surrendered for immediate area exploitation.

OBSERVATION: There is need for additional personnel to enable the Brigade to make possible full exploitation of the VCI.

EVALUATION: It was found that coordination with DIOCC requires either an NCO or officer from each Bn to make daily liaison, and in many cases remain there all day. Also, the Bde has need for an additional officer to monitor closely the operation of the DIOCC in each District and lend assistance to the Bn S-2 section.

RECOMMENDATION: Add to MTOE 7-176T; one (1) E-6 11F40 or one (1) officer 0-2 for each Bn S-2 and one officer 0-2 pr 0-3 for each Bde S-2

OBSERVATION: Using large forces on cordon and search missions will not lead to capturing VCI.

EVALUATION: Operation conducted against VCI targets was found to be unsuccessful when using large scale cordon and search operations by this unit.

RECOMMENDATION: We have found that it is more successful to use small size raid (snatch) type operations. These operations are conducted with detailed intelligence against known VCI targets. The unit should know what houses the target lives in, and should try to get to the target at night without detection or utilize helicopters in raid-type operations.

e. Logistic:

OBSRVATION: Issuance of odd size equipment.

EVALUATION: Personnel who wear odd size equipment many times must wait a long period of time in order to obtain equipment. For example, one man waited four (4) months for a pair of 4R boots.

EVALUATION: Discarding of unserviceable ammunition in field locations is a recurring safety and supply problem. It appears most unit level NCO's and Officers are not familiar with turn-in procedures.

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend command emphasis be given to the dissemination to the lowest level of what constitutes unserviceable ammunition and the procedures for turn-in.

OBSERVATION: Reporting units equipment status.

EVALUATION: Units at Battalion level are not making the proper reports of their equipment status in order that the Brigade Commander can make a true evaluation of their combat capabilities. Many of the reports are late, inaccurate, and incomplete.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Battalion Commander insure proper reporting of equipment status for his unit.

f. Organization: None

g. Other: None.

3. Section 3, Escape, Evasion and Deception: None

FOR THE COMMANDER:

JERRYR H. HUFF

MAJOR, ARMOR

ADJUTANT

31 August 1968

Enclosure 3

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Action along the TAY NINH - DAU TIENG axis had been heavy for three days. Numerous contacts with the enemy had been experienced within the BEN CUI Rubber Plantation immediately west of DAU TIENG, and large enemy forces were known to be still present within the rubber. Stabilization of the situation required that the enemy within the plantation be sought out and destroyed. The line of communication between the two vital population centers must be kept open.

The mechanized infantry company's mission was to move from the DAU TIENG Base Camp into the BEN CUI Rubber Plantation. There it was to position itself one kilometer south of route 239, the Main Supply Route (MSR) to TAY NINH, and sweep due west cross-country approximately six kilometers to a point where the path of its sweep would cross the MSR. At that location, according to the battalion commander's plan for the day, the company would be met by a cavalry troop moving east from TAY NINH. Together, the two units would then move east along the MSR and close back into the DAU TIENG Base Camp.

At the same time that the company was conducting its sweep through the rubber, the battalion's scout platoon accompanied by the brigade Combined Reconnaissance and Intelligence Platoon (CRIP), a composite U.S. and Vietnamese unit, and a twin 40mm self- propelled gun team would be moving west along the MSR on a road clearing mission. The two forces would coordinate their parallel movements at all times so as to be in position to provide mutually supporting fires should either force develop a contact.

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At 0640 hours, the company moved out of the base camp with fourteen armored personnel carriers and crossed the SAIGON RIVER to enter the BEN CUI. Shortly thereafter, at 0658, the scout and CRIP element rolled out of base to begin its road sweep mission.

After crossing the river and moving west one kilometer along route 239, the company turned south and moved along a trail designated LTL 19. (See sketch #1 for an annotated overlay showing the unit's route of travel.) As he moved his company off the road, the company commander dismounted his troops and deployed the company in a modified “V” formation: 3rd platoon on the left, 1st platoon on the right and the 2nd platoon and mortar platoon combined in the middle and trailing. A three man scout dog element moved to the front of the formation as a point element, and each platoon deployed a two or three man flank security element as required. (See sketch #2 for a detailed graphic presentation of the company formation during the southward movement.)

The company commander employed this formation to take advantage of the frontal and flank orientation of firepower that it provided and the excellent control it would afford as the company moved through the heavy rubber trees and undergrowth.

The company moved south approximately 1,500 meters without incident. Its rate of march was deliberately slow to allow for a thorough check of the area through which it was moving. Suddenly, at 0831 hours, the scout dog on the point alerted, and the dog handler advised the company commander that he believed the dog detected personnel to his southwest. The commander halted his formation and relayed this information to the battalion S-3 who was over-flying the formation in an OH-23 helicopter. The S-3 conducted an immediate low level reconnaissance of the area to the southwest of the company formation, but reported that he was unable to detect any movement in that area.

The company commander placed several rounds of 81mm mortar fire to the south of his position before returning to the southward movement of his formation. After moving several hundred meters to the south, the point element detected and engaged two enemy soldiers to its front. The time was 0906 hours. The enemy withdrew to the south without returning fire. Several minutes later, the flank security element of the 3rd platoon discovered a mine which it destroyed.

Based on this activity to his front, the company commander adjusted the movement of his formation approximately 100 meters to the west away from the trail upon which he had guided up to this point. The company's southward movement continued without incident for another 1,000 meters where it met an east-west trail.

Here the company turned west. The commander modified his “V” formation so much as to place the trailing 2nd and mortar platoons behind the 3rd platoon with these units moving south of the trail. The 1st platoon continued to move abreast of the 3rd platoon on the north side of the trail. (See sketch #3 for a detailed graphic of the formation used by the company in its westward movement.)

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Throughout the morning, the company commander was in constant radio contact with the scout and CRIP element which was moving along the MSR a short distance away. As the company turned west, the scout and CRIP element reported that it had moved into a village to the northwest of the company's position and had found no enemy present. It did report, however, that several buildings on the southern edge of the village showed evidence of having been used recently as sleeping quarters and classrooms by the enemy. One building contained a drawing of an armored personnel carrier with two antennas. At 1012 hours, the element, still located in the village, reported that it had observed a red star cluster over a second village located one kilometer to the west of its present position.

The company slowly proceeded west for 1,000 meters until at 1110 hours its lead elements came under sporadic rifle fire. As the firing commenced, the commander found his point element approximately 40 meters west of a north-south trail which ran from the village in which the scout and CRIP element was last reported located. The dismounted troops of the 3rd and 1st platoons were just moving across this trail with their tracks approximately 30 meters to the rear. The trailing 2nd and weapons platoons were moving forward 60 to 100 meters east of the trail.

The rifle fire which had originally come from the west and southwest steadily increased in intensity as the dismounted personnel deployed forward to the west of the trail to return fire. To their front, the troops could observe enemy troops moving forward through the rubber trees, firing and advancing from tree to tree. Enemy snipers were also observed firing from within the trees themselves. The company commander radioed the situation to his S-3 overhead and requested that a light fire team be brought to bear on the enemy to his front. By this time, ten minutes had elapsed. The dismounted personnel of the 3rd and 1st platoons remained on the west side of the rail engaging the enemy steadily advancing to their front, while the tracks of the two platoons moved on-line on the eastern shoulder of the trail. (See sketch #4 for company disposition at the beginning of the contact.)

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As the situation rapidly developed, the company commander was advised by the 1st platoon that a large number of enemy troops were swinging to the north of the company position in an apparent effort

to turn the right flank of the company. The company commander then ordered his 2nd platoon to deploy to the right flank of the 1st platoon and directed the mortar platoon with its three tracks to withdraw to the rear approximately 200 meters where a clearing provided a location from which the 81mm mortars could be employed. He then ordered his dismounted personnel on the west side of the trail to pull back to the location of their tracks so that the maximum firepower of the mounted .50 caliber machine guns could be placed on the rapidly advancing enemy to the front. The third platoon was also ordered to execute a flank denial movement to bring fire on enemy troops observed moving along the company's left flank. (See sketch #5 for company disposition at this point.)

The company held this position for approximately 30 minutes during which time the S-3 overhead repeated his request for armed helicopters and the artillery forward observer attempted to obtain clearance to bring artillery fires into the enemy positions. The company position was marked with purple and yellow smoke.

Supporting artillery fires could not be immediately employed because of the requirement to obtain political clearance from Vietnamese provincial authorities prior to firing into a location within or adjacent to a populated area. Helicopter gun-ships were temporarily delayed because of the commitment of available assets to other operations simultaneously taking place.

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Also during this time the scout and CRIP element which was deployed immediately west of the village to the north along route 239 reported that they had observed and estimated company size force moving out of the village one kilometer to the west. The enemy had moved into the rubber in a south-easterly direction and were being taken under fire by the elements 50 caliber machine guns and the twin 40mm gun team.

The company fought from its position on the eastern edge of the road until approximately 1150 hours. At this time, three armored personnel carriers on the left side of the company line were knocked out of action by rocket propelled grenade (RPG) rounds at extremely close range. Not desiring to engage the enemy at such a close range that the effect of his supporting fires would be compromised, the commander ordered his line to pull back 150 meters to a new position. This retrograde movement was executed in an orderly fashion and within a few minutes the three platoons were redeployed on line with the eight remaining armored personnel carriers. All mounted .50 caliber guns were operating at this time, and the company was laying down a heavy base of fire to its front and flanks. The artillery forward observer was now adjusting artillery fires into an impact area 200 meters to the west of the new company position. In addition, the 81mm mortars were laying down fire that was primarily

impacting to the immediate front of the second platoon's position on the right flank. The scout and CRIP platoons with the 40mm gun team were deployed on line along the MSR approximately 500 meters north of the company position and were delivering a withering field of fire across the company's front. (See sketch #6 for disposition of the company in this new position.)

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Despite this heavy volume of fire, the enemy continued to press his assault. Three of the remaining eight armored personnel carriers were knocked out by direct hits, and the company's casualties mounted rapidly to include the company commander, the artillery forward observer and the mortar platoon forward observer. At 1201 hours a helicopter gun team arrived on station and delivered fire along the now threatened left flank of the company position.

The platoon leader of the third platoon assumed command of the company shortly after 1200 hours. With his position made unviable by the persistent human-wave assaults, and the “hugging” tactics of the enemy, the lieutenant elected to withdraw further to the east to a clearing on the edge of the rubber where a landing zone could be secured for medical evacuation of his wounded. This movement was executed, and shortly thereafter, the company was joined by the scout and CRIP element. (See sketch #7 for unit withdrawal routes.) Heavy artillery and air strikes were then directed into the rubber from which the units had withdrawn.

A short time later, a second mechanized company from DAU TIENG moved into position in the vicinity of the village to reinforce the contact and relieve the pressure on the original company in contact. Following the lifting of the heavy artillery fires and air strikes, the reinforcing company swept through the area of contact without resistance.

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The sweep of the contact area revealed 182 enemy bodies and numerous blood trails and drag marks indicating that the enemy had carried off numerous other casualties as he withdrew. In turn, the original company in contact sustained 15 killed and 23 wounded along with the loss of six armored personnel carriers. The battlefield indicators established the enemy force in contact as two battalions or a regiment (minus).

The company with the scout and CRIP element remained in a defensive position on the edge of the rubber until 1600 hours when they were ordered to return to the DAU TIENG Base Camp.

LESSONS LEARNED

The mechanized company that engaged in this action performed under fire in a highly creditable manner. Several valuable lessons learned, both of a positive and negative nature, can be drawn from this experience by all commanders and leaders.

1. Our mechanized company commander's action in dismounting his troops and in using a deliberate rate of march for his sweep was well considered. We must get our mechanized infantry out on the ground where the enemy lives. We also must give the foot soldiers time to do a thorough job.

2. Choice of the "V" formation in moving through the rubber was well made. With one exception that will be pointed out below, the formation provided the flexibility of control, firepower and maneuver the commander required to meet the situation as it developed. Always give primary consideration to your combat formation, and tailor it to the local terrain and the enemy capabilities.

3. When he made contact against an obviously numerically superior enemy force, the commander maneuvered well to meet the threat to his company. His flank denial and carefully calculated withdrawals to maintain a safe distance between his line and the enemy in order to effectively utilize his superior organic and supporting fires is a good illustration of a key to success in this combat environment - defeat the enemy with firepower not the bodies of your men. The company commander gave ground wisely and in a disciplined manner, battered the enemy with firepower and won the battle…….We must win every battle!!

4. Now the negative side of the ledger; two things are worthy of note. First, the commander could well have placed his point security farther to the front - 100 meters as opposed to the 30 to 40 that he employed. Flank security, too, could have been at least 50 meters out with little problem. By having his point at 100 meters, the commander would have had sufficient warning of the enemy's presence to have maneuvered his dismounted troops and tracks before the main body came under heavy fire. He had too much committed too soon. The battle was joined and his flexibility was lost before he knew where he wanted to place most of his pressure.

5. In his movement through the rubber, the company commander compromised the immediate firepower of his mortar platoon by having it with the main body. Had he moved his mortars behind his main body advancing them by bounds from prospective firing position to prospective firing position, he would have been able to make immediate use of his mortar platoon's firepower. As it was, valuable time and firepower was lost as the mortars repositioned to the rear. Avoid any situation wherein you can't wallop the enemy with your full punch at a moment's notice.

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