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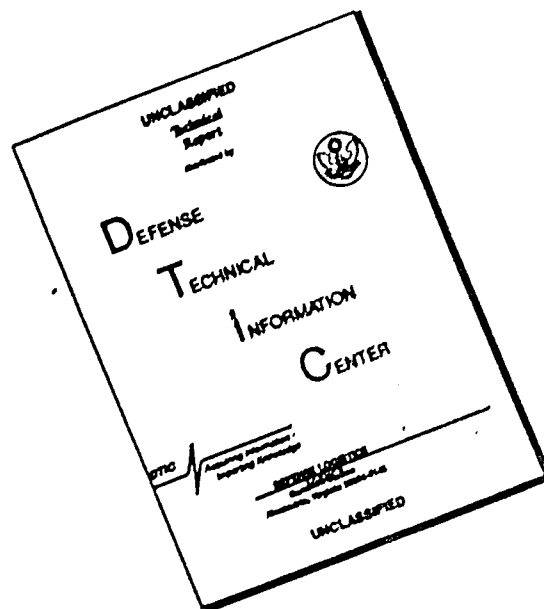
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**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20310**

IN REPLY REFER TO

AGAM-P (M) (9 May 69) FOR OT UT (69X011)

15 May 1969

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report - Hawk/Hunter, 1st Platoon, B
Company 3d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry, 5-7 April
1969 (U)

SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. Subject report is forwarded as inclosure for review and evaluation in accordance with paragraph 5b, AR 525-15.
2. Information contained in this report is provided to insure appropriate benefits in the future from lessons learned during current operations and may be adapted for use in developing training material.

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY:

Kenneth G. Wickham

**KENNETH G. WICKHAM
Major General, USA
The Adjutant General**

1 Incl
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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Headquarters I Field Force Vietnam
APO San Francisco 96350

AVFA-GC-HIST

26 April 1969

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Interview Report (U) 1st Platoon, B Company
3d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry

SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. (U) REFERENCE:

a. MACV Directive 335-8, Combat Operations After Action Reports (MACJ3-32 (R2) dated 31 January 1968.

b. USARV Regulation 870-3, Combat After Action Interviews dated 7 March 1968.

2. (U) NAME AND TYPE OF OPERATION: Unnamed HAWK/Hunter-Killer Operation.

3. (U) DATE OF OPERATION: 5-7 April 1969.

4. (U) LOCATION: 10 kilometers ESE of Bao Loc City, Lam Dong Province, RVN; grid coordinates ZT 162733.

5. (U) COMMAND AND CONTROL HEADQUARTERS: 3d Battalion (Airborne), 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade OPCON to Task Force South.

6. (U) PARTICIPATING UNITS:

a. 1st Platoon, B Company, 3-503d Infantry

(1) 4.2" Mortar Forward Observer, HQ Company 3-503d Infantry

(2) Scout Dog Team, 39th Infantry

b. 3d Platoon, B Battery, 231 ARVN Artillery (2 Tubes 105 howitzer)

c. 92d Assault Helicopter Company (one command and control ship, three lift ships, two gun ships).

FOR OT 4T
69X011
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26 April 1969

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Interview Report (U) 1st Platoon, B Company
3d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry

7. (U) PERSONS INTERVIEWED:

LTC Henry J. Berke, CO, 3-503 Inf
MAJ Joseph F. Santilli, G-2 Opns Off, I FFORCEV
CPT Gaylord Kolbe, CO, Co B, 3-503d Inf
CPT William Underwood, S-3 Air, 3-503d Inf
CPT Richard Traut, S-2, 3-503d Inf
SFC Kenneth Hamill, Ass Opns Sgt, 3-503d Inf
SGT Michael E. Glass, 1st Platoon, Co B, 3-503d Inf
SGT Gary R. Held, 1st Platoon, Co B, 3-503d Inf
SGT Jack A. Jager, 39th Inf (Scout Dog)
SP4 Allen J. Szalewicz, 1st Platoon, Co B, 3-503d Inf
SP4 Jose A. Ballesteros, 1st Platoon, Co B, 3-503d Inf
SP4 Frederick A. Smith, 1st Platoon, Co B, 3-503d Inf
SP4 Melorn E. Lake, 1st Platoon, Co B, 3-503d Inf
SP4 Paul B. Dalton, 1st Platoon, Co B, 3-503d Inf
PFC Carver, 1st Platoon, Co B, 3-503d Inf

8. (U) INTERVIEWING OFFICER: Major Alexander S. Cochran, Commanding
Officer, 13th Military History Detachment, Headquarters, I Field Force
Vietnam.

9. (U) BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

a. By late 1968, it became apparent because of the lack of significant contacts with the enemy, that a large number of NVA forces were moving from II Corps north to I Corps and south into III Corps. The remaining NVA forces and VC Main Force and Local Force units, with a few exceptions, were avoiding contact and were adopting an economy of force role.

b. In order to counteract this new enemy situation and to increase pressure on enemy local units, couriers, and carrying parties, US forces began to employ large numbers of hunter-killer teams. Each unit had a different code name for these types of operations, but essentially they were all designed to reduce the guerilla's freedom of movement, hamper their operations and weaken their influence on the local population.

c. The 173d Airborne Brigade call their hunter-killer operations HAWK Operations. The mission assigned to a HAWK Combat Team is to harass, destroy or capture enemy personnel, equipment and installations. When a HAWK team is squad size or larger, its mission is to search, attack and decisively engage targets within its capability. The concept of HAWK operations is to assign an area of operations to a company or platoon size element. HAWK teams are employed in this area and attempt to make contact with the enemy. A reaction force is normally available to reinforce or exploit contact.

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d. One of the most effective tactics used by HAWK teams has been the ambush, especially the night ambush. The team moves into ambush positions covertly, normally after dark. The positions are usually located along known infiltration routes, paths or lines of communication.

10. (C) INTELLIGENCE:

a. The province of Lam Dong is located in the southern part of II Corps bordering on III Corps. The population of approximately 65,000 is about one half Vietnamese and one half Montagnard and is centered around the major population centers of the provincial capital, Bao Loc, the other major city, Di Linh, and along National Route 20. The local economy is basically an agrarian one.

b. 145th Main Force Battalion has operated in Lam Dong for many years and is considered one of the best combat tested VC battalions in II Corps. Also operating in the Bao Loc area are two local force units, the 715 Sapper Company and the 744th Local Force Company. In August 1968, elements of the 145 Main Force Battalion clashed with the 3-503d Infantry at Di Linh and suffered more than 100 casualties. Since that clash, enemy activity in Lam Dong has been limited to stand-off attacks primarily aimed at Regional and Popular Force units securing hamlets and to interdiction of Route 20 by mining and booby traps.

c. In July 1968, I Field Force Vietnam formed a provisional unit consisting of two US infantry battalions and support elements called Task Force South to operate in the southern part of II Corps. This unit currently conducts operations jointly with the 53d and 44th ARVN Regiments utilizing the "pair off" concept. The 3d Battalion, 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne Brigade is OPCON to Task Force South and operates from Camp Rock located outside of Bao Loc, in Lam Dong Province. With the decrease in enemy activity in the past several months, the battalion has been conducting extensive HAWK operations, normally platoon sized. Prior to 7 April, both friendly and enemy initiated contacts had been extremely light and scattered.

11. (C) MISSION: The mission given to the 1st Platoon, B Company 3-503d Inf on 29 March 1969 was to patrol and ambush in the eastern portion of the company area of operations, 10 kilometers ~~ESE~~ of Bao Loc City, in order to locate and destroy enemy in the area.

12. (C) CONCEPT OF OPERATION: The company commander's concept of operation was for the platoon to split into patrols during the day and establish one or more ambushes at night along likely enemy lines of communication.

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SUBJECT: Combat After Action Interview Report (U) 1st Platoon, B Company
3d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry

13. (C) EXECUTION:

a. On 29 March, 1st Platoon, Company B, 3-503d Infantry began to conduct HAWK operations in their assigned area of operations. The 25 man platoon was organized into two rifle squads, one machine gun squad with two M-60 machine guns and a headquarters element. A scout dog team consisting of a handler and a dog from the 39th Infantry, a forward observer from the battalion's 4.2 inch mortar platoon and a senior aidman accompanied the platoon. The dog handler had just gotten a new dog and was not yet familiar with him. The platoon was commanded by PSG Beers. The regular platoon leader was in the hospital with tonsillitis.

b. The platoon operated for approximately seven days with no contact. In the early afternoon of 5 April in the vicinity ZT 141717, a scout element spotted from 10 to 20 VC moving east on a trail wearing brand new uniforms and carrying new ruck sacks. Artillery was employed with unknown results. The platoon began to follow the trail left by the VC hoping to catch them. That night, the platoon split into two HAWK teams but had negative contact.

c. The next day (6 Apr) they continued to follow the trail. At noon, they discovered an old base camp (ZT 164727) and a VC body in a grave. They destroyed all bunkers and continued to move north. The scout dog continually alerted all day long, but no enemy could be found. The handler reasoned that the dog was alerting because of the nearness of the base camp. Early in the afternoon, the rear security man spotted a VC in uniform. Fire was exchanged with negative results. By mid-afternoon, the patrol found themselves on a well traveled north-south path. At approximately 1600, they moved down a finger to the Da Riam River vicinity ZT 172734. After stopping for water, the acting platoon leader decided to move back up the finger and establish a night position along the trail.

d. Because of the discovery of the nearby base camp and the continual alerting of the scout dog during the day, the acting platoon leader decided not to split into HAWK teams that night but rather to organize the platoon in a defensive perimeter. The fact that the platoon was due for resupply the next morning and would have to cut an LZ probably influenced his decision. The acting platoon leader sent out several clearing patrols which encountered nothing though it was later discovered that one patrol which went southeast passed within 200 meters of a large, elaborate enemy base camp.

e. The night defensive position consisted of four bunkered positions and several individual positions. Two machine guns were placed in two positions on the east of the trail. Five men were assigned to each emplacement. The two rifle squads were placed in two positions to the west of the trail; five men occupied each of these positions.

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The headquarters element, consisting of the acting platoon leader, platoon sergeant, two RTOs, and the forward observer were located in the center. The entire position measured no more than 40 meters across. Some positions were dug, but none of these were deep enough or large enough to accommodate all members of the platoon nor were they provided with overhead cover. Trip flares and claymore mines were placed outside the perimeter. OPs remained outside the perimeter until dark when they were withdrawn. Artillery defensive targets were planned and plotted by the forward observer. They were not fired. All men interviewed indicated that they felt that they were in a good defensive position.

f. Platoon SOP required that one man at each position remain awake at night. The scout dog continued to alert all night, but his handler still thought that it was because of the nearness of the base camp discovered earlier in the day. It rained off and on during the night. Most men interviewed indicated that they thought that this muffled any sound made by the VC soldiers moving into position. At approximately 0100, noises were heard outside the perimeter, and the entire platoon was alerted. After approximately 20 minutes, they stood down.

g. At first light, shortly before 0630, 7 April, the acting platoon leader made the rounds of his platoon to ensure that everyone was awake and alert. As he approached the squad position in the northwest where the scout dog was, the dog began to growl. PSG Beers immediately ordered the OPs outside the perimeter. Before they could move, a trip flare north of the perimeter went off, and the enemy attack was initiated.

h. The initial attack came from the south and was concentrated against the machine gun position and the headquarters element. The enemy utilized small arms, automatic weapons, hand grenades, B40 rockets, and satchel charges. They were dressed in new uniforms with red bandanas. Two individuals dressed in National Police uniforms were also observed with the attacking force. As the attack grew in intensity, it appeared that the enemy was moving around on the flanks to the east and west. Some Claymore mines were fired, but the VC were so close that one soldier stated that he was afraid to fire his since the enemy might have turned it around.

i. At 0638, the 4.2 inch forward observer called for artillery fire informing the fire support coordination center that the platoon was under attack. This was the first report made to battalion of the attack. During the attack, this was the only radio used. Artillery fire was provided by two tubes of ARVN 105 howitzers located at ZT 142765. They fired one round smoke and 44 rounds HE in support. For some unknown reason, all the concentrations

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INTERVIEW Report After Action Interview Report (U) 1st Platoon, B Company, 3-503d Infantry, 1st Air Cavalry Division, 1st Cavalry Division

fired were to the north of the position. The artillery forward observer was killed, and the acting platoon leader attempted to shift fire to one of the defensive targets before he died. Most of the men interviewed felt that the artillery support was not effective because it was too slow and was not where it was needed.

j. As the attack continued, the riflemen began to run out of ammunition. The machine gun position in the south ran out completely. The acting platoon leader ordered a withdrawal to the north. He was killed immediately after giving this order. The platoon sergeant assumed command and decided to withdraw across the river. Meanwhile, the VC continued to attack, utilizing large number of grenades and heavy automatic weapons fire.

k. The battalion commander and his S-3 had been alerted at 0640 by the artillery liaison section. Co C, 3-503d located at Camp Rock was alerted to deploy into the area. The battalion commander and his S-3 left Camp Rock at 0650 by chopper to locate a possible LZ and to determine the situation. By this time, all communications with the platoon had been lost.

l. In the defensive position, the new acting platoon leader gathered together all the wounded and began to move down the finger towards the river. 13 men were in the party. The enemy had overrun the southern portion of the perimeter. As the 13 man element began to withdraw, the enemy did not pursue and contact broke at approximately 0700. One wounded was unable to keep up with the party and was left on the trail. He was later found alive.

m. By 0710, the battalion commander and S-3 located the remainder of the platoon north of the river. The battalion commander landed and several minutes were spent attempting to account for people. The battalion commander wanted to counterattack with the wounded force but was unable to do so because of the shortage of ammunition. Instead, the most seriously wounded were evacuated. At 0800, elements of Co C, 3-503d began to be inserted into the area. As they moved into the contact area, they found two more friendly wounded.

n. Eleven members of the platoon were found dead, their bodies in holes and in the center of the perimeter. The platoon leader was found in the northwest portion of the perimeter. All had been shot in the head except for one whose face had been smashed in. All the rucksacks had been quickly ransacked although many valuable items had been left behind by the enemy. The machine gun position to the south was covered with brass. There was no ammunition left. The north machine gun position had about 150 rounds of M-60 ammunition left. Blood in the area indicated that numerous enemy had died or been

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3d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry

severely wounded in or around the position. An agent report received later indicated that 20 to 30 VC had been killed. While Co C was searching the contact area, they found a large and elaborate enemy base camp 200 meters to the south.

o. Co A and Co D, 3-503d Inf were withdrawn from their areas of operations and inserted to the south, east, and west of the contact area. B Troop, 7-17 Air Cavalry was diverted to the area. These friendly forces failed to make contact. Another extensive VC base camp was found 700 meters to the east, and ground troops searching this camp area found signs of very recent use including hot coals in fireplaces.

p. On 9 Apr, Co D, 3-503d Inf found three fresh enemy graves, containing two VC and one Chinese body. An envelope belonging to one of the U.S. members of the platoon was found in the vicinity.

14. (C) RESULTS:

Friendly losses: 11 KIA
14 WIA
1 PRC 25 Radio
1 PRC 77 radio
12 M-16 Rifles
1 M-60 Machinegun
3 .45 Calibre Pistols
6 Magazines (.45 Calibre Pistol)
42 Rounds (.45 Calibre)
6 Compasses

Enemy Losses: 3 KIA (BC), 30-40 (Estimated)

15. (C) ANALYSIS AND LESSONS LEARNED:

a. It appears that this platoon unknowingly set up a night laager position within close proximity of a large VC force which was probably occupying a nearby base camp. There is also reason to believe that an unknown sized VC force had been following the platoon for a day or more. Almost all of the wounded interviewed said that they felt that this is what happened. The constant alerting during 6 Apr by the scout dog and the rear security element contact that afternoon tends to confirm this.

b. The enemy force that conducted the attack was a sizable one. Estimates range from one company to a 200 man force. They were well armed and well equipped. The attack itself was well planned and well conducted. Several soldiers interviewed made specific references to the high discipline of the enemy during the attack. The fact that the enemy force was able to avoid contact and move out of the area successfully after the attack is further evidence of careful planning and control.

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Combat After Action Interview Report (U) 1st Platoon, B Company
1st Infantry

c. There is reason to believe that the acting platoon leader made a number of errors in establishing his defensive position. Specifically, bunkers were not large enough and had no overhead cover. Listening posts were not established at night. Illumination was not fired when the scout dog alerted. However, more basic to the problem, is the fact that while on a HAWK operation, the platoon assumed a conventional defensive role. They established a position well before dark and made considerable noise while digging in. As mentioned before, most personnel interviewed stated that they felt the position was adequate. In fact, many felt that they could have held out had they had more ammunition. However, the mission of the platoon was to establish ambushes and to move into them clandestinely. Again, as mentioned above, there are several possibilities why this was not done. The members of the platoon were edgy because of the nearness of the known base camp and the constant alerting of the scout dog. Secondly, the platoon was due for resupply the next morning and would have to join up in order to cut an LZ.

d. Both the battalion commander and the company commander stated that the acting platoon leader was a competent leader and was an "above average" noncommissioned officer. All wounded who were interviewed expressed confidence in their acting platoon leader.

e. The nearest reaction force to the platoon was approximately three to four kilometers away. The company headquarters was four kilometers away. Terrain prohibited rapid ground reinforcement. As a result of this contact, Task Force South is re-examining the US tactic of breaking down into platoon and smaller teams to hunt the VC. Company size night bivouacs may well become SOP.

f. There is also reason to believe that the acting platoon leader erred in not reporting the scout dogs reactions to noise around the perimeter during the night. However, this was the first operation that the handler had worked with the dog, and he was not familiar with him. The handler mentioned that he thought that the dog was alerting on the nearby basecamp. The dog had not been under fire before and was unpredictable. He had bitten the acting platoon leader the day before when he came too close to the dog.

16(C) HISTORIAN'S COMMENTS:

a. There is a tendency among US forces to underestimate the capabilities of the enemy, especially in areas where enemy contact has been extremely light over a long period of time. Likewise, there is a tendency to forget that the mission of the enemy infantryman is the same as that of the US infantry - to close with and kill the enemy.

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3d Battalion (Airborne) 503d Infantry

b. The contact of 7 April is an example of a successful enemy attack. The friendly force had probably been trailed for a day or more. They set up their position during daylight, and the enemy probably was able to reconnoiter the positions. A sizeable, well armed and combat tested enemy force was located in the immediate area. Intermittent rain fell during the night which probably deadened the noise of the enemy movement. At first light, a numerically superior enemy force attacked. Artillery was employed until the forward observer was killed. Friendly forces held until their ammunition ran low, and radio communications was lost. Double canopied jungle precluded the battalion commander from seeing what was happening until the survivors were located on the ground. A reaction force was inserted as rapidly as available assets would permit, but the enemy had withdrawn. There is every indication that the enemy suffered heavily for his attack. However because there are very few agents operating in the area, the exact number of enemy casualties may never be known.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

Frederick E. Holland

FREDERICK E. HOLLAND

1LT, AGC

Asst AG

2 Incl

1. Drawing of contact area
2. 3-503d Combat After Action Report

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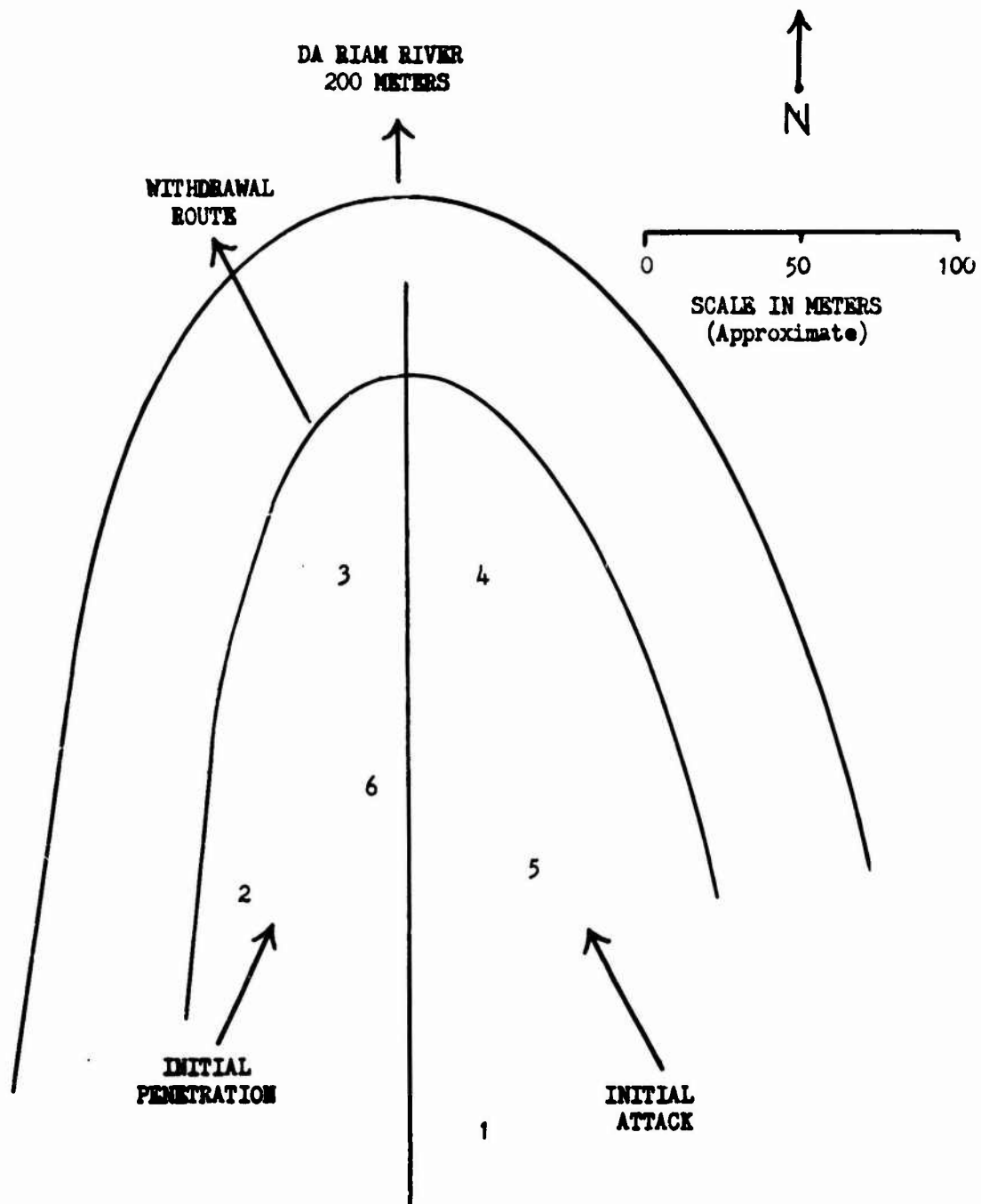
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- 5 - CO, Task Force South, ATTN: S-3
- 30 - CO, 13th Mil Hist Det

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Inclosure 1 - Drawing of Contact Area



- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Trail | 4. Machine gun position (1 KIA, 4 WIA) |
| 2. Squad position (3 KIA, 2 WIA) | 5. Machine gun position (4 KIA, 1 WIA) |
| 3. Squad position and scout dog team (5 WIA) | 6. Platoon headquarters (3 KIA, 2 WIA) |

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 3D BATTALION (ABN) 503D INFANTRY
173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE
APO San Francisco 96250

AVBE-BG-SC

11 April 1969

SUBJECT: Combat Operation After Action Report for 1st Platoon, B Company,
3-503 Infantry

Commanding Officer
Task Force South
APO 96204

1. NAME OF OPERATION: 1st Platoon, B Company, 3-503 Infantry, Contact of 7 April 1969.
2. DATE OF OPERATION: 050001 April - 072400 April 1969.
3. LOCATION: 10 kilometers ESE of BAO LOC City, LAM DONG Province, RVN.
4. COMMAND OR CONTROL HEADQUARTERS: Task Force South.
5. REPORTING OFFICER: MAJ Palmer McGrew S-3.
6. TASK ORGANIZATION:

1st Plat, B Co, 3-503 Inf
1 Forward Observer (3-503 4.2)
1 Senior Aidman
1 Team 39th Inf (Scout Dog)

7. SUPPORTING FORCES:

a. United States Air Force: N/A

b. Army Aviation: One Command and Control, three lift ships and two gunships of 92d AHC were used by 3-503 during relief of 1st Plat B Company.

c. Artillery: 3d Plat, B Btry, 231 ARVN Arty (105T) (2 tubes) located at ZT 142765 fired 1 round smoke and 44 rounds HE in direct support. A U.S. liaison team was co-located with the artillery unit to facilitate control of firing. Artillery reaction time was good. Adjustments were made without error to within 300 meters of the friendly position, when communications were lost. Artillery fires may have helped the remnants of the 1st Plat to withdraw. Withdrawal was made in the direction of the final concentration.

Inclosure 2

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11 April 1969

SUBJECT: Combat Operation After Action Report for 1st Platoon, B Company,
3-503 Infantry

8. INTELLIGENCE:

a. Enemy Situation Prior to Operation: Prior to commencement of the operation, the combat units known to operate in the area were the C-215 and the C-744 local force companies and the T-29 District Committee with two squad size elements which act as security and B-3 Arrow team.

b. Order of Battle Findings:

(1) The estimated strength prior to the entry of the unit into the area was C-215 forty personnel; C-744 — fifty personnel; B-3 Arrow — eight personnel and the security element T-29 Headquarters — twenty personnel.

(2) On 5 April three individuals from the first platoon of Bravo Company sighted 10 VC carrying loaded rucksacks and individual weapons and moving east. The first platoon tracked the 10 VC for one day and a half. On the second day one VC wearing a gray uniform, a pistol belt with canteen and ammo pouch and carrying an AK47 was detected approaching the rear of the platoon. Contact was initiated, however with negative friendly casualties and unknown enemy casualties. The platoon then moved into a night laager at ZT 160772. During the night the scout dog alerted twice and several platoon members heard distinct movement around their position. At 0630 hrs on 7 April VC initiated contact.

(3) Directly south of the contact area, a recently occupied battalion size basecamp was found. In the basecamp the following items were also found: 585 rounds of 7.62 short ammunition, 6 Chicom grenades, 6 pair jungle boots, 1 B40 booster charge, 2 light anti-tank weapons, one of which had been booby-trapped and various pieces of clothing. About 1 lb of documents was recovered in the basecamp, however, these documents did not identify the occupants. There were several awards given by T-29 District Committee to an member of an unidentified C-2 unit. There was also a promotion order dated 28 April 1967 generated by unit 900 an AKA for the 145 M.F. Bn. However, no positive identification of the attacking unit has been made.

c. Weather: On the night of the 7 April the moon rose at 2322 hrs with a PMI of .78. The moon was visible throughout the night with a light fog sitting in at 0400 hrs.

d. Terrain: The platoon was situated on a hill with a heavy, well used trail directing the platoon position. About 250 meters to the north of the position ran the Da Kiam River. Vegetation in the area limits visibility to approximately 10 meters and the fog which set in at 0400 hrs tended to deaden sound.

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SUBJECT: Combat Operation After Action Report for 1st Platoon, B
Company, 3-503 Infantry

9. MISSION: The platoon's mission was to patrol and ambush in the eastern portion of the company's area of operation in order to locate and destroy enemy in the area.

10. CONCEPT OF OPERATION: The Company Commander's concept was that the platoon would split into patrols during daylight and establish one or more ambushes at night along likely enemy lines of communication.

11. EXECUTION: On 5 April 1969 in the vicinity of ZT 141717, a scout element of the 1st platoon of B Co, 3d Bn, 503d Infantry sighted 10 VC moving east on a trail. The platoon began following the trail left by the VC hoping to catch them when they stopped. They followed the trail, which turned north and occasionally northeast, for the rest of the day and all day 6 April. Toward evening on 6 April the signs they had been following were no longer visible, and the platoon found itself on a well beaten trail running north-south. They decided to ambush this trail that night in hopes of catching VC moving along it, as the ones they had followed apparently had. Clearing patrols were sent out which found nothing except that the trail continued both north and south and was well used. The patrol which went southeast passed within 200 meters of a large, elaborate enemy basecamp but did not know it. It is possible that enemy trail watchers observed the patrol and were able to follow it back to the ambush site which was at ZT 162733.

The platoon established its night laager in an unusual fashion. The practice in the battalion at this time was to establish platoon size or smaller ambushes every night. Standard ambush techniques were to be employed, including moving into the position clandestinely after dark. This practice was not followed. The platoon partially dug in, establishing four bunkers around the perimeter of a defensive position (see Annex A). As the sound of digging would reveal their location they were committed to establishing a good defensive position, but they stopped far short of that. Their holes were not deep enough or large enough to accommodate all the members of the platoon, nor were they provided with overhead cover.

Starting shortly after midnight various members of the platoon heard movement outside the perimeter. The scout dog with the platoon was restless, giving alert signs to his handler during the night. It was not unusual for the jungle to sound as if there were people moving through it and the NCOs of the platoon were able to calm the men, but not the dog.

At first light, shortly before 0630 hrs, SFC Beers, the acting platoon leader, made the rounds of his platoon ensuring that everyone was awake and alert. While he was still doing that, a trip flare popped and the enemy attacked. Fire came from around the perimeter in all directions making it obvious that they were surrounded. Sp4 Dye, the 4.2" mortar FO attached to the platoon, called for artillery

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fire, informing the fire support coordination center that the platoon was surrounded. He adjusted fire from ARVN artillery close to the perimeter before he was killed. The enemy attacked repeatedly from the south and the defenders replied by firing their claymore mines and their individual weapons.

The machinegun on that side of the perimeter fired into groups of 3, 4 or 5 VC that appeared at or fired from the positions to the front, silencing the enemy's fire and turning back his attacks. Fragmentary rounds were exploding in the perimeter caused by either B40 rockets or M79s. All members of the platoon were wounded by fragments and many of their weapons were damaged. Eventually the enemy was able to momentarily overrun the southern portion of the position and those men who were still alive and conscious were clustered in the northern half. Led by SSG Eckman, the acting platoon sergeant, they started to counterattack when one of the men realized he was out of ammunition. SSG Eckman saw that there were about eight members of the platoon lying dead in the position, and found that everyone was nearly out of ammunition. He concluded that they could only defend themselves a few more minutes before they would be out of ammunition. He decided to withdraw across the river to the north. On the way they encountered two enemy on the trail and killed them at point blank range.

The battalion TOC had received the message that the platoon was surrounded at 0630 hours from the artillery liaison section and had alerted the battalion commander and S3. They arrived over the position at approximately 0700 they saw US personnel north of the river waving to them and landed at that location. There were twelve personnel at that location, all wounded, and SSG Eckman reported that the rest of the platoon was dead, except for one man, PFC Szalewicz, who had been left behind on the trail when he was unable to keep up. C Co, at Camp Rock, was alerted to deploy to the area and started arriving at 0800. One more man, PFC Ramsey was located a short distance from the group of 12, and Szalewicz was found alive by C Co, when they moved to the defensive position. Eleven members of the platoon were found dead at the position. They had all been shot in the head except one, whose face was smashed. All of their rucksacks had been quickly ransacked, although many valuable items had been left behind by the enemy.

All 25 men of the platoon were accounted for. Members of the platoon could account for at least seven enemy that were dead in the position when they left, but none were still there when C Company arrived. Blood in the area indicated that possibly 30 or 40 enemy had died or been severely wounded in or around the position.

A & D Companies were inserted in the vicinity to attempt to cut off the enemy's escape. Two days later D Co found three fresh enemy graves and dug up two Vietnamese VC and one Chinese, a large man who had been described by one of the survivors. An envelope belonging to SSG Eckman was found in the vicinity.

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12. RESULTS:

a. Friendly Losses:

KIA - 11

WIA - 14

PRC 25 -	1
PRC 77 -	1
M-16 Rifles -	12
M-60 Machinegun -	1
.45 Cal Pistols -	3
Magazines .45 Cal. Pistol -	6
Rounds .45 Cal. -	42
Compasses -	6

Survivors reported that one M-16 rifle was dropped in a hole and a M-26 grenade detonated in the hole prior to withdrawal, two M-16 rifles were thrown in the creek and two M-16 rifles were disassembled and the parts scattered in the underbrush during withdrawal. The M-60 MG had been hit and put out of commission, possibly by a B40 rocket, during the contact.

b. Enemy Losses: 3 KIA - (BC)

Blood on the ground in the area indicated that 30-40 enemy were either killed or badly wounded.

13. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

a. Supply: N/A

b. Maintenance: N/A

c. Treatment of Casualties, Evacuation and Hospitalization: A total of 14 WIA were treated by the 1-568 Medical Clearing Company surgeon, the 3-503 surgeon and aidmen assigned to both units. The wounded were medivaced mainly by the 92d AHC ships. One casualty was evacuated by dustoff in a well coordinated hoist mission. All casualties were returned to the 568 Medical Clearing Facility where fast, efficient treatment was initiated. Most of the wounds were considered not of an urgent nature and after initial treatment the patients were held at the Clearing Facility for about 3 hours, at which time 9 were evacuated to Nha Trang by fixed wing aircraft. All evacuated personnel were listed in satisfactory condition at the 8th Field Hospital.

d. Transportation: N/A

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e. Communications: The platoon experienced some communications difficulty throughout the day on 6 April, however, the 1st Platoon was able to communicate well with the 2d platoon during the night and while they were under attack in the morning. The platoon leader could not monitor his radio constantly during the contact, and no one was able to talk to him to obtain information except for the two times that he broadcast requests for artillery. The forward observer attached to the platoon had good communication and maintained contact with artillery until he was mortally wounded. Both the platoon leader and the FO were killed during the battle and no one in the platoon reestablished radio communications after they were silenced. All three radios were abandoned by the survivors, but one had been carried a short way before it became caught in the jungle and was left behind. One of the radios, probably the one that was abandoned along the way, was recovered by the relief force. The survivors used smoke grenades to show their location when the C&C ship arrived at the scene and arm and hand signals to show they wanted the ship to land. The battalion commander and S-3 landed that time and established face to face contact with twelve men at that location and received the report of what had happened. The battalion S-3 had taken a PRC 77 radio from the C&C ship and it was used to direct deployments of the relief force.

f. Medical Evaluation: N/A

g. Personnel Service: N/A

14. SPECIAL EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES: NONE

15. ANALYSIS AND LESSONS LEARNED: A number of errors were made by the platoon leader in establishing his defensive position, however these could more correctly be classified as violations of established tactical doctrine than as lessons learned. Among those errors are:

- a. No overhead cover
- b. Bunkers not large enough
- c. Too few bunkers
- d. No listening posts
- e. Failure to maintain effective communications

The first four observations assume that the platoon was conducting a conventional operation, whereas the platoon's mission was to patrol and ambush. It should not have established a defensive position but should have moved clandestinely into an ambush position after dark. The

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platoon leader combined two techniques, stopping and establishing his position during daylight as though he was engaged in conventional operations but failing to construct proper positions. The lessons learned is that it is not possible to mix the two types of tactics in this fashion. The patrol base or ambush derives security from its secrecy, whereas the defensive position derives security from its strength and defensibility. By attempting to combine the two tactics the platoon leader sacrificed the security afforded by either.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

1 Incl
ATTACH A SCHEMATIC

/s/John S. Bethea, LTC, INF
/t/PALMER MCGREW
MAJ INF
Battalion S-3

Cys Furn:
5 - CG 173d Abn Bde

A TRUE COPY

Alexander S. Cochran
ALEXANDER S. COCHRAN
Major Infantry
Commanding

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