

64-079

TASK FORCE SOUTH  
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AOAC-3 (FY-69)

## TASK FORCE SOUTH

In late June 1968, a new joint United States-Vietnamese headquarters, Task Force South (TF South), was formed to control and coordinate tactical operations in the provinces of Binh Thuan, Ninh Thuan, Tuyen Duc and Lam Dong in II Corps Tactical Zone (II CTZ). The headquarters was established in the city of Dalat. TF South had operational control (OPCON) over two US Task Forces and two large ARVN units. The nucleus of the forces in the Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan Provinces was the 3d Bn, (ABN) 506th Infantry (3-506th) at the city of Phan Thiet, and the 44th Regiment, 23d ARVN Division at Song Mao. The 3r Bn, (ABN) 503d Infantry (3-503d) and the 2d ARVN Ranger Group were positioned at Bao Loc to operate in the provinces of Lam Dong and Tuyen Duc. The specific missions of TF South were:

- \* to conduct all authorized forms of land, sea and air warfare within its capabilities
- \* to organize and participate in combined operations with Free World Military Forces in the four provinces
- \* to assist the four provinces with their Rural Development Program
- \* to keep the main highways in the four province area open and maintained.

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The main purpose of TF South was to coordinate the efforts of TF 3-506th and TF 3-503d in conjunction with all Free World Forces in the four province area of operations. An additional reason, and perhaps the most important, was to direct and coordinate the ability of these two US TF's to train the ARVN, Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Force (PF) units who eventually will have to assume the complete responsibility for security within the four provinces.

The staff of TF South was organized jointly from commander through S-5. It acted solely as a command and control headquarters with no organic or direct support units; thus its size, 28 US personnel and an equal contingent of Vietnamese officers and enlisted men, was kept to a bare minimum.

Planning for all operations was done jointly. The US commander retained OPCON of US forces as did the ARVN commander his own forces. The decision-making process was completed with joint understanding and complete cooperation between the two commanders. For example, if the US commander needed additional forces for an operation, coordination was made directly with the ARVN commander who in turn issued appropriate instructions for support of the operation to his subordinates. The reverse was true with the US commander who controlled the bulk of the artillery and all helicopter support within the four provinces. The results of this action were two-fold: one, the ARVN and other Free World Forces received needed logistical and combat support

for tactical operations; and two, a close working relation between the senior US and ARVN commanders, in addition to the assets for tactical operations, provoked the ARVN to go on extended offensive operations. Prior to the formation of the TF, ARVN and RF units throughout the four provinces did not conduct many operations in the area. Shortly after 1 July,

"all RF units were conducting operations at least five days a week to include two night operations per unit. The ARVN units were getting into the habit of staying in the AO for extended operations."<sup>1</sup>

The US Bn TF's continuously deployed in coordination with other Free World Forces. This ranged from an RF company as firebase security to an operation involving two ARVN Bns, three CIDG Co's, one Provisional "Mike" Bn, and a US Bn TF.

"The combined command worked out areas of operation, fire support coordination, a communication plan and logistical support for each force. The TF conducted their coordinated assault into the designated tactical area of responsibility (TAOR), either day or night, by helicopter, by junk fleet or on foot. Each rifle company conducted a cloverleaf or reconnaissance in force operation during the day and established between three and six ambushes during the night. The companies were able to achieve a good measure of security by aggressive offensive operations and continuous movement."<sup>2</sup>

A basic concept to support this type of operation was to try to live as close to the way of the enemy as possible; thus, disrupting his activities more effectively. Helicopters were only flown into company positions for resupply and upon enemy contact. Each man carried three to four days rations in his rucksack and companies were resupplied according to

a prearranged schedule.<sup>3</sup>

The Joint Tactical Operations Center (JTOC) was established by the US combat support company commander and was usually co-located with an artillery battery on a hill-top. Low ground was only used when there was no commanding terrain available. The JTOC was positioned in order to effect command and control, emergency resupply and fire support. Communications at the JTOC were established so that the TF commander could talk, by radio or telephone, with the TF South Commander and to HQ, IFFV, in Nha Trang. Security for the JTOC was provided normally by an ARVN or RF rifle company and a US rifle company. The US rifle company had a double mission in that they were the 30 minute reaction force for the deployed units within the TAOR. Helicopters would pick up the re-inforcing unit at the JTOC and fly them into the TAOR. Once in the TAOR the senior US ground commander would assume operational control of all elements in the immediate area.<sup>4</sup>

The two US Infantry Bn's reconnaissance platoons were organized into LRRP teams. Each platoon had five teams of six men each. These teams, plus five teams from the 20th Infantry (LRRP-IFFORCEV), provided a total of 15 teams to be deployed throughout the TAOR. A minimum of five teams were deployed throughout the TAOR at all times. The use of these teams completely confused the enemy as to the intentions of the US Bn'TF's and provided extremely good intelligence.<sup>5</sup> The outstanding results achieved by the

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US LRRP teams prompted the ARVN commander, with the assistance of a small US cadre from the LRRP teams, to start a LRRP school for selected Vietnamese officers and enlisted personnel at Phan Thiet. By 1 September, the first graduates were being deployed with ARVN units into the field.

When an emergency situation developed at a distant place in one of the four provinces where the TF was not operating, one of the two US Battalions' XO's was dispatched with a small TF consisting of a command and control helicopter, one US rifle company and one US artillery battery. They would operate with ARVN and RF units within the area. This fast deployment of forces throughout the AO often upset the plans of the VC and caught VC elements by surprise, causing heavy casualties. The obvious strain on supply and communication lines caused by these split operations was relieved by continuous thorough planning and aggressive action by the TF staff officers.<sup>6</sup>

The great amount of coordination required between ARVN and US units was a surprise to the Vietnamese staff officers. The initial complications of such operations were not apparent, especially to the local Vietnamese staffs. However, after a few operations and the forceful command actions of the senior Vietnamese commander at TF South HQ, the local ARVN and province staffs, under the guidance of the assigned US advisors, quickly improved and started to become a coordinated well-organized replica of the US staffs they saw in action.

The overall effect of the combined command did not start to show itself until late August and early September. The degree of success of TF South's influence can only be measured by looking at the complete tactical and political situation as a whole within the four provinces.

The tactical situation could be measured more clearly due to the day-to-day operations taking place. The ARVN were now in the field almost as much as the US forces. The M-16 rifle had been issued to all the ARVN troops; this seemed to instill a more aggressive attitude upon both troops and leaders. The increased availability of US combat support for ARVN operations had the greatest impact; excuses for not conducting an operation grew fewer and fewer. The RF and PF troops grew more aggressive as the ARVN forces stayed out in the AO. The combined action increased government security within the villages. This became more apparent by the increased accurate intelligence coming directly from the villagers. Twice, during early August, villagers reported that a large VC force was approaching the city of Phan Thiet from the northeast. ARVN forces deployed into the area making heavy contact with the enemy. US forces were flown into the battle to try to complete the encirclement. Each time the encirclement failed to be as complete as desired and the enemy escaped. However, the tactical training gained in this most difficult maneuver was most beneficial for the Free World Forces. Thus, when the same force was again reported by villagers to

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be approaching the city from the northwest in early September, ARVN and US forces successfully accomplished a combined encirclement that left 58 VC dead against 1 US and 5 ARVN dead. The success of this operation and others like it forced the change in ARVN tactical thinking from primarily defensive to offensive.

The political situation could only be measured by the increased hard intelligence being provided by the local inhabitants of the four provinces and the upward turn in the Rural Development Program. During the TET offensive, the Rural Development Program suffered a major setback. Its work had been destroyed by the VC and the cadre teams had been forced to return to the city each night for security reasons. As TF South militarily changed the situation in the provinces, these teams once again were living continuously with the villagers. The damage from the TET offensive was almost completely repaired and fulfillment of most of the original goals set for 1968 were moving toward accomplishment. Coordination on military, political, and economic problems in the four provinces was more easily accomplished, and started to give a greater semblance of government control and order to the war effort throughout the area.

The initial success of TF South was slowly establishing a pattern for an effective economy of force operation for all aspects of the war effort in the II CTZ. This idea is being expanded and improved upon throughout II CTZ and appears



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on the surface to be the most effective method for future operations; especially when the time comes to start withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam.

FOOTNOTES

1. R. M. Elton, "Air Cavalry in II Corps," Marine Corps Gazette, 53 (January, 1969), 11.
2. Ibid., 10.
3. Ibid., 10.
4. Ibid., 10.
5. Ibid., 10.
6. Ibid., 10.

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### AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Captain William H. Landgraf, OF101551, was graduated from the U. S. Military Academy in 1964. He attended the Ranger Course and Airborne Course in 1964. He was then assigned to the 2nd Bn, (ABN) 509th Inf., 8th Infantry Division, Germany, where he served as a platoon leader, S-3 air, and Commandant, 8th Inf. Div. Abn. Sch.. He was reassigned in March 1967 to the 3rd Bn, (ABN) 506th Inf., 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where he served as a company commander. He deployed with this unit to South Vietnam, where he served as company commander and battalion S-4. In 1968, he returned to CONUS and attended the Armor Officer Advanced Course. He is currently assigned to

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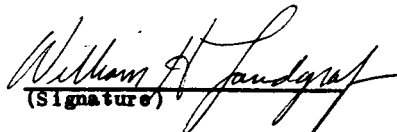
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