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OPERATIONS OF COMPANY B, 2D BATTALION (AIRBORNE) 327TH INFANTRY,
IN EMPLOYING AN ECONOMY OF FORCE RECONNAISSANCE SQUAD IN THE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH VIETNAM, 30 MARCH-1 APRIL 1967. (PERSONAL
EXPERIENCE OF A COMPANY COMMANDER.)

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INTRODUCTION

In early 1966, Communist forces began extensive large unit operations along the coast of the South China Sea in the Tuy Hoa area. Viet Cong (VC) main force and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units conducted attacks along Highway 1 and the railroad, which paralleled the highway, until they effectively stopped all land travel into the Tuy Hoa area. Massive attacks were conducted against local paramilitary and Army of the Republic of Vietnam units which significantly reduced their combat effectiveness. Concurrently, an intensive terror campaign was conducted against public officials who supported the government of South Vietnam. It was evident that the enemy intended to remain in the Tuy Hoa area and that he was attempting to impose his will upon the people. United States^(u.s.) officials correctly estimated that the Communist needed control of the Tuy Hoa area in order to control the large rice crop produced there.

To counter this Communist move, U.S. forces were deployed in the Tuy Hoa area in April of 1966. Large scale battles were fought during May and June and heavy casualties were inflicted upon the enemy forces. By August 1966, it appeared that the larger enemy units had moved out and that the Communist had abandoned their attempt to control the Tuy Hoa area. This, however, was not the case, for in late 1966, Communist forces again launched intensive offensive operations in the same coastal region. Again the enemy forces suffered heavy casualties; two U.S. companies also sustained significant losses. Intelligence reports revealed that the enemy units participating in the battle were the same units which had been previously defeated. They had

filled their ranks with new personnel and had replaced captured and destroyed weapons and equipment. The performance of the enemy units indicated that they had undergone extensive training since their last encounter on the battlefield.

U.S. units were now operating within the Tuy Hoa area on a permanent basis to protect the local populace and the essential rice crops. In early 1967, the Communists launched another offensive operation in the same area. During this operation, an unsuspecting U.S. company was completely overrun and nearly annihilated by a VC main force battalion. Intelligence reports revealed that the responsible enemy unit was one which had suffered defeat at the hands of U.S. forces in the same area in late 1966.

It was apparent that NVA and VC main force units were launching operations in the Tuy Hoa area from a nearby haven in which they were able to receive new personnel, train, regroup, and resupply. U.S. commanders did not know where the enemy base area was, but available intelligence indicated that it might have been in the area known as "the Haroi" which was approximately 35 kilometers southwest of Tuy Hoa.

In late March 1967, the Commanding General, I Field Forces, Vietnam, ordered the Commanding General, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division to deploy his forces into the Haroi area. The assigned mission was: to determine if the Haroi area contained an enemy secret base complex and if so, to seek out and destroy those forces within the area. The operation was to be named "Summerall".

TERRAIN

The area of operation encompassed the northwestern portion of Khanh Hoa Province and the southwestern portion of Phu Yen Province. Three-quarters of the area was characterized by heavily

forested mountains and hills with elevations generally in excess of 800 meters. The remainder of the area was relatively flat and thickly vegetated. Many small streams, which were not shown on the map, flowed throughout the area. Some of these streams originated from springs high up in the mountains, thus providing a good supply of water for enemy installations located on the mountain tops.

Observation and fields of fire were seriously limited by the heavy vegetation in both the mountain and lowland areas.

Concealment was excellent throughout the area from both ground and aerial observation. Cover was poor in the lowlands and consisted only of folds in the ground, stream beds, and to some extent, the thick vegetation. Cover in the mountains was excellent, particularly in the terrain covered by huge rocky boulders. The thick jungle canopy significantly reduced the effects of artillery and tactical air fires in the mountain areas.

The most significant obstacles within the area of operation were the steep mountainous slopes, thick vegetation, and unfordable streams. Foot movement was very slow and difficult except when travelling along trails. The largest unfordable stream in the area was the Song Hin River.

The best avenues of approach were Highway 21 running north-west-southeast through the center of the area of operation and Highway 9B running north-south in the northeast portion of the area of operation. Highway 9B had not been open to traffic since 1954. It was a dirt bed road and, in many places, was covered with thick vegetation. It was, however, an excellent avenue of approach for dismounted forces. Numerous mountain valleys provided good local avenues of approach throughout the area.

WEATHER

The weather was favorable for the conduct of tactical

operations. Afternoon showers were frequent, but did not significantly effect visibility and had no adverse effect on the men or their equipment. Early morning fog restricted the use of helicopters for a period of two hours during the morning of 30 March.

ENEMY SITUATION:

The Haroi secret base was believed to be comprised of a series of platoon-to battalion-size base camps. U.S. officials believed that the following enemy units traditionally operated in the Haroi area: the 5th NVA ^{Division (TRADPARRE, 1st VC Main Force, the 18B NVA Regiment)} Regiment, and the 30th VC Main Force Battalion. As operation Summerall began, existing intelligence indicated that elements of the 18B NVA Regiment might possibly be staging within the Haroi area. The other aforementioned enemy units were not believed to be operating within the area at the time.

THE BRIGADE PLAN

The Brigade planned to deploy initially two of its three battalions into the area of operation by airmobile assault. The two battalions were to assault on multiple landing zones and were to conduct search and destroy operations within their respective areas of operation. The other battalion was to be held in reserve and employed to exploit enemy contacts or intelligence developed by the committed battalions. A B-52 strike was planned in support of the operation; the target area was to be searched immediately after the strike by a rifle company from one of the committed battalions. (See Map A)

THE BATTALION PLAN

The 2d Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry (-) was to conduct an airmobile assault on 30 March into its area of operation which was in the southeastern portion of the Brigade's area of operation. (See Map A) Company B was to assault into Landing Zone

Heiffer and was to exploit the B-52 strike and conduct search and destroy operations in areas adjacent to the strike zone. (See Map A) Company A was to assault into Landing Zone Stud, which was approximately three kilometers west of Landing Zone Heiffer, and was to conduct search and destroy operations west of Landing Zone Stud. The battalion command post, Headquarters Company, and B Battery, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 320th Artillery were to follow Company A into Landing Zone Stud and establish the command post and artillery fire base in the immediate vicinity of the landing zone. Company C was detached from the battalion for the initial phase of the operation and was given the mission of securing Highway 21, which was being used as a land resupply route for the brigade.

THE COMPANY ORGANIZATION

Company B was organized into three rifle platoons, a weapons platoon, and a company headquarters.

The rifle platoons were organized into three rifle squads and a platoon headquarters. The weapons squad within each platoon was not deleted but was broken down and permanently attached to two of the three rifle squads. This provided these two squads with a M60 machine gun and crew. Each platoon had three AN/PRC-25 radios for command and control.

The weapons platoon was trained and equipped to function as a 81 millimeter mortar platoon, a 60 millimeter mortar platoon, or as a rifle platoon. The platoon was capable of performing each of the three missions in a professional manner. When performing as a rifle platoon, the platoon was organized and equipped exactly as the three rifle platoons except that only one squad was reinforced with a machine gun. Henceforth, the weapons platoon will be referred to as the fourth platoon.

The company also employed a reconnaissance squad which was part of the company headquarters. The squad consisted of eleven members, including a medical aidman, and was organized into two reconnaissance teams. This squad was organized, equipped, and trained from resources within the company organization. The squad's primary mission was to conduct economy of force reconnaissance operating as a semi-independent unit.

The reconnaissance squad was armed with nine M-16 rifles and two XM148's. The latter weapon is an M-16 rifle with a 40 millimeter grenade launcher mounted beneath the barrel. This gave the squad both automatic and semi-automatic weapons, plus two special purpose 40 millimeter grenade launchers. The squad was equipped with two AN/PRC-25 radios for command and control. For night surveillance, the squad was provided with a Starlight scope of the same type as those employed by the rifle platoons. Other equipment and special items issued included: Composition C-4 and the necessary demolitions equipment to provide a demolitions capability, binoculars, compasses, panel markers, signal mirrors, machetes, extra canteens, a 100 foot nylon rope, snap links and extra maps. Each squad member carried a triple basic load of ammunition including one Claymore mine and eight hand grenades. The squad used the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) ration and a rice supplement for food.

THE COMPANY MISSION

The mission of Company B was to conduct an airmobile assault into Landing Zone Heiffer and to exploit the B-52 strike by searching the area immediately following the strike. (See Map A) Upon completion of the exploitation, the company was to conduct search and destroy operations northwest of the strike zone orienting

on enemy contacts.

MANEUVER PLAN

I planned to move the first and second platoons due east from the landing zone and have them search the strike zone sweeping from the northern portion of the zone toward the southern end. The third platoon was to move northwest from the landing zone and conduct search and destroy operations approximately one and one-half kilometers north-northwest of the strike zone. The command group and the fourth platoon were to move northeast from the landing zone and establish the command post on the high ground approximately 800 meters from the landing zone. The fourth platoon was to conduct patrols within the immediate area of the command post and be prepared to move to and assist any of the other three platoons which might develop contact with a sizeable enemy force. (See Map A) The reconnaissance squad was to remain with the command group until I could obtain more information about the area of operation. I intended to employ the squad in a reconnaissance role, but elected to select the area in which it would operate only after developing the situation.

FIRE SUPPORT PLAN

The landing zone would not be prepared by artillery or tactical air fires. Three helicopter gunships would escort the troop lift helicopters into the landing zone and would make one firing pass at the landing zone just prior to the landing of the lift helicopters. Tactical air support would be provided by fighter aircraft from the squadron based at Tuy Hoa; I could count on tactical air support being over the target area within 10 to 15 minutes after initiating the request. The direct support artillery battery would be the primary fire support agency. The artillery forward observer planned 30 concentrations throughout the area of operation and had

them approved by the artillery fire direction center. All squad leaders and platoon leaders in the company had these concentrations plotted on their maps and had the coordinates recorded in their notebooks. The concentrations were assigned identifying numbers one through 30. The purpose of these planned concentrations was as follows; when an element was moving, the element leader was required to know which planned concentration was nearest to his element. If the element suddenly became engaged by an enemy force, the leader could immediately call for the appropriate concentration. Once the concentration was fired, the leader would need only an azimuth to enable him to rapidly adjust the fire on the enemy force. This technique could prevent leaders from wasting valuable time in determining grid coordinates and requesting lengthy fire missions while under enemy fire.

PREPARATION

The company was located at the battalion's forward base camp #7 Khank Duong, which was approximately 25 kilometers southwest of Landing Zone Heiffer. I received the detailed operations order from the battalion commander at 1400 hours on 29 March. Immediately after receiving the order, the battalion commander, the battalion S-3, the company artillery forward observer, one of my rifle platoon leaders, the reconnaissance squad leader, and I conducted a limited aerial reconnaissance of the planned B-52 strike zone and Landing Zone Heiffer. The reconnaissance mission was flown at an altitude of 5,000 feet and consisted of one straight line flight over the area. I issued the company operations order at 1830 hours and required the platoon leaders to brief me at 2200 hours concerning their detailed platoon plans.

At 0630 hours on 30 March, the platoon leaders and I conducted a thorough inspection of all personnel and their equipment. The

purpose of this inspection was to insure that each man deployed with the required items of equipment, ammunition, and food and to insure that personnel deployed with no unnecessary items. Immediately after the inspection, all personnel camouflaged themselves and their equipment and made last minute preparations. At 0830 hours, I met with all fire team leaders, squad leaders, and platoon leaders and issued them radio call signs and frequencies for the following: The direct support artillery battery, forward air controllers, medical evacuation helicopters, the battalion command net, and adjacent units. At 0845 hours, the company moved to the pickup zone, broke down into helicopter loads, and waited for the B-52 strike to begin.

NARRATION

Company A conducted an unopposed airmobile assault into Landing Zone Stud commencing at 0835 hours on 30 March. By 0925 hours, the artillery battery and Headquarters Company were in position and the fire base was established on the eastern side of the landing zone. Company A began moving west at 0930 hours to conduct search and destroy operations in the assigned area of operation. Immediately after establishing the fire base, the artillery battery began firing false registration fires in an area south of the firing position. This was done in an attempt to deceive the enemy and to make him believe that our forces would deploy to the south.

THE B-52 STRIKE

Company B remained at the pickup zone at Khank Duong during the deployment of forces into Landing Zone Stud. The B-52 strike began at 0930 hours and at 0932 hours Company B departed the pickup zone in UH-1D and CH-47 helicopters. The battalion commander and the S-3 were in the command and control helicopter orbiting west

of the B-52 strike zone in the vicinity of Landing Zone Heiffer. Shortly after we began to orbit, I received a radio message from the battalion commander informing me that the B-52 strike was being conducted two kilometers west of the intended strike zone. He immediately decided that Company B would not assault into Landing Zone Heiffer; he would conduct a reconnaissance of the strike zone immediately following the detonation of the last bomb and attempt to find suitable landing zones within the strike zone.

The battalion commander's reconnaissance revealed no landing sites within the strike zone so he selected a small open area approximately 1700 meters west of the strike zone. The landing zone would accommodate only four helicopters, but was the only available landing zone in the area.

THE ASSAULT

At 0952 hours, the first four helicopters began to land on the alternate landing zone. The zone was covered with tall cane bushes which prevented the helicopters from landing; therefore, the troops had to exit the aircraft while the aircraft hovered approximately eight feet above the ground. We encountered no enemy opposition and the assault was completed at 1004 hours. Two men were injured as a result of jumping from the helicopters and both would require medical evacuation.

ACTIONS AT THE LANDING ZONE

The company organized a hasty perimeter defense around the landing zone and I summoned the platoon leaders to my position to issue them a fragmentary order. While enroute to my position, the third platoon leader and his radio operator detected and captured a NVA soldier who was hiding in a clump of bushes inside of the perimeter. The executive officer, assisted by the

interpreter, began to interrogate the prisoner in an attempt to gain information which we could immediately exploit. I quickly briefed the platoon leaders and ordered the first and second platoons to begin movement toward the B-52 strike zone. I decided to keep the third and fourth platoons and the reconnaissance squad at the landing zone until we completed interrogating the prisoner.

The prisoner informed us that, he was a member of the 18B NVA Regiment and that he had been with the unit since it entered South Vietnam. He stated that the regiment had departed the Haroi area on 26 March and that he and six other soldiers had been left behind because they had malaria and were not physically able to make the move. He stated that no other NVA or VC main force units were operating in the area. He had no knowledge of any weapons or food caches, but was willing to lead us to a hut which he and his six comrades had inhabited.

I called the battalion commander and reported that we had captured the prisoner. I reported the information that we had obtained and requested permission to keep the prisoner for one hour in order to have the prisoner lead the third platoon to the hut. The battalion commander approved the request and informed me that he would extract the two injured personnel at 1115 hours when he came in to get the prisoner. At 1015 hours, the third platoon, with the prisoner, began moving toward the hut, which was approximately 600 meters northwest of the landing zone; the fourth platoon began patrolling south of the landing zone. Both platoons were to return to the landing zone no later than 1115 hours. The command group and reconnaissance squad remained in the vicinity of the landing zone. The prisoner led the third platoon to the hut; the hut and immediate area were searched with negative results. The enemy had evidently departed the area when the B-52 strike

began. The third and fourth platoons returned to the landing zone and the prisoner and two injured personnel were extracted by the command and control helicopter.

THE REVISED SCHEME OF MANEUVER

I decided to employ the third platoon northwest of the landing zone on the western side of the Song Hin River. The platoon was to operate no further than two kilometers west of the river. The fourth platoon was to move northeast from the landing zone and conduct search operations north of the strike zone. The command group would accompany the fourth platoon. The reconnaissance squad was to move north along the eastern side of the Song Hin River and attempt to establish observation posts astride major trails; the squad was to move at night and remain in observation posts during the day. (See Map A)

At 1130 hours, the third platoon and the fourth platoon, accompanied by the command group, began moving toward their respective areas of operation. The reconnaissance squad moved a short distance from the landing zone and established an observation post; they would remain there until after dark.

Meanwhile, the first and second platoons were progressing very slowly. Both platoons had encountered extremely thick vegetation and were having to employ cutting teams to get through. At 1240 hours, the platoons had progressed only 700 meters. At 1250 hours, the second platoon leader reported that he had found an east-west trail. The platoon followed the trail 100 meters to the east and discovered an abandoned company size base camp. (See Map A) The platoon leader estimated that the camp had been unoccupied for at least three days and reported that the trail led to the north from the camp. The platoon destroyed the facilities within the camp and continued moving toward the strike

area. At 1600 hours, the first platoon leader reported that his platoon had reached the strike zone; at 1630 hours the second platoon arrived. The two units were approximately four hundred meters apart; I directed the first platoon leader to effect a link up with the second platoon. The units linked up at 1725 hours and began to establish a perimeter defense for the night. The first platoon leader assumed command of the perimeter and dispatched two patrols to reconnoiter the immediate area. Two ambush patrols were positioned within 500 meters of the perimeter along the most likely avenues of approach. (See Map A)

At 1715 hours, the third platoon had moved approximately 1500 meters northwest of the landing zone. The platoon leader had reported finding numerous small trails west of the river, but had detected no signs of current enemy activity. The platoon leader moved his platoon onto high ground and established a perimeter defense; one squad conducted an ambush patrol along a north-south trail approximately 400 meters east of the platoon. (See Map A)

The fourth platoon and the command group stopped moving at 1800 hours and established the command post on a hilltop approximately 1000 meters northeast of the landing zone. One squad conducted an ambush patrol along the ridgeline 400 meters north of the platoon perimeter. (See Map A)

THE FIRST NIGHT (30-31 MARCH)

All elements of the company, except the reconnaissance squad, were in position and prepared for night defense and ambush operations at 1930 hours. At that time, the reconnaissance squad began moving from its observation post to the north along the east side of the Song Hin River. The squad soon came upon a small north-south trail that paralleled the river. The squad leader elected to move on the trail in order to increase the speed of movement

and decrease the noise caused by moving through the thick vegetation.

The squad leader employed the technique of moving several hundred meters and establishing listening posts; when assured of no enemy activity within an area, the squad would again continue movement. The unit conducted a thorough reconnaissance of all secondary and tertiary trails that branched from the trail on which they were moving. This technique was continued until 0300 hours on 31 March, when the squad discovered a major trail junction located approximately 1900 meters north of the landing zone. The squad leader and one reconnaissance team established a listening post at the trail junction. The other team moved approximately 500 meters north and established a listening post along the river. (See Map A) The squad leader reported the squad's location and informed me that the trail network in the area had been heavily travelled. The major trail was approximately five feet wide; it came in from the southwest and junctioned with the trail that the squad had been travelling on. The squad leader suggested that it might be the same trail which led north out of the base camp discovered by the second platoon on 30 March. I directed the squad leader to remain in the area and to maintain surveillance of the trail and river throughout the day.

31 MARCH

All elements, except the reconnaissance squad, began moving at 0600 hours. The first and second platoons continued searching the B-52 strike area and the third platoon continued operations west of the river. The fourth platoon and the command group resumed movement to the northeast toward the Ea Nhe River. (See Map A)

At 1045 hours, the fourth platoon discovered a company size

base camp approximately 900 meters north of the B-52 strike area. (See Map A) The camp had been abandoned for about three days; it now appeared that the prisoner had provided accurate information.

At 1205 hours, the reconnaissance squad leader reported that the northern reconnaissance team had detected one armed enemy soldier on the west bank of the river. The individual was dressed in black pajamas; he had moved down to a cleared area on the bank of the river and was filling canteens when the reconnaissance team detected him. At 1250 hours, the team observed several women and children in the same cleared area; each of the observed individuals filled large containers with water and then moved back to the west. I directed the squad leader to attempt to locate a crossing site and be prepared to cross the river that night to reconnoiter the area. One team reconnoitered for a crossing site while the other team maintained surveillance of the watering site. During the remainder of the day, five unarmed males of military age, and several more women and children came to the watering site to fill large containers. This activity indicated that there might be an enemy camp or village on the western side of the Song Hin River.

At 1715 hours, I ordered the third and fourth platoon leaders to begin moving their units toward the reconnaissance squad. The fourth platoon was to move into an area north of the squad and the third platoon was to move into position west of the watering site. The reconnaissance squad was to conduct a night reconnaissance on the west bank of the river. If a target was detected, the third and fourth platoons would be in positions that would facilitate rapid movement into the area. (See Map A)

The first and second platoons continued search operations

within the B-52 strike zone. At 1630 hours, the first platoon engaged and killed two NVA soldiers and captured two automatic rifles. The second platoon engaged and killed one NVA soldier and captured one automatic rifle at 1645 hours. Both of these contacts occurred on a north-south trail on the east side of the strike zone. At 1900 hours, the first and second platoons moved into night ambush positions east of the strike zone. (see MAPA)

At 1930 hours, the third platoon was 1600 meters west of the watering site and had an ambush position set up on an east-west trail. The platoon leader believed the the trail led east to the watering site. The fourth platoon and command group were still moving in order to get into position north of the reconnaissance squad. At 1905 hours, the fourth platoon had engaged and killed one VC soldier and captured one U.S. carbine. At 2200 hours, the fourth platoon reached the Song Hin River at a location approximately 900 meters north of the reconnaissance squad. (See Map A)

THE SECOND NIGHT (31 MARCH-1 APRIL)

The reconnaissance squad had not found a fordable crossing site during the daylight reconnaissance of the river. Rather than employ a rope bridge, the squad leader elected to swim across the river. At 2200 hours, the squad leader and one ~~of the~~ reconnaissance teams swam to the west bank of the river. The other team remained on the east bank to support the reconnoitering team by fire. After crossing, the team moved into the jungle about 50 meters, stopped, and listened for sounds of enemy activity. The team then moved toward the watering site until they found the trail leading west from the river. They had followed this trail for approximately 100 meters when the lead man detected a hut. The team moved off of the trail and listened but could hear nothing.

As the team moved forward, several other huts came into view. A thorough reconnaissance of the area revealed a total of 14 huts; the small village had been abandoned recently. The team continued moving to the west and had moved approximately 800 meters when the lead man heard voices; the time was 0130 hours 1 April. The squad leader positioned two of the team members along the trail as a security element and moved forward with the remainder of the team. The team conducted a detailed reconnaissance of the area and withdrew at 0330 hours. At 0500 hours, the team crossed the river and linked up with the remainder of the squad. The squad leader reported the results of the reconnaissance to me. The team had discovered a rocky cliff area which consisted of several caves. An estimated 20 men and many women and children were hiding within the cave complex. Male sentinels were on guard but none were armed. It appeared likely that these were the same people who had abandoned the village. The squad leader thought that the cave area was only a temporary hiding place and recommended that I exploit the intelligence as soon as possible. After receiving his report, I ordered the squad leader to move north with the team which had reconnoitered the cave complex and link up with the fourth platoon and command group. I then issued instructions to the third and fourth platoon leaders; the third and fourth platoons would exploit the intelligence obtained by the reconnaissance squad.

EXPLOITING THE INTELLIGENCE (1 APRIL)

At 0600 hours, the third platoon began moving toward the cave complex. The platoon was to move south of the east-west trail and approach the complex from the south; its mission was to block all avenues of egress on the east and south sides of the complex.

Two squads from the fourth platoon began reconnoitering along the river at 0600 hours to find a suitable crossing site. No fordable site could be found so I elected to conduct a rope crossing. The reconnaissance team linked up with us and the crossing began at 0635 hours. At 0740 hours, the river crossing was completed and the fourth platoon, command group, and reconnaissance team began moving south toward the cave complex. The mission of the fourth platoon was to establish a cordon on the northern side of the cave complex and to block routes of egress to the east. The reconnaissance squad leader and the reconnaissance team were to serve as guides to assist the fourth platoon leader in positioning elements of the platoon. The other reconnaissance team would remain at the river and maintain surveillance of the watering site.

The first and second platoons resumed search operations within the B-52 strike zone at 0600 hours. At 0700 hours, the second platoon discovered a battalion size training area. The area consisted of three separate company size base camps, a rifle range, hand grenade range, and several classrooms. The area had been used within the past week. (See Map A)

At 1130 hours, the third platoon leader reported that his platoon was in position. (See Map A) He had moved his platoon within 150 meters of the caves and had his men positioned in a semicircle around the complex; machine guns were positioned along the trail on both the east and west side. I directed the platoon leader to keep his people in position and to insure that the platoon remained undetected.

At 1150 hours, the fourth platoon arrived within 250 meters of the cave area. I called the third platoon leader and directed him to notify all of his personnel of our presence in the area.

The fourth platoon leader, reconnaissance squad leader, and I, secured by a rifle squad, moved forward of the platoon to reconnoiter the area. We found the caves and established physical contact with the third platoon; the fourth platoon immediately began moving into position.

At 1225 hours, the fourth platoon, reconnaissance team, and command group were established in a perimeter around the north side of the complex. The third and fourth platoons were physically tied in on the east and west sides.

The fourth platoon leader, the company interpreter, and one rifle squad began crawling toward the caves at 1240 hours.

They moved to within 30 meters of the caves and then rushed into the open area with their weapons at the ready position. The interpreter yelled to the people telling them they were surrounded. There was no resistance; the people were captured without a shot being fired.

THE RESULTS

The captives were quickly separated into two groups: 17 men in one group and 75 women and children in the other. The company senior medical aidman, assisted by the two platoon aidmen, began to treat the women and children. We wanted to show the people that we intended to help them and dispell any ideas that they might be harmed or killed. We immediately began to interrogate the male captives. They claimed that they were not VC, but that they were farmers. They claimed no knowledge of any enemy units having operated in the area.

I reported the situation to the battalion commander and requested CH-47 helicopters to evacuate the women and children to Tuy Hoa. I told the battalion commander that I believed we had VC prisoners, but could not prove it because we had captured

no weapons. I requested permission to keep the male prisoners for a couple of hours while we searched the area for weapons. The battalion commander approved the request.

A landing zone was prepared and the first CH-47 helicopter arrived at 1430 hours. Four CH-47 sorties were required to lift the women and children, animals, and personal belongings to Tuy Hoa. The extraction was completed at 1630 hours.

We continued to interrogate the male prisoners and search the area for weapons. We made no progress until 1730 hours when one of the squads from the fourth platoon found a Mauser rifle. The rifle had been hidden beside the trail only 50 meters from the caves. We then employed various means of subterfuge and by 1830 had accomplished the following: 15 of the 17 prisoners had admitted they were VC and 13 had produced their VC identification cards. Seven additional weapons were captured.

The 15 VC, the two detainees, and eight weapons were extracted by CH-47 helicopter at 1945 hours.

The reconnaissance team that had remained on the east side of the river, joined the two platoons at the cave complex during the afternoon. At 2000 hours, the third and fourth platoons, the command group, and the reconnaissance squad departed the cave complex area. We moved approximately 400 meters to the west and established a perimeter defense; one squad from the fourth platoon remained in the complex area as a stay behind ambush force. (See Map A)

The first and second platoons had continued to operate along the eastern side of the B-52 strike zone during the day. Each platoon had one enemy contact during the day accounting for two NVA soldiers killed and two automatic rifles captured. At 1700 hours, the two platoons completed searching the strike zone and

began moving northeast. At 1930 hours, both platoons established night ambush positions northeast of the strike zone along the Ea Nhe River. (See Map A)

At 2300 hours, the battalion S-2 called and informed me that our 15 prisoners had been interrogated by the brigade interrogation team. The prisoners were local VC and were working for NVA units. Their mission was to provide food. The VC had been holding the 75 women and children as hostages and forcing them to grow rice and corn crops in the Haroi area. The VC also collected rice from farmers in Tuy Hoa and transported it into the Haroi area. The food grown in the area and that transported into the area was placed in ~~caves~~^{cases} for future use by NVA forces. The VC were not aware of any NVA unit designations, but stated that a regiment had departed the Haroi area three days prior to the arrival of U.S. troops. They provided no information concerning unit locations, weapons caches, or future plans of NVA units. The prisoners stated that they had moved from the village into the cave complex on 30 March when the B-52 strike was executed. They thought that U.S. forces had deployed south of the B-52 strike area.

The battalion commander called at 2340 hours and issued a fragmentary order. The battalion was to be extracted the following morning to be committed further west in search of the 18B NVA Regiment.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The actions of the reconnaissance squad, Company B, ^B24th Bn (Airborne), 327th Infantry during the period 30 March-1 April, were a classic example of economy of force reconnaissance operations. The squad clearly demonstrated the feasibility of employing small reconnaissance units at the Infantry company level.

The company's primary mission was to search the B-52 strike area, a task which required the combined efforts of the first and second platoons for a three day period. The reconnaissance squad was employed concurrent with the accomplishment of the primary mission. The results obtained by the reconnaissance squad were, in effect, a bonus in that they were achieved in addition to accomplishing the assigned mission. In this case, the bonus results were greater than those achieved by the B-52 strike.

The squad performed as a semi-independent unit during the initial phase of the operation. If the squad had become engaged by a superior enemy force, the squad leader would have been dependent upon organic firepower and indirect supporting fires to disengage from the enemy force. None of the rifle platoons were within range to immediately assist the squad.

As the squad began to develop the enemy situation on 31 March, the third and fourth platoons were moved into positions within the general area. Had these two platoons not moved into the area on the night of 31 March, it would have been impossible to react upon the intelligence on 1 April. The platoons could not have moved the entire distance in one day.

The squad moved at night and maintained surveillance from clandestine positions during the day. This technique was employed to increase the security of the squad. Had the squad become engaged by a superior enemy force at night, it would have been easier to break contact and withdraw than it would have been in the daytime. It is difficult to accurately locate a moving person at night and is even more difficult to bring accurate fire upon him. Pursuit is almost impossible during the hours of darkness. I also felt that better results might be obtained using this technique as

opposed to moving in the daytime. The B-52 strike and the airmobile assault had indeed announced the arrival of U.S. troops within the area. We had fired artillery south of the landing zone in an attempt to make the enemy think our interest was south of the B-52 strike area. If we had succeeded, the enemy would still be using the trails and would be moving, as normal, during the day. If this were the situation, the reconnaissance squad would obtain better results by maintaining surveillance along the trails during daylight hours. After capturing the cave complex, we found out from the prisoners that they had no idea that U.S. forces were in the area. They knew we were operating the B-52 strike area but thought we were moving south.

The prisoners captured at the cave complex were not readily identified as VC because they had no weapons at the time of capture. Had the battalion commander disapproved my request to retain the prisoners for several hours, they would have been turned into battalion and classified as detainees. They would have been released after interrogation and would have continued to aid the Communist cause. Instead, the prisoners were retained with the company and within three hours, 15 of them had been identified as VC.

LESSONS LEARNED

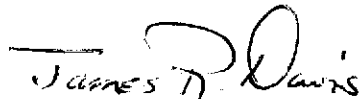
1. The Infantry company has within its organization the necessary personnel and equipment to organize, train, and successfully employ a small economy of force reconnaissance unit.

2. When employing a reconnaissance unit, the company commander must insure that sufficient maneuver forces are readily available to exploit intelligence developed by the reconnaissance unit.

3. An ideal reconnaissance technique for small reconnaissance

units is to infiltrate an area at night and to occupy clandestine observation posts during daylight hours.

4. Prisoners should not be extracted from the battlefield until the capturing unit conducts adequate interrogation. Units should be allowed to retain prisoners for periods longer than normal when it is possible to obtain significant results.


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