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OPERATIONS OF COMPANY B, 2D BATTALION, 7TH CAVALRY, 1ST  
CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE), IN A SEARCH AND DESTROY  
MISSION ON 15 FEBRUARY 1966 DURING OPERATION WHITE WING  
(EAGLES CLAW) IN BINH DINH PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM.  
(PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A COMPANY COMMANDER.)

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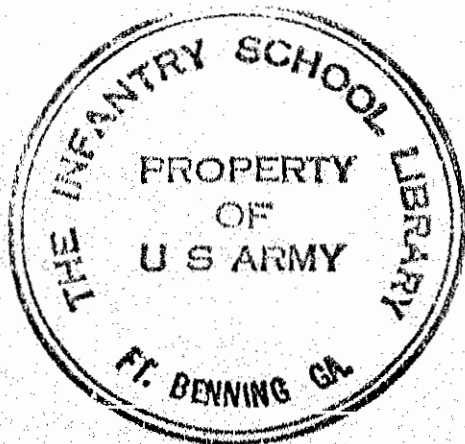


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OPERATIONS OF COMPANY B, 2D BATTALION, 7TH CAVALRY, 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE), IN A SEARCH AND DESTROY MISSION ON 15 FEBRUARY 1966 DURING OPERATION WHITE WING (EAGLES CLAW) IN BINH DINH PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. (PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A COMPANY COMMANDER.)

#### INTRODUCTION

During the period of 24 January through 6 March 1966, 1st Air Cavalry Division conducted offensive operations in the northeastern BINH DINH Province. The area of operations was bounded by QUANG NGAI Province border on the north, KIM SON Valley on the south, SOUTH CHINA Sea on the east and western boundary was approximately 50 km inland (See Map "A"). The purpose of the operations was to dominate the area, contribute to the Republic of Vietnam Government pacification effort, and, in conjunction with the Republic of Vietnam and other U.S. and Free World Military Forces, conduct search and destroy operations.

The first two phases of the campaign, Operations MASHER and WHITE WING, were conducted in the coastal plain north of BONG SON and in the AN LAO Valley, respectively, during the period 24 January through 10 February 1966. Company B, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, participated in both of the above operations.

#### OPERATION WHITE WING (EAGLES CLAW)

Operation WHITE WING (EAGLES CLAW), the next phase of the campaign, was conducted in the SON LON (KIM SON) Valley and mountain complex called the CROW'S FOOT, from its appearance on the map. The 3d Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division, which conducted both Operations MASHER and WHITE WING, was given the mission to conduct search and destroy operations in the CROW'S FOOT area commencing on 11 February 1966. The Brigade consisted of three Airmobile Infantry Battalions, a Reconnaissance Squadron (minus), a 105mm Howitzer Artillery Battalion (DS) (reinforced with Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA) Battery), UH-1D and CH-47 helicopters, and

other combat support and combat service support elements. (3:1-1)

The Brigade's main effort was to locate and capture or destroy enemy troops, command groups, and installations. It was estimated that four enemy battalions were located in the CROW'S FOOT area.

Colonel Harold G. Moore, the 3d Brigade Commander, issued his order at 101500 February. His concept was for one battalion to air assault into Landing Zone BIRD and seize and secure it for establishment of an artillery position. Once the artillery battalion was in position, the bulk of the infantry would air assault into small landing zones on the high ground in the CROW'S FOOT area. The infantry would then set up company ambush sites astride the most likely avenues of escape out of the CROW'S FOOT. Once the ambush forces were in position, small pushing or "beater" forces would operate out of LZ BIRD in order to flush the enemy into the ambush sites or into the open where the enemy would be engaged with firepower. (See Sketch B)

The 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, minus one company, was to air assault into LZ BIRD at H-hour to seize and secure it for emplacement of 1/21st Artillery. One company was to be designated as Brigade Reserve. One company was to be attached to 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry effective 101800 February. H-hour was designated to be 111000 February. Pre H-hour preparation was to be a TAC air strike, and 155mm and 8-inch Howitzer fires from position PONY (BR 803837). (4:par 3)

#### AIR ASSAULT INTO POSITION BIRD

The 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry air assaulted into Position BIRD at 111020 February 1966 following TAC Air and 155mm and 8-inch Howitzer artillery preparation. The assault, with the exception of sporadic enemy fire, was unopposed. By 111055, the battalion composed of two rifle companies (Companies B and C), a

combat support company (Company D) and Battalion TAC CP closed into Position BIRD. (1:4) The enemy force encountered following the assault consisted of one VC/NVA platoon which was eliminated. At 111430 hours, a VC/NVA company came down the valley from the north to assist the enemy platoon at LZ BIRD. Company C, utilizing artillery fire and own maneuver elements, repulsed and defeated this force. (3:4) The artillery battalion was in position by 111315 hours. The area was completely cleared and secured by 111700 February.

#### OPERATIONS OF 12-14 FEBRUARY 1966

During the period 12 through 14 February 1966, the 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry conducted saturation patrolling and search and destroy operations in the valleys adjacent to Position BIRD. (See Map "C") Enemy resistance was scattered and light, however, a large number of enemy weapons, ammunition, communications equipment and supplies was discovered and captured during this period. On 14 February, Company B conducted two platoon size search and destroy operations in the SUOI RUN Valley. By 1500 hours, the platoons penetrated the valley to BR 760790 on the south and BR 767794 on the north. (See Map "C") LTC Robert A. McDade, Commander of 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, called the company commanders to his CP at Position BIRD to receive orders for the next day's operations.

#### THE BATTALION PLAN FOR 14-15 FEBRUARY

At 141500, LTC McDade issued a verbal frag order to company commanders. The mission given B and C Companies was to remain in their valleys, establish platoon ambushes during the night of 14 February and continue search and destroy operations with no more than two platoons each company, commencing 150800 February. Company A, back from attachment to 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry,

was to secure Position BIRD and conduct search and destroy operation to the east of Position BIRD along the SON LON commencing at 150800 February. (See Map "C") Upon completion of the operation, the Battalion was to assemble at Position BIRD, secure it during the night of 15-16 February and be airlifted to AN KHE Base Camp on 16 February.

#### THE SUOI RUN VALLEY

The SUOI RUN Valley (See Map "C") is characterized by steep mountain slopes and a narrow valley floor broken by inundated rice paddies. The SUOI RUN Stream flows through its center and halfway down the valley, it is joined by an intermittent stream. This causes the valley to split into the eastern and southern branch.

The valley is dominated by NUTHO TRONG Mountain on the north, ONG CA Mountain on the south and HON MOT Mountain on the east. It is inhabited, with majority of the villagers living in the PHU HUU (3) Village. The eastern portion of the SUOI RUN Valley splits into two branches circumventing the HON MOT Mountain. The northern branch is formed by the SUOI RUN and the southern branch by an intermittent stream flowing into the SUOI RUN. The stream depth ranges from one to five feet. The key terrain consists of the base of the mountains (high ground) overlooking the rice paddies. It provides the enemy excellent observation and fields of fire over the rice paddies which can be used as landing zones. Observation, fields of fires, cover and concealment for the enemy are further enhanced by the thick secondary growth along the base of the high ground and the numerous bamboo thicket hedgerows which overlook and mesh through the rice paddies. Enemy avenues of approach are unlimited.

#### THE PREPARATION

After receipt of the Order, B Company Commander directed the

3d Platoon leader, 1st Lieutenant Robert Hillyer, to secure a landing zone capable of accommodating four UH-1D helicopters in the vicinity of his location not later than 141630 February. The 2d and 3d Platoons were given a warning order for the impending night ambush mission. The order was to be issued at 141800 hours at new Company CP to be located vicinity of landing zone in SUOI RUN Valley. The 1st and Mortar Platoons were given a verbal order to prepare to move by UH-1D helicopters at 141630 hours to SUOI RUN Valley. Upon landing, 1st Platoon would provide security for Company CP, Mortar Platoon and landing zone. (See Table I for organization of the Airmobile Rifle Company.) Company (-) completed airlift into the SUOI RUN Valley at 141730 hours. (See Map "D")

At 141800 hours, B Company Commander issued a verbal frag order to the platoon leaders. The 2d and 3d Platoons were to establish ambush sites on the north and south sides of the SUOI RUN Valley respectively. General locations were BR 759794 for the 2d Platoon and BR 760790 for the 3d Platoon. The 1st Platoon, company reserve, was to secure Company CP and Mortar Platoon at BR 756791. Mortar Platoon was to release one squad composed of the ammunition bearers to the 1st Platoon for perimeter security. The Mortar Platoon would fire harrassing and interdiction (H&I) fires throughout the night. DS artillery would fire H&I fires on the high ground dominating the SUOI RUN Valley. Priority of fires was to be to the platoon in contact. All platoons were to be on radio listening silence. Radio was primary means of communications.

The concept of operation for 15 February was for the 2d and 3d Platoons to continue with the search and destroy mission in the valley with 2d Platoon on the north and 3d Platoon on the south. 1st Platoon, company reserve, was to provide security for Mortar Platoon and Company CP. Mortar Platoon was to be in General

Support with priority of fires to the platoon in contact. (See Map "D") Final instructions and fire support plan for operations on the 15th would be issued 150700 hours. The platoons deployed to their respective ambush sites and were in position at 141930 hours. The Mortar Platoon completed registration at 141700 hours.

At 142100 hours, DS artillery battalion fired a battery TOT of six volleys at the high ground vicinity BR 782792. At the same time, the battalion S2 advised B Company Commander that Viet Cong Captives and captured documents indicated that an enemy battalion was located north, south and east of B Company's present position. Battalion daily journal listed the unit as the 9th Battalion, 18th NVA Regiment.

On 15 February, it was determined that the unit was the 93d Battalion, 2d Main Force (MF) Regiment or the 1st Battalion, 2d MF Regiment. Both 93d and 1st Battalion designations were utilized by the enemy to identify the same unit. (5:1) All platoons were immediately advised of this information. Mortar Platoon's H&I fires were replanned in order to cover the trails, ridgelines and draws leading into SUOI RUN Valley. A request was submitted to the DS artillery battalion and Artillery LNO for additional H&I fires on the new suspected enemy locations; however, due to higher priority commitments for artillery support, only two 105mm Howitzers were allocated to support B Company's H&I requirement. Mortar Platoon was scheduled to fire 100 rounds of mortar ammunition, therefore, a resupply of mortar ammunition was requested to be delivered to B Company at first light on 15 February to support the operation. Negative contact was reported during the night. The Mortar Platoon and the two 105mm Howitzers fired H&I fires during the night with unknown results. Additionally, one propaganda shell mission was fired by a 105mm Howitzer Battery at



suspected enemy location. Message on leaflets asked the Viet Cong to surrender.

#### NARRATION

At 150700 hours, platoon leaders assembled at Company CP for final instruction. Primary items of instructions were the suspected presence of an enemy battalion in company zone of action and fire support. Fire support consisted of fires by two 81mm mortars from company Mortar Platoon, 105mm Howitzers from 1/21st Artillery (DS), 155mm Howitzer from GS units, Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA) from 2/20th Artillery, and TAC Air, on call. The 2d and 3d Platoons had one Mortar FO attached from Company's Mortar Platoon. Artillery, ARA and TAC Air fire support was available through the Artillery Recon Sergeant with the 2d Platoon, and the Artillery FO with the 3d Platoon. Priority of fires would be to the platoon in contact. The Mortar Platoon would fire screening fires for the advancing platoons. At 150730 hours, four UH-1D helicopters arrived at Company CP with requested mortar and small arm ammunition, C-rations and some replacement clothing and equipment. Company B strength consisted of six officers and 120 men. Included in this number were the FO party of one officer and two men, and four aidmen. Rifle Platoon strengths were 28, 30 and 31 men. Mortar Platoon had 20 men.

#### MOVEMENT TO CONTACT

The 2d and 3d Platoons moved out in platoon wedge formations at 150845 and 150825 hours, respectively. The Mortar Platoon fired ten WP rounds at the rice paddie at the base of HON MOT Mountain (BR 762788) to screen the movement of the 3d Platoon.

At 150906 hours, the lead and right flank squads crossed the intermittent stream at BR 763790 and were proceeding across the rice paddie complex at the base of HON MOT when they were engaged

by an undetermined enemy force with automatic, small arms and 60mm mortar fire. The intense volume of enemy fire scattered the 2d Platoon elements over the 150-meter rice paddy complex. The platoon, utilizing rice paddy dikes for cover, returned fire at the enemy. 2d Lt John D. Particelli, the 2d Platoon Leader, immediately called for and adjusted 81mm mortar fire on the enemy located in the bamboo thicket and paddy dikes along the base of HON MOT (BR 764789). At this point, the 2d Platoon suffered two killed and one wounded. The Artillery Recon Sergeant's radio was damaged by the enemy fire. (See Map "E")

At 150915 hours, the 3d Platoon reported that six to eight 60mm mortar rounds fell within his platoon formation (BR 757787), causing no casualties. The 3d Platoon was ordered to reorient towards the east and be prepared to assist the 2d Platoon. The artillery FO was ordered to report to the Company Commander who would be located in 2d Platoon's area. The 1st Platoon was ordered to be prepared to assist the 2d Platoon. 81st Mortar Platoon and Company Headquarters Section were directed to be prepared to secure Mortar Platoon and Company CP. At 150930 hours, the Company Commander with two RTO's and one squad from 1st Platoon arrived at the 2d Platoon's location at the streambed at BR 763790. While crossing the open rice paddy enroute to the streambed, the command group came under intense enemy automatic fire which wounded the Company Commander's and Artillery FO's radio operators and damaged the FO's radio.

Upon arrival at the streambed, Company Commander established his TAC CP. LTC McDade, the Battalion Commander, was advised that B Company Commander would leave the Battalion Command Net in order to use the radio in the Artillery Fire Direction net. LTC McDade was also advised that the enemy was estimated to be a reinforced

platoon with some 60mm mortars. LTC McDade granted B Company's request to leave the Battalion Command Net and stated that he would enter and operate in B Company's Command Net while B Company was in contact. This arrangement proved satisfactory since it allowed the Battalion Commander to be constantly informed on B Company's situation.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITUATION

With reestablishment of communications with the DS artillery battalion, 2d Lt Gauthier, the Artillery FO, called for and directed numerous battery volleys of 105mm HE, VT and quick fuze fire on the enemy locations immediately in front of B Company. In the left sector of the 2d Platoon, artillery fire was brought to within 25 meters of friendly troops due to proximity of the enemy. The Mortar Platoon was placing HE and WP fire along the southern flank of the company to prevent the enemy from attacking from that direction. Although the enemy force was estimated to consist of a reinforced platoon, indications were that the remainder of the enemy company was in the vicinity. Observation helicopters from the Scout Platoon of C Troop, 1st Squadron, 9th Cavalry, reported that they received ground fire from HON MOT and the high ground south of B Company's location.

The enemy to B Company's front was well dug in, and concealed in the hedgerows and bamboo thicket overlooking the rice paddies along a 300-400 meter front. The enemy had excellent fields of fire and observation. He was armed with automatic weapons, 40mm Rocket Launchers, and 60mm mortars. B Company Commander advised LTC McDade of the enemy situation and stated that B Company would attack to destroy the enemy.

#### PREPARATION FOR ATTACK

1st LT Jack Hibbard, the Company XO, was advised to request

ammunition resupply for anticipated expenditures. In addition, a request was submitted to Battalion Headquarters for an interpreter to be sent forward to B Company.

The 1st Platoon was ordered to move towards Company TAC CP, assemble at BR 761789, and be prepared to attack.

The 2d Platoon was ordered to reassemble in the streambed they had crossed half an hour previously (BR 763790). For cover, they were to utilize the fires of 105mm Howitzers and execute a fire and movement maneuver to the rear. The 2d Platoon Leader was requested to report to the Company TAC CP. The 3d Platoon was directed to move forward to the streambed at BR 761788 and prepare for attack. The 3d Platoon Leader was ordered to report to Company TAC CP for an order.

At 151010 hours, the 2d and 3d Platoon Leaders assembled at Company TAC CP to receive their attack order. They were told that the enemy appeared to be entrenched over a 300 to 400 meter area forward of B Company (BR765789 to BR 762787). The enemy was estimated to be a reinforced platoon, maybe a company.

Unknown at this time was the fact that the enemy consisted of two MF/NVA companies entrenched over a 1000 meter area from BR 765789 to BR 762787. (1:5) (4:1) (See Map "F"). The enemy covered the approaches to and the entire southern branch of the SUOI RUN Valley.

The scheme of maneuver was for the 2d Platoon to assault the enemy southern "flank" (BR 762787). The 2d Platoon would provide a base of fire from the streambed. The 1st Platoon, in reserve behind 2d Platoon, was to be prepared to assist the 3d Platoon in the assault or to attack through the 2d Platoon in direction of HON MOT.

Fire support for the attack consisted of the Mortar Platoon firing along the company right flank, shifting on order of the

3d Platoon Leader. DS artillery was to fire on enemy positions immediately to the front of 2d Platoon, shifting east and southeast as the assault progressed. The Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA) consisting of 2 UH-1B helicopters from Battery C, 2d Battalion, 20th Artillery (ARA), was to attack enemy targets 1000 meters southeast of present B Company's position to seal off enemy routes of withdrawal in that direction. The assault would commence on order. LT Gauthier coordinated the fire plan with DS and ARA artillery units over the Artillery Fire Direction net. 81st Mortar Platoon was given its mission over the Company Command Net.

The 2d Platoon, while maintaining contact with the enemy, reassembled in the streambed at 1020 hours. At 1025 hours, the enemy placed ineffective 60mm mortar fire to the rear of Company TAC CP and increased its intensity of automatic weapons fire in the direction of the 2d Platoon and TAC CP. At 1045 hours, all platoons were in position and prepared for the attack. At 1050 hours, B Company was notified that two A1E Air Force aircraft were enroute to B Company's sector to support the attack. The airborne FAC would contact B Company on the Artillery Fire Direction Net. The FO was advised, and Air Force support was incorporated into the fire support plan. The Mortar Platoon would cease fire for duration of the air attack and resume fire on order. DS artillery fire was shifted to the base of HON MOT (BR 764789-BR 765787) to prevent enemy from escaping towards HON MOT and north branch of SUOI RUN Valley. If 1st Platoon attacked toward HON MOT, artillery fire would shift on order to support the 1st Platoon. ARA would continue with their present mission. The target assigned for A1E aircraft consisted of the enemy force in well-concealed trenches located approximately 50 meters forward of the 3d Platoon. This was the initial objective for the 3d Platoon. 3d Platoon would

mark their location for the airborne FAC with smoke. Signal to commence the assault would be the final attack pass by the A1E's.

The artillery FO advised all fire support elements of the changes to the fire support plan. The airborne FAC was advised of artillery firing to be conducted simultaneously with the air strike. An attack flight route was recommended to the FAC. The aircraft were to fly to the left of the stream southwest of HON MOT from southeast to northwest. Recovery was to be to the west. The trajectory of artillery rounds would be 300 to 500 meters northeast (right) of the recommended attack flight route. The Air Force pilots agreed to fly the attack mission.

#### COMPANY IN THE ATTACK

The A1E "Skyraiders" attacked the enemy at 151100 hours. Simultaneously, the DS artillery commenced their fires on the base of HON MOT. While these fires were in progress, four OH-1D helicopters arrived at Company CP with a resupply of mortar and small arms ammunition. The attacking A1E's reported automatic ground fire from vic BR 760782. This location was given as target for the Mortar Platoon after departure of A1E's from the area. During one of the attack passes on the enemy, one of the A1E aircraft had a malfunction in its bomb release mechanism and dropped its CBU ordnance a split second late. Some of the bomblets landed within the 3d Platoon and caused a bit of confusion. Lt Hillyer, the Platoon Leader, left his position to assess and report any casualties. One soldier was seriously wounded.

While Lt Hillyer was briefly separated from his assault echelon, the aircraft made their final attack pass on the enemy. The 3d Platoon, without hesitation, with bayonets fixed, assaulted on the heels of the attacking aircraft. The platoon moved forward in determined, rapid and well-coordinated bounds employing the

technique of fire and movement. Lt Hilmyer, with his radio operator, a grenadier and a rifleman, rejoined and overtook his assaulting platoon. The platoon was moving forward at a dead run, "yelling", as one soldier later described, "like madmen". (See Map "F") The violent and aggressive assault by the 3d Platoon caused the enemy to abandon their fortified, concealed positions. The enemy, apparently disorganized, was forced north into the supporting fires of the 2d Platoon. Escape to HON MOT and to the south and southeast was blocked by the fires of 105mm Howitzers and ARA, respectively. The Mortar Platoon commenced fire on enemy location vicinity BR 760782.

With the initial success of the 3d Platoon, the 1st Platoon was "rammed" through the left flank elements of the 2d Platoon and attacked in direction of HON MOT with a direction of attack generally towards the southeast. The 3d Platoon changed the direction of its attack and proceeded southeast utilizing the village trail as a guide. The formation utilized by the 1st Platoon was a wide wedge. 3d Platoon's formation was basically a platoon line formation with squads employing fire and movement maneuver. As the 3d Platoon advanced, it continued to push the enemy to the southeast, shifting the supporting fires accordingly.

After the 1st Platoon completed passing through the 2d Platoon, the 2d Platoon was directed to move forward and recover their dead and equipment. Carrying parties from the platoon were organized to evacuate the dead, wounded and equipment to the Company CP and bring forward ammunition resupply. Additional radio was brought forward to be used on the Battalion Command Net. Battalion Commander was advised of the progress of the attack. The Med Evac helicopter was called in to Company CP. At approximately 1200 hours, the Battalion Commander, Battalion S2, Battalion Surgeon,

Deputy Brigade Commander and an IPW Team arrived by OH-1D helicopter to Company CP (BR 756791). At this time, two prisoners were taken and evacuated to Company CP. Presence of IPW Team at Company CP provided the Commander with intelligence information of immediate tactical value.

Battalion Reconnaissance Platoon landed in B Company's LZ in order to provide additional security forces in the western portion of SUOI RUN Valley. Company C was ordered to be prepared to assist B Company on order.

The 1st and 3d Platoons continued their advance, encountering slight to heavy, but disorganized, enemy resistance. The enemy was on the run. The enemy, in groups of three and four, was spotted by ARA attempting to cross the rice paddies vic BR 764784. ARA took these groups under fire. Many of the enemy were killed and wounded in the rice paddy complex. Others, attempting to escape to HON MOT were intercepted and destroyed by the advancing platoons. By 151450 hours, all enemy resistance ceased and the attacking platoons were halted in order to be resupplied with ammunition and reorganize. A situation report was rendered to the Battalion Commander. He directed B Company to continue the attack in direction of PHU NINH (4) (BR 7677) and exploit success of the attack. He reemphasized his order to take prisoners and to police the battlefield. Also, that Company C was in position to assist B Company if the situation so dictated.

#### THE EXPLOITATION

To exploit the success of the attack, B Company Commander's concept was to continue the advance in the direction of PHU NINH (4) with 1st Platoon on the left anchored on the HON MOT and the 2d Platoon, base platoon, on the right, anchored on the stream adjacent to the village complex. The 3d Platoon was designated



company reserve and directed to conduct a sweep to the rear to insure all-round security, police and search the battlefield and evaluate the enemy positions. Emphasis of the sweep was to be placed on the stream, the streambed and the hedgerows which were riddled with fortifications. Upon completion of the sweep, the 3d Platoon was to join the attacking platoons, on order. The fire support continued to be provided by the DS artillery battalion, ARA and Company's 81mm Mortar Platoon. (See Map "G")

At 1500 hours, the 1st and 2d Platoons resumed the attack, utilizing platoon wedge formations. Visual contact was maintained by the inside flanks. Company Command Group was with the 2d Platoon.

At 1520 hours, contact was again regained with the enemy. An enemy squad of 7 men set up a hasty ambush in the 2d Platoon's zone at BR 767783. The excellent security force of the 2d Platoon enabled the platoon to flank the enemy and attack the ambush site from the rear, capturing two VC and killing five others. Simultaneously with this action, the 1st Platoon overran the Command Post of the 93d Battalion (1st Battalion), 2d Main Force Regiment (BR 768784), killed three enemy and captured the wounded Battalion Commander with numerous documents and plans. The VC Battalion Commander and the documents and plans were taken immediately to the Company CP for interrogation by the IPW team.

Approximately 20 meters southeast of the ambush site, the 2d Platoon discovered the abandoned enemy mortar position with 26 rounds of 60mm mortar ammunition, a standard U.S. bipod and four field expedient mortar bipods. Thorough search failed to produce the mortars.

The attacking platoons continued their forward advance, encountering insignificant resistance by enemy rear guard elements.

Indications were that the enemy withdrew beyond PHU HUU (4) (7778) and PHU NINH (4) (7677). Inspection of the battlefield and the area between the village and PHU NINH (4) and PHU HUU (4) revealed that the battlefield was littered with numerous pieces of enemy bodies and the trails were littered with discarded bandages, blood trails and discarded, bloody equipment. LTC McDade, the Battalion Commander, was advised of this. One of the enemy escape routes was discovered at the southern end of the village (BR 768782). The ground adjacent to the stream dropped straight down for approximately 30 feet. It was heavily overgrown with brush and bamboo thicket. Approximately 10 feet up from the valley floor, the 2d Platoon discovered a trail located on a step of this "wall". Further search revealed a series of foxholes and caves located at approximately five-meter intervals along the trail. The trail was well concealed with overhanging brush and bamboo. In places, the trail was stained with blood and littered with discarded bloody bandages. Enemy equipment and ammunition cans (with ammunition) were found along the trail. Some foxholes contained hand grenades. The trail continued east until it blended with the thick jungle at BR 770781. (See Map "G")

The second escape route discovered was along the trail leading to PHU NINH (4). The trail was along a rice paddy dike. It contained some abandoned enemy positions. The trail and the dike were approximately two meters wide and were overgrown with bamboo thicket and brush. Some enemy resistance was encountered along both routes. (See Map "G")

At 1650, two A1E "Skyriders" and an airborne FAC reported to B Company Commander over the Battalion Command Net for utilization. Company Commander requested the FAC and the A1E pilots to switch to the airborne FAC frequency (FM) due to heavy traffic on

the Battalion Command and the Artillery Fire Direction nets. B Company Commander briefed the FAC and pilots on past and present situation. The draws vicinity PHU NINH (4) and PHU HUU (4) were designated target areas and attacked with a variety of ordnance. At the completion of the airstrike, LTC McDade ordered B Company to return to Company CP location for extraction by UH-1D helicopters back to Position BIRD. The Company made a rear sweep to the Company CP with two platoons abreast and closed at CP at 1745 hours. Movement to the rear was covered on the north (HON MOT) side by VT and quick fuze fires of DS 105mm Howitzer artillery, and on the south and rear by the Mortar Platoon firing HE and WP fires. (See Map "G")

The 1st lift of 12 UH-1D helicopters arrived at the LZ, vicinity Company CP, at 1800 hours. Company closed at BIRD at 1830 hours with its mission accomplished.

#### THE RESULTS OF THE OPERATION

Friendly Losses - Two KIA, six WIA (one wounded by A1E strike prior to 3d Platoon's attack).

Enemy Losses - Combat effectiveness of the 93d Battalion, 2d Main Force Regiment was disrupted.

KIA - 57 by body count plus numerous pieces of enemy bodies. It is estimated that an additional 93 enemy were killed or wounded and evacuated by the enemy.

Captured four enemy, including the Battalion Commander of 93d Battalion, 2d MF Regiment.

#### Captured equipment:

Nine crew served weapons including two heavy machine guns. Two additional 40mm Rocket Launchers destroyed.

Two submachine guns.

Ten rifles (one destroyed in place and pieces to

many others were seen throughout the battlefield).

Two Cal .45 pistols.

26 rounds of 60mm mortar ammunition.

Five 60mm mortar bipods (one U.S., four VC field expedient).

400 rounds of 7.62mm linked MG ammunition.

Five rifle grenades (U.S.).

12 Chicom hand grenades (potato masher type), and 17 others destroyed in place.

Approximately 4000 rounds of assorted small arms ammunition.

Assorted individual equipment.

During his interrogation, the captured Battalion Commander spoke freely. He stated that he had two companies in the battle with the American unit (Company B). His battalion's area of operations was the valley and surrounding mountains extending northeast from BR 770775 to BR 755800. His mission was to ambush possible landing zones. Morale of his troops was good because they had plenty of food and ammunition. They were sure they would defeat the enemy. He estimated that he lost two platoons in the battle, but, he could not contact his company commanders for a report. His rally point after the battle was to be the area occupied by B Company mortar platoon and CP. (5:1 and 2)

In addition to the above information, the Battalion Commander was very successfully exploited by the 2d Brigade, 1st Air Cavalry Division, who continued operations after extraction of the 3d Brigade from the CROW'S FOOT area. Through his cooperation and from his information, significant contacts ensued with the 2d MF and the 18th NVA Regiments. (2:11) Company B, 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry was recommended for the Valorous Unit Award for the

leadership of its officers and noncommissioned officers as well as the professionalism and gallantry of its men and its "will to win".

(6) Personnel decorations included one Silver Star and eight Bronze Star medals.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

A search and destroy mission involves two tasks: Gaining contact with the enemy and destroying him through offensive combat. Since the Viet Cong normally decisively engage only those forces that they think they are able to defeat, flexible and thorough planning must be made at all echelons conducting search and destroy operations. The plan at all levels of command must provide for search forces, adequate reserve/reaction forces, fire support, and, above all, it must be highly flexible.

1. The search forces for operations on 15 February 1966 were platoons. The Battalion Commander limited the companies to two platoons conducting search and destroy missions. This enabled the Company Commander to maintain a sizeable reserve. The Battalion reserves consisted of the Reconnaissance Platoon as the immediate reaction force and the uncommitted companies as additional reserve forces. The preceding pages describe how these forces were utilized at company/battalion level.

2. Adequate fire support was made available at all echelons. Proper utilization of fire support, once the contact with the enemy is made, gives the commander a marked advantage in combat power especially against a numerically superior force which lacks the fire support. The plan of fire support must be comprehensive and flexible so that it can be applied at the proper time and place. It has to complement the scheme of maneuver. The individual soldier must be accustomed to constant utilization of close fire support and expect it at all times. The Viet Cong "bear hug"

technique demands that leaders capitalize on and use all types of fire support. The fire support employed in support of the assault by the 3d Platoon and the reorganization of 2d Platoon are examples of close and flexible use of fire support.

3. Planning at all echelons must be comprehensive. Orders must be detailed and flexible. They must be disseminated to all personnel. The assault of the 3d Platoon without the platoon leader succeeded because it was disseminated to every member of the platoon. As the situation changes and events continue to develop, plans and orders that are flexible are modified easily to suit the situation. Numerous examples of flexibility are portrayed on preceding pages.

4. As contact was made with the enemy by the 2d Platoon, it was difficult to accurately determine the strength, composition and disposition of the enemy. The Viet Cong is a master at camouflage and concealment. The 93d Battalion, 2d Main Force Regiment had excellent fire discipline. Out of two companies in position, only those in the 2d Platoon's sector opened fire. This action deceived B Company as to the size of the enemy force encountered.

5. Once gained, the contact with the enemy must be maintained and the battlefield isolated. Escape and reinforcement must be prevented. Contact with the enemy was maintained by the 2d Platoon and the aerial scouts prior to the assault; the battlefield was isolated by mortar and tube and aerial rocket artillery fires. However, the elusive enemy escaped through a concealed route. Once these routes were discovered, an attempt was made to destroy him utilizing TAC Air Strike.

6. To retain the initiative on the battlefield, B Company Commander utilized the overwhelming combat power provided by the artillery, mortar and TAC Air fire support systems. The platoons

were maneuvered into positions favoring the subsequent assault, *additional combat power was applied in conjunction with the 3d Platoon's assault.* The air strike, culminated by the violent assault by the infantry with bayonets fixed, achieved the element of surprise over the superior enemy force. The assault provided the B Company Commander with freedom of action to maneuver and commit additional forces against the enemy.

7. The momentum of the attack was maintained by the employment of the 1st Platoon against the demoralized enemy. The 1st Platoon attacked on the "heels" of the 3d Platoon. The rapid and violent attack by the platoons, complemented by the shifting supporting fires maintained pressure against the enemy, forcing him into the open and the covering fires of the Aerial Rocket Artillery.

8. The success of the attack was exploited through the commitment of the 2d Platoon into the attack. The platoon, eager to revenge their earlier set-back, fanatically drove forward continuing to pursue and destroy the enemy. The momentum and violence of the exploitation caused the enemy to disengage and flee rapidly. The enemy Battalion Commander lost all control of his elements, had his command post overtaken and was captured.

9. The security and integrity of the company was maintained by the individual platoon actions, employment of the 3d Platoon during the exploitation, the Battalion Commander's employment of the Reconnaissance Platoon and supporting fires. During the initial engagement, the 2d Platoon maintained contact with the enemy employing the platoon's weapons and B Company's mortar fires. Although the integrity and security of the 2d Platoon was threatened, the platoon's reaction enhanced security of B Company by giving the Company Commander freedom of action. This enabled the Commander

to maneuver the remaining platoons into advantageous positions. Other elements contributing to B Company's security were the aerial scouts, continuous use of fire support and the 3d Platoon's assault.

10. The most essential ingredient which contributed to the success of the battle consisted not of the tools of war but of the men of Company B. It was the leadership of its officers and noncommissioned officers; the gallantry and professionalism of its men; and, finally, its "will to win" -- the "Spirit of the Offense". The personal decorations were few since only a handful of soldiers performed deeds above and beyond the actions of their peers.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

1. Units on search and destroy missions must always be provided with reserve/reaction forces.
2. The primary objective of forces on search and destroy missions is the destruction of the enemy.
3. Fire support must be habitually planned for and employed by search and destroy forces.
4. Once contact with the enemy is gained, it must be maintained and the enemy destroyed.
5. Planning at all echelons must be comprehensive. Orders must be detailed and flexible and disseminated to all personnel.
6. A violent bayonet assault on the heels of a close TAC Air strike has a tremendous psychological affect on the enemy and should be exploited to the maximum.
7. The key to successful employment of fire support is proper coordination with all the elements of the fire support system.



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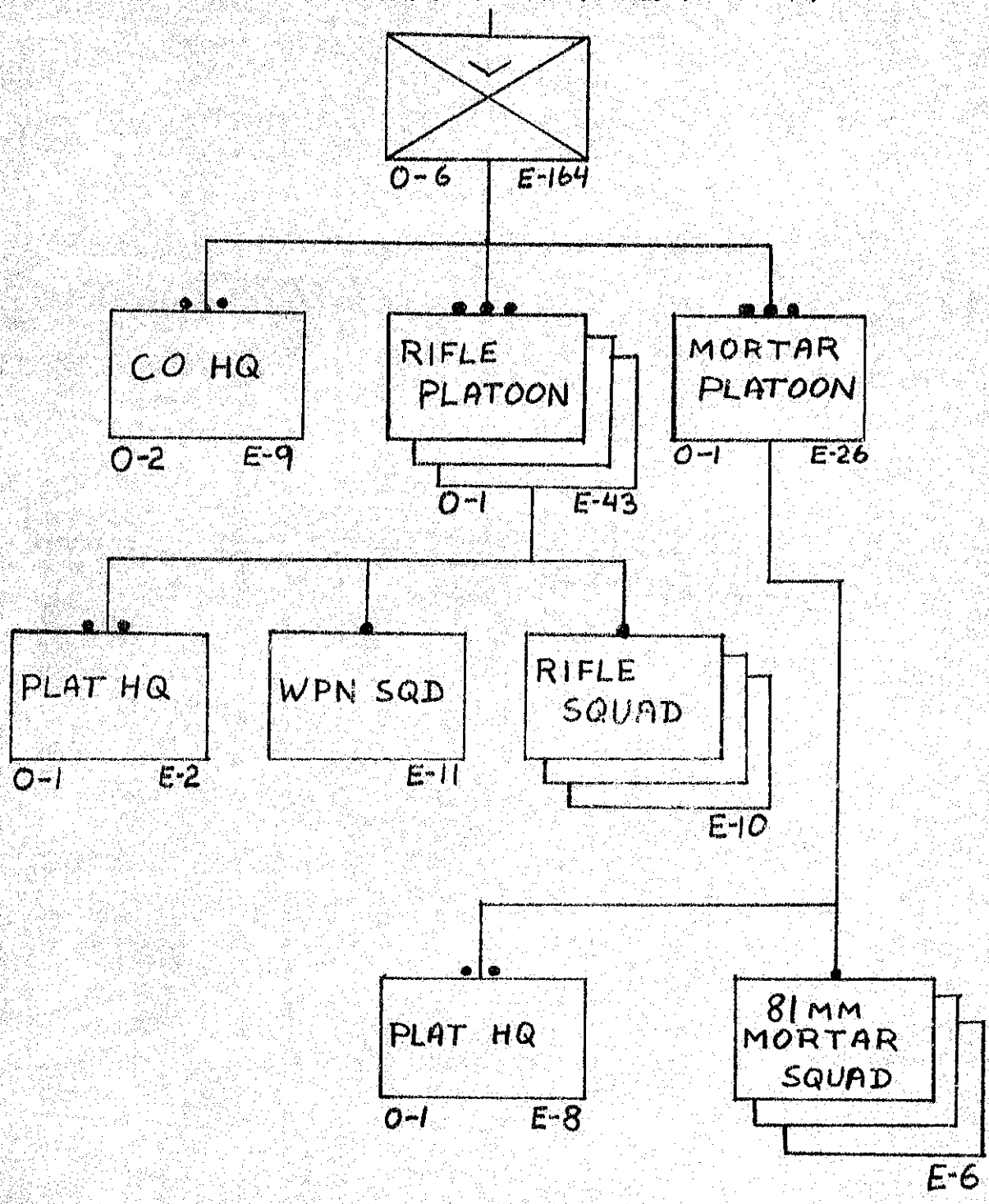


TABLE 1