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COMPANY E
(LONG RANGE PATROL) 20TH INFANTRY (ABN)
APO San Francisco 96262
CAMP INARI, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM

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NOTE:

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LONGER RELEVANT!

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FORWARD

This document is the initial historical record of E Company (Long Range Patrol) 20th Infantry (Airborne). This unit was organized on 25 September 1967 and the major events of its training and operations have been traced.

E Company was formed within South Vietnam from "in country" assets. The original personnel fill was comprised for the most part of combat veterans, particularly in the non-commissioned officer ranks. The entire company went through an intensive training program prior to being given missions by I Field Force, Vietnam. At the same time all of the necessary equipment for the unit was being requisitioned and gathered from various supply sources both in and out of country.

The company has thus far performed missions with 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, 4th Infantry Division, and B Company, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). It has extensively tested Long Range Patrol techniques in a variety of situations. It has both validated existing Long Range Patrol doctrines and established new techniques. On numerous occasions this unit has demonstrated that it can insert patrols into areas of known enemy locations without being detected. It has also repeatedly demonstrated the ability to extract a patrol that has been compromised and is under fire regardless of the enemy activity. These capabilities permit the company to insert and extract patrols at will, and greatly enhances their value as intelligence gathering sources.

Operations have also been run in a variety of terrain, from coastal jungle to heavy mountains.

In summary, this unit has established itself in an extremely short period of time as an elite, professional, long range patrol unit.

ABBREVIATIONS

Airborne.....Abn
Army Navy/Portable Radio Communications.....AN/PRC
Brigade.....Bde
Communications.....Commo
Date Eligible to Return from Overseas.....DEROS
Department of the Army.....DA
Division.....Div
Field Training Exercise.....FTX
I Field Force, Vietnam.....IFFV
Killed in Action.....KIA
Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.....MACV
Modified Table of Organization and Equipment.....MTOE
Republic of Vietnam.....RVN
Table of Organization and Equipment.....TOE
United States.....US
United States Army, Vietnam.....USARV
Viet Cong.....VC

CHAPTER 1

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

SECTION I

MISSION

E Company (Long Range Patrol) 20th Infantry (Airborne) has the following missions:

- a. To provide long range reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition patrol capabilities to I Field Force, Vietnam (IFFV)
- b. To provide personnel and equipment to train, administer, plan for, and employ patrols as directed.

SECTION II

PERSONNEL

Under Modified Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE) 7-157E this unit is authorized a total strength of two hundred twenty-one enlisted men and nine officers. Since the company was organized it has been kept at close to one hundred percent authorized strength. Factors in personnel strength affecting the unit performance have been limited to rank rather than personnel shortage.

CHAPTER 2

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

SECTION I

COMMAND POLICIES

This company habitually employs two patrol platoons at a time, with the other two undergoing a period of stand down and refitting at the com-

pany base camp. The two deployed platoons operate from a mission support site where they are further supported by a base radio station from the communications (commo) platoon and necessary personnel from the operations section. The platoons are not normally capable of providing their own security and therefore must be located in a secure area: i.e. a battalion fire base, Special Forces Camp, etc.

A platoon will normally employ no more than three patrols at any one time. To extend the commitment beyond this seriously taxes the available resources of both personnel and equipment.

The company has experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining adequate aircraft support for the deployed platoons. Extensive experience and evaluation has shown that the minimum acceptable aircraft support for each mission support site is two helicopter gunships, four helicopter troop ships (slicks), and two O-1 Birdog aircraft. This unit also has two Air Force Forward Air Controllers with two O-1 aircraft permanently attached.

SECTION II

TRAINING AND OPERATIONS

This company was activated on 25 September 1967 in Phan Rang, Republic of Vietnam (RVN) and was initially attached to 1st Brigade (Bde), 101st Airborne Division (Abn Div). The four patrol platoons were filled with personnel in sequence and phased into a special recondo course at the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) Recondo School in Nha Trang, RVN, at two week intervals. Prior to attending this course, each platoon had a minimum of ten days preparatory training. After completion of the special recondo course, each platoon underwent a one week field training

exercise (FTX) at Plei-Do-Liem Special Forces Camp in the Central Highlands south of Pleiku, RVN. It was not until after the completion of this FTX that a platoon was declared combat ready. The First Platoon completed training and was declared combat ready on 1 December 1967. The last platoon to complete it's training was declared combat ready on 23 December 1967. This was, in effect, E Company's Christmas present to IFV, a combat ready patrol company, organized and trained from the ground up in less than three months.

On 3 December 1967, the First Platoon was attached to the 1st Bde, 101st Abn Div and began Operation Bao Loc in the vicinity of Bao Loc, RVN. the helicopter support required for the platoon to operate in the six man patrol configuration was not available and the platoon was forced to operate more or less as a normal rifle platoon. The First Platoon stayed on this operation until 26 December 1967 at which time it was relieved by the Second Platoon. While the First Platoon was on Operation Bao Loc, it discovered numerous bivouac areas, had several contacts resulting in six enemy killed in action (KIA) and captured over twenty-five tons of rice. However, on 19 December 1967 the platoon had two United States (US) KIA's, the platoon leader and a patrol leader, as the result of a Viet Cong (VC) ambush. These are the only KIA's that have been suffered by the company since it's formation.

On 26 December 1967, the First Platoon was relieved by the Second Platoon which continued the mission until the termination of the operation on 5 January 1968. Aircraft support was still unavailable and the Second Platoon was also forced to operate in a rifle platoon configuration. During the time that the Second Platoon was on the mission several more contacts and

sightings were made, confirming the continued presence of VC forces in the area of operation.

The primary lesson learned during Operation Bao Loc was that it is uneconomical and a waste of valuable assets to employ personnel trained for long range patrol work in a rifle platoon configuration. To be sure, their performance will match that of any rifle platoon in the Army but they can be employed far more profitably in the role of long range patrols for which they are primarily trained. For this to be possible however, helicopter support to the extent outlined under the "COMMAND POLICIES" section must be provided.

On 18 December 1967 the Fourth Platoon began Operation Qui Nhon, at which time it was attached to B-22 Detachment, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne). The platoon's primary mission was to recon the mountains to the southwest of Qui Nhon and attempt to locate a VC battalion that had the supposed mission of attacking the ammunition storage area at Phu Tai (4) during the Christmas holidays. Several sightings were made by patrols but no major activity was discovered. Of considerable interest was a planned infiltration of a patrol team by boat. This infiltration was completely planned and rehearsed but had to be called off at the last minute due to rough seas. This operation was terminated on 30 December 1967. The expected attack on the ammunition storage area had not occurred and it was judged that the danger had passed.

On 30 December 1967 the Third Platoon began Operation Oasis I in support of the 4th Infantry Division. A mission support site was set up at fire support base Oasis and patrols were inserted into the mountains to

the northwest of Po-Lai-Djerong Special Forces Camp with the mission of detecting enemy troop movement towards Pleiku. This was a short term operation lasting only until 5 January 1968. The patrols that were inserted made several contacts but were not able to detect any large scale movement of enemy forces. Of particular interest was one patrol having to be exfiltrated at night, under fire, by helicopter. This rather dramatically demonstrated that such a tactic, while extremely dangerous, is possible if necessary. This also served to further emphasize one of the basic tenets under which this unit operates, that a patrol will never be put into an area from which it cannot be extracted, regardless of conditions.

SECTION III

LOGISTICS

When this unit was activated in Phan Rang, RVN on 25 September 1967, all of the Table of Organization and Equipment (TOE) equipment was placed on requisition by the G-4 supply, IFFV. These requisitions were placed through the 1st Logistics Command depots in Cam Rahn Bay and Qui Nhon. The unit relocated to Camp Enari with the 4th Infantry Division on 22 October 1967, and since that time has requisitioned all equipment and supplies through the 4th Infantry Division Supply Office. Also, some of the TOE equipment requisitioned by G-4, IFFV has been received through the 4th Infantry Division Supply Office. In addition, a number of items of TOE equipment have been laterally transferred from other units. These lateral transfers were arranged by G-4, IFFV and were of considerable help in enabling the unit to reach an operational status.

A recommendation to modify the existing TOE has been submitted by Headquarters, US Army, Vietnam (USARV) with comments from this unit attached. The major change effecting the unit mission is the increase in authorization of Army Navy / Portable Radio Communications (AN/PRC) 25 radios from the present authorized twenty-eight to forty-eight. As stated elsewhere, the usual procedures to deploy two patrol platoons at a time from two separate mission support sites. There have been instances however, when three, and at one time, all four platoons were either deployed or being deployed at one time. Such tactics create a support requirement that is beyond the capability of the Commo Platoon as presently equipped. Other than this there are at present no serious logistic problems that adversely effect the accomplishment of the unit mission.

CHAPTER 3

MAJOR PROBLEMS

SECTION I

EQUIPMENT SHORTAGES

As stated in CHAPTER 2, SECTION III, the major equipment shortage effecting the unit mission exists in AN/PRC-25 radios. This is not due to a shortage of authorized allowance but is a result of the authorized allowance being insufficient. Other shortages that have a much lesser effect are that of several items of test equipment in the Commo Platoon and the large organizational tool set in the motor pool. All of these items are on valid requisition under O2 priority but have not yet been received.

SECTION II

PERSONNEL SHORTAGES

When this company was activated in September 1967 it was initially filled to 100% strength by draw down from in-country assets, primarily the 1st Bde, 101st Abn Div. This initial fill was accomplished by the end of November. Since that time personnel losses due to all causes have been filled by replacements from the USARV "pipeline". Since one of the prerequisites for acceptance on the initial fill was a minimum of four months retainability, no Date Eligible to Return from Overseas (DEROS) losses were experienced until January 1968. Since that time there have been a number of losses, particularly in the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) grades, without subsequent replacements. This problem will apparently become more severe in the months of April to June 1968. At present, 4th Infantry Division, to whom the company is attached for administration, has initiated emergency requisitions to cover all DEROS losses through July 1968. Replacements for DEROS losses after that point have been requisitioned on a normal basis. Also, USARV has indicated that Department of the Army (DA) form 1049 actions requesting reassignment to this unit from personnel already in country will be given favorable consideration. Because of these measures, the personnel shortage, while still serious, can no longer be considered critical.

SECTION III

HELICOPTER SUPPORT

As stated elsewhere in this supplement it is considered that the minimum acceptable helicopter support for this unit is two gunships and

four slicks, or troop ships, per deployed platoon. Long study and extensive field experience have shown these figures to be valid. The patrols of this company operate on their own and, for the most part, beyond the range of friendly artillery support. For this reason, there must exist a readily available extraction capability. During several operations this support has not been available and consequently the patrols could not be deployed.

Several solutions to the problem have been proposed: deploying the platoons in a rifle platoon configuration, limiting the patrols to areas of operation within friendly artillery fans, and cutting the helicopter requirement, to name a few. None of these has proved satisfactory since, in one way or another, they all seriously limit either the effectiveness and/or flexibility of the patrol operations. Also, helicopter support is provided this unit on a mission, rather than a permanent, basis. This causes a loss of several days time at the start of each operation in that the helicopter crews must be trained in the techniques used by the unit.

A far more suitable solution would be to permanently attach a helicopter lift platoon and two light helicopter gun sections to the company. This would provide the necessary helicopter support for two deployed patrol platoons. Whenever it became necessary to deploy more than two platoons at a time, the additional helicopter support could be provided on a mission basis. So far, nothing in way of accomplishing this has been done.

COMBATERS BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The present commander of E Company (Long Range Patrol) 20th Infantry (Airborne) is Major William H O'Connor, who assumed command on 19 December 1967. Major O'Connor received his commission from the Infantry Officer's Candidate School at Ft. Benning, Georgia and has since completed the Infantry Officer Career Course, Ranger School, Vietnamese Language Course at the United States Army Language School at Monterey, California, and the Special Forces Officer Course at the John F Kennedy Special Warfare School, Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. He has had extensive experience in the far east, serving previous tours in Korea, Okinawa, and Vietnam. Major O'Connor is a native of Rhode Island and presently makes his home in Somers, Connecticut.