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HEADQUARTERS
1st Battalion, 3d Marines
3d Marine Division (Rein), FMF
FPO San Francisco 96602

3/DLK/dlk
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12 August 1969
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From: Commanding Officer
To: Commanding General, 3d Marine Division (Rein), FMF
Via: Commanding Officer, 3d Marines

Subj: Combat Operations After Action Report

Ref: (a) DivO 3100.1

1. Code Name. Virginia Ridge -- Search and Destroy
2. Dates of Operation. 30 April 1969 to 16 July 1969
3. Location. Quang Tri Province, Cam Lo, Huong Hoa and Gio Linh Districts, Republic of Vietnam
4. Task Organization.

1st Bn, 3d Marines (-) (Rein)

RCOL J. S. KYLE
(30Apr-20May69)
RCOL D. C. HERRON
(11May-16Jul69)

H&S Co (-) (Rein)
Det. Btry A, 1stBn, 12thMar
Det. Interpreters, 2dARVN
Det. HST, Co C, 3d SP Bn (30Apr-20Jun)
Det. HST, Co A, 3d SP Bn (21Jun-16Jul)
Det. Engr, Co B, 3d Engr Bn

1stLt W. J. CAMPBELL
(30Apr-18May69)
1stLt J. C. SANBORN
(19May-16Jul69)

Company A (Rein)
Det. Btry A, 1stBn, 12thMar
Det. Engr, Co B, 3d Engr Bn
Det. Interpreters, 2dARVN
Det. KCS
Det. HST, Co C, 3d SP Bn (30Apr-20Jun)
Det. HST, Co A, 3d SP Bn (21Jun-16Jul)

Capt G. M. MC ADAMS
(30Apr-19May69)
(1Jun-16Jul69)
1stLt A. G. CHESSON
(20-31May69)

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1578/320 MAR

A/RPT VIRGINIA RIDGE

30Apr-16Jul 1969

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Det. H&S Co
 FO Tm, 81mm Mortar Platoon
 Det. TACP
 Det. Comm Platoon
 Det. Intelligence Section
 Det. Medical Platoon

Company B (Rein)

Det. Btry A, 1stBn, 12thMar
 Det. Engr, Co B, 3d Engr Bn
 Det. Interpreters, 2dARVN
 Det. KCS
 Det. HST, Co C, 3d SP Bn (30Apr-20Jun)
 Det. HST, Co A, 3d SP Bn (21Jun-16Jul)
 Det. H&S Co

FO Tm, 81mm Mortar Platoon
 Det. TACP
 Det. Comm Platoon
 Det. Intelligence Section
 Det. Medical Platoon

Capt G. H. SAMPSON

Company C (Rein)

Det. Btry A, 1stBn, 12thMar
 Det. Engr, Co B, 3d Engr Bn
 Det. Interpreters, 2dARVN
 Det. KCS
 Det. HST, Co C, 3d SP Bn (30Apr-20Jun)
 Det. HST, Co A, 3d SP Bn (21Jun-16Jul)
 Det. H&S Co

FO Tm, 81mm Mortar Platoon
 Det. TACP
 Det. Comm Platoon
 Det. Intelligence Section
 Det. Medical Platoon

Capt F. H. WHELIN
 (30Apr-16Jun69)
 Capt G. H. CARLSON
 (16Jun-16Jul69)

Company D (Rein)

Det. Btry A, 1stBn, 12thMar
 Det. Engr, Co B, 3d Engr Bn
 Det. Interpreters, 2dARVN
 Det. KCS
 Det. HST, Co C, 3d SP Bn (30Apr-20Jun)
 Det. HST, Co A, 3d SP Bn (21Jun-16Jul)
 Det. H&S Co

FO Tm, 81mm Mortar Platoon
 Det. TACP
 Det. Comm Platoon
 Det. Intelligence Section
 Det. Medical Platoon

Capt W. A. GAST
 (30Apr-7May69)
 1stLt J. W. HART
 (8-28May69)
 Capt J. B. GROFT JR
 (29May-16Jul69)

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5. Supporting Forces.a. Artillery.

(1) During the period 30 April-16 July 1969, the below mentioned batteries provided both direct and general artillery support of combat operations in the Virginia Ridge Area of Operations. The concept of operations was more than adequately supplemented by the ILLI fires, along with the programs of special fires requested by the artillery liaison section. Targets were planned to cover by fire those areas not actually occupied by friendly forces. Along with the preplanned targets, infantry combat operations were also supported by the firing in of Night Defensive Fires for all night positions. Whenever this was impossible due to the proximity of other friendly units or other tactical limitations, targets were placed on-call with the Battalion FDC to provide for the possibility of attack. Also along this same line, observed missions were frequently fired upon both known and likely enemy positions; and in every possible instance, infantry movements were preceded by patrol route and standard prep fire. Whenever in actual contact with the enemy, both counter-mortar and anti-personnel artillery fires were timely and well placed. In those few instances where the delay between the initial call for fire and first rounds fired was somewhat more than desired, the fault lay not with the artillery, but rather with lack of clearance due to aircraft or the delay resultant from requesting clearance from higher headquarters. The average time from request to first round was 9-10 minutes. In all cases, both the quantity and quality of the supporting artillery were excellent.

(2) Artillery units used during the Operations: Battery A, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines; Battery B, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines; Whiskey Battery, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines; Battery B, 1st Battalion, 40th Artillery (USA); Battery L, 3d Battalion, 12th Marines; Battery K, 3d Battalion, 12th Marines; and the 2nd ProCB 8/5.

(3) Missions Fired.

Observed	989
Unobserved	160
Registration	89
Preparation	74
Patrol Route Preparation	12
H & I	863

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Ammunition Expenditures

HC	60
Illum	220
WP	3,272
HE	2,450
FC	30
Total	40,032

b. Air.

(1) 1-31 May - The sorties flown included four emergency MedEvacs on four separate dates during the hours of darkness and four resupply sorties in which 81mm mortar ammunition was delivered to two positions during the hours of darkness. Two troop-lift sorties were made at night when a section of 81mm mortars was lifted to a new position. "Spooky" gunships also worked for the battalion on eight separate dates. Twenty-two troop-lift sorties were on 12 May while Company D and the Battalion Command Group were under mortar attack. The Battle Damage Assessment reported by aerial observers on fixed wing aircraft strikes included 150 bunkers destroyed, 20 secondary fires, eight secondary explosions, five .50 caliber or mortar positions destroyed, and two confirmed MDA's.

(2) 1-30 June - During the month of June the priority of the Battalion was occupying defensive positions in the 3rd Marine AO. Consequently the number of CAS sorties was low in view of decreased contacts. The beacon system and A6A aircraft were utilized as much as possible with some missions being run in the DMZ with the assistance of aerial observers. The total Battle Damage Assessment reported for all fixed wing missions included 47 bunkers destroyed, three secondary explosions, two secondary fires, and 30 meters of trail destroyed.

(3) 1-16 July - The Battle Damage Assessment for 1-16 July included 57 bunkers destroyed, four damaged, two weapon positions destroyed, 50 meters of trenchline destroyed, seven secondary explosions, and four secondary fires. Supporting units included Provisional Marine Aircraft Group-39 providing aerial observer and helicopter support; Marine Aircraft Group-36 providing helicopter support; Marine Aircraft Groups 11, 12, and 13 providing fixed wing support; and supporting units of the Air Force and Navy. Significant events for the period, were the 18 flights of fixed wing support which dropped CS gas in the denial zone of the Battalion AO. From 9-16 July the HST personnel attached to this Battalion handled 56 sorties of resupply for Battery A, 1st Battalion, 12th Marines located on Dong Ha Mountain.

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During the operation, May was the month of most activity. Contact began when Company D ambushed two NVA killing one. The following sweep of the area resulted in contact with an estimated enemy platoon. The contact resulted in 16 enemy KIA and the capture of two 82mm mortars and 200-82mm mortar rounds (YD 027644).

On the 4th of May Company C discovered a bunker complex and destroyed the small amount of equipment found. The evening of the 4th, the forward Battalion Command Post, supported by Company D (YD 020670), received 5 rounds of shelling. Again on the morning of the 5th five more mortar rounds were received.

On the 6th of May Company D discovered two NVA KIA in a recently constructed bunker. The next day Company C killed one NVA (YD 024644). On the 8th Company C attacked a position held by 12 NVA killing five (YD 997641). At 0415 on May 10th the position held by the Command Group and Company D was attacked by enemy using TNT, RPG's and small arms (YD 007642). No enemy bodies were found. At 0430 Company A ambushed four enemy troops at (YD 004654). Later the company found 52-82mm mortar rounds, 322 anti-personnel mines, 16 anti-tank mines, 200-50 caliber rounds and 40 lbs of TNT.

On 11 May Company D found 30 bunkers (YD 008645), two 82mm ordnance. Company A took eight rounds of 82mm mortar. On the 12th of May Companies A and D received a total of 51-82mm mortar rounds from (YD 0266). On the 13th the Command Group and Company D received 19-82mm mortar rounds. As the battalion swept to the east from the 13th to the 17th more bunker complexes were discovered. On the 18th, ten enemy probed Company G lines (YD 057638); a check of the area revealed one AK-47. Later the company killed four NVA in bunkers (YD 062648) and 3 of 4 enemy sighted at (YD 055630). Supporting fires were called on 19 enemy sighted by the Company.

The Command Group received 29-82mm mortar rounds on May 19th. Company D and the Command Group were probed by 5 NVA, night of 19-20 May. NVA tripped flare, Frag grenades and S/A resulted in 5 NVA KIA. Company A also received enemy fire totaling 25-82mm mortar rounds from the vicinity of (YD 029667). Company B killed two NVA in a bunker complex and captured 1 AK-47 and 1 AK-50 and destroyed large amounts of 60 and 82mm mortar ammunition. At approx 200320H Company C (YD 059640) were attacked by an estimated 60-70 NVA from two direction. Results 15 NVA KIA.

Ambush from Company B at (YD 056668) were sprung on approx 40 enemy. Resulting in 19 NVA KIA and 2 WIA. One captive identified the unit as an element of the 2nd Bn, 27th Regt. During the same day the CP received 120-82mm mortar rounds (YD 043634) while attempting schedule helo lift to Con Thien. On the 25th of May at Company B position, an enemy mortar round caused the explosion of a pallet of mortar ammunition.

On the 27th 20 rounds of 120mm mortar fire fell on Company C (YD 062687); Company B received 8-60mm mortar rounds while on patrol from A-4 also.

From the 6th of June to the 17th of July activity was light. Enemy units were active in mining, shelling, and building of bunkers. Only one contact of significance, on the 18th of June, when five enemy took the road sweep under fire (YD 134623), indicated that the enemy

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intended to avoid contact. During incidents caused damage to five trucks and one tank and resulted in one friendly KIA. Killing was mostly by 60mm and 82mm mortar fire. However, on 15 June one of the Battalion positions at Con Tien was hit by 2-122mm rockets and on the 16th of June the position at Con Tien received 6 to 10 122mm rockets.

Enemy losses for the period.

AK-47	23	60mm mortar rds	75
AK-50	3	82mm mortar rds	1,265
82mm mortar	2	RPG rds	12
60mm mortar	1	122mm rockets	10
SKS	3	AT Mines	322
9mm pistol	1	AP Mines	12
RPG 2	8	Grenades	371
RPG 7	1	Bunkers	12
Pistol .38	1	Rice	1,100 lbs
Small arms ammo	4,185	120mm mortar rds	1

7. Concept of Operation.

Operation "Virginia Ridge" entailed the use of highly mobile, fast reacting infantry units, deployed in mutually supporting platoon or squad size elements in the Mutter's Ridge/Helicopter Valley area, as well as the defense of certain fixed positions and security of vital lines of communication within the assigned AO. Competent conducting search and destroy operations saturated assigned area with maximum patrols and ambushes and made effective use of all supporting arms. Each maneuver element, down to and including squad level, possessed the capability to request and adjust artillery fire and could operate for a period of 4-5 days without resupply. The use of CGs in a portion of the AO to channelize enemy movement into approaches where movement could be detected by sensing devices resulted in numerous artillery fire missions executed on the basis of sensor readings.

Those units assigned missions for security of fixed installations and lines of communication utilized roving daylight patrols and ambushes, maximum night ambushes of fire team/squad size, and employed seismic intrusion and night observation devices to extend effectively their surveillance and control of assigned areas. Infantry security elements were provided for daily road sweeps by engineers and NOB units engaged in construction along Route #2.

"Pink Panther" a specialized operation aimed at S/D operations in the southern DMZ, including special "stingray" patrols from 3rd Recon, was superimposed on "Virginia Ridge" during the period May 24-28. The purpose of "Pink Panther" was to locate and engage NVA forces in the southern DMZ, then employ larger retraction forces to develop these engagements.

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<u>KIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>	<u>MIA</u>	<u>DOW</u>
40	121	1	5

b. Enemy personnel losses.

<u>KIA</u>	<u>POW</u>
84	2

9. Administrative Matters.

a. All matters pertaining to supply, maintenance and transportation were satisfactory during the entire operation.

b. The evacuation of casualties, although delayed at times by higher priority, was satisfactory.

c. Communication during the entire period of the operation was satisfactory.

10. Commander's Analysis.

Operation "Virginia Ridge" provided this battalion a valuable "lesson learned". In most previous operations in the Mattocks Ridge/Helicopter Valley area, units operated in company size units and frequently occupied positions in excess of 24 hours. Such operations usually resulted in friendly positions receiving incoming mortars and RPG fire, as well as frequent probes of their positions. Shortly after the commencement of "Virginia Ridge", this battalion established the following procedures for operations in the field:

1. All movement to be by platoon or smaller unit.
2. No company positions would be established. All positions would be platoon-size or smaller and mutually supporting.
3. No positions would be established on military or topographic crests.
4. No positions would be occupied in excess of 24 hours.

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Since the adoption of the above procedures, no unit of the battalion has received any incoming mortar or RPG fire in their positions. In one instance, during the latter part of June, Company B observed a number of incoming mortar rounds impacting on a position vacated three hours previously. It is believed that operations conducted in accordance with the above guidelines accomplishes the following:

1. Does not present a large enough target for the NVA to risk their supply of ammunition.
2. Movement every 24 hours provides insufficient time for the NVA to coordinate the movement of mortars, ammunition, and RPGs into position.
3. By keeping clear of high ground, friendly units avoid those areas that have been previously registered by the NVA.

Finally, it should be emphasized that these procedures for operation in the field proved valid during a period in which the enemy appeared to be moving in small units, with no evidence of large concentration of forces in the AO. The existence of masses enemy forces in the area would require reappraisal and revision of this concept.

11. Recommendations. It is recommended that in-country training systems be established for infantry units wherein company-size units are withdrawn from their area of operations, moved to a secure rest area position, and rehearsed periodically in basis small unit tactics. Such a procedure, performed in six to seven days periods, and conducted during times of decreased enemy activity, would allow the unit commander opportunity to critique past performance and correct observed deficiencies.

W. R. EMMRE
By direction

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