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U.S. ARMY MILITARY HISTORY INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

Headquarters, 198th Infantry Brigade, 23d Infantry Division
APO San Francisco 96374

AVDF-BCC

21 April 1971

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report (U)

Commanding General
23d Infantry Division
ATTN: AVDF-GC
APO San Francisco 96374

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BY BAKERS ON 23 May 95

1. (C) NAME AND TYPE OF OPERATION: WASCO RAPIDS (U). Search and clear vicinity Song Ve River Valley, Republic of Vietnam.
2. (U) DATE OF OPERATION: 130600 - 272400 March 1971.
3. (C) LOCATION: Song Ve River vicinity BS6153 (See Inclosure 1).
4. (U) CONTROL HEADQUARTERS: 198th Infantry Brigade, 23d Infantry Division and 4th ARVN Regiment, 2d ARVN Division.
5. (U) REPORTING OFFICERS:
 - a. Colonel William R. Richardson, Commanding Officer, 198th Infantry Brigade, (13-18 March).
 - b. Colonel Charles R. Smith, Commanding Officer, 198th Infantry Brigade, (19-27 March).
 - c. Lieutenant Colonel John B. Luke, Commanding Officer, 3d Battalion, 1st Infantry, 198th Infantry Brigade.
 - d. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas W. Brogan, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, 198th Infantry Brigade.
 - e. Lieutenant Colonel Vernon B. Sones, Commanding Officer, 4th Battalion, 21st Infantry, 198th Infantry Brigade.
 - f. Colonel Khieu, Commanding Officer, 4th ARVN Regiment.
6. (U) TASK ORGANIZATION:
 - a. Headquarters, 198th Infantry Brigade.
 - b. Headquarters, 3d Battalion, 1st Infantry. Downgraded at 3 year intervals.
 - c. Headquarters, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry. Declassified after 15 years.

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d. Headquarters, 4th Battalion, 21st Infantry.

7. (C) SUPPORTING FORCES.

a. A Battery, 1st Battalion, 14th Artillery (GS) with two 105mm howitzers located at FSB Snoopy.

b. B Battery, 6th Battalion, 11th Artillery (DS) with two 105mm howitzers located at FSB Liz.

c. D Battery, 6th Battalion, 11th Artillery (DS) with two 105mm howitzers located at Minh Long.

d. A Battery, 3d Battalion, 16th Artillery (GS) with two 155mm howitzers located at FSB Snoopy.

e. C Battery, 3d Battalion, 18th Artillery (GS) with two 8 inch howitzers located at Minh Long.

f. Supporting Artillery fired a total of 3432 rounds resulting in one (1) VC KIA and two (2) bunkers destroyed. The break down of mission/rounds fired are as follows:

- (1) Contact: 105mm (2/82).
- (2) Known enemy locations: 105mm (2/34), 155mm (3/80).
- (3) Preparation: 105mm (10/826), 155mm (1/114).
- (4) Suspected enemy locations: 105mm (53/860), 155mm (15/459).
- (5) IOS: 105mm (1/18), 155mm (1/16).
- (6) Scheduled fires: 943 rounds.

g. Forward Air Controllers (FAC), 20th Tactical Air Support Squadron, flew 15 missions during the operation. Air support was requested only one day and that was the first day of the operation. The ordnance dropped was 12-500 pound bombs and 4-750 pound napalm. Bomb damage assessment indicated there were two .51 caliber positions and 12 bunkers destroyed.

h. The 16th CAG provided Army Aviation support. There were a total of 39 missions flown during the operation.

8. (C) INTELLIGENCE.

a. Weather and Terrain:

(1) Weather: The weather during operation WASCO RAPIDS was variable with occasional rain and low ceilings early in the mornings. Early morning clouds usually broke up by mid-morning to become scattered to broken by afternoon. Morning fog in the low ground and near the Song Ve restricted visibility sub-

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stantially in the early morning with 0700 hours being the worst time. The main force of the northeast monsoon had dissipated and consequently the general flow pattern over the AO was weak and variable. The mean relative humidity remained at about 80%. Weather did not significantly influence operations.

(2) Terrain: Terrain within the AO was generally characterized by rugged mountains with slopes of 20-70% with a mixed vegetation pattern consisting of multi-canopied dense undergrowth forests and brushwood. The Song Ve flows in a north-south direction the length of the AO through the Song Ve valley. The level of the Song Ve was low but navigable to shallow draft craft. The Song Ve valley was about two kilometers wide and was found to be relatively flat with scattered groupings of trees. Low grass covered the entire valley floor with mountainous terrain rising abruptly on both sides of the valley. Except in scattered clearings and along stream beds, concealment from all types of observation was good. Cover afforded by trees was fair and where coupled with terrain irregularities was considered good to excellent. The piedmont area in the northern portion of the AO north of the Song Ve was characterized by elephant grass covered hills where aerial and ground observation and fields of fire were fair to good.

b. Enemy:

(1) Based on agent reports, APD missions and past operations in the WASCO RAFIDS AO, the 70th and 80th NVL Battalions of the 21st NVA Regiment and the 38th Local Force Battalion are known to use this area as a base area for attacks on the coastal plain. Contact with territorial forces on 24 April confirmed the presence of elements from 21st NVA Regiment. These battalions are held with strength of 120, 125, and 160 respectively. The enemy possesses the capability of defending from well fortified positions and remain hidden in well camouflaged caves and tunnels.

(2) Enemy units were not located during Operation WASCO RAFIDS. The 38th Local Force Battalion evaded the area and relocated in Mo Duc District, east of QL-1. The two NVL battalions believed to be in the area apparently did not find conditions suitable for offensive maneuvers and remained hidden. There were no significant contacts or unit identifications during the operation.

9. (C) MISSION: The 198th Infantry Brigade mission, in conjunction and coordination with the 4th ARVN Regiment, was to conduct combat operations in the Song Ve Valley to destroy elements of the 21st NVA Regiment and the 38th VC Local Force Battalions and to interdict movement of rice-carrying parties from sources of supply to enemy units astride the Song Ve Valley.

10. (C) CONCEPT OF OPERATION: The concept of operations initially provided for combat assaulting elements of 3-1 Infantry, 1-20 Infantry and 4-21 Infantry into assigned AO's in order to conduct rice denial and search operations. Concurrently, the 4th ARVN Regiment was to commence operations in assigned AO by combat assault. The 198th Infantry Brigade also planned a flame drop on 13 March vicinity BS6758. On-call and scheduled fires were coordinated with supporting artillery units. 3-1 Infantry was ordered to conduct operations in assigned AO with priority of effort along the Song Ve River and adjoining trails. 3-1 Infantry also would secure the area adjacent to Highway 516 and provide protection for ARVN convoys traversing the AO. Periodic 2-3 day operations would be con-

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ducted in the Western Horseshoe vicinity BS4575 using Recon/3-1. The 1-20 Infantry would interdict the 515 Valley trail network with one company and the remaining units would be targeted against routes of movement throughout the Iron Mountain complex, concentrating on routes of egress from the Song Ve Valley through high ground bordering the east of the Valley. 4-21 Infantry would conduct operations with one company in assigned AO to interdict enemy movement. 6-11 Arty provides direct support 105mm from Minh Long and FSB Liz. General support would be provided with 155mm at LZ Snoopy and 8 inch at Minh Long. Tactical air strikes on call.

11. (C) EXECUTION:

a. At 130730, 3-1 Infantry combat assaulted Alpha Company into the following landing zones: BS663589, BS647587, BS673588. All LZ's were cold. Bravo Company was inserted by combat assault immediately after Alpha and again the LZ's were not contested. Bravo's LZ's were BS596593, BS603592, and BS673588. Charlie Company's combat assault completed the 3-1 Infantry insertions. The first day of operation resulted in negative contact for 3-1 Infantry.

b. The 4/4 ARVN Regiment assaulted at BS633513, 131645 March. During the combat assault one gunship received .51 caliber and small arms fire and went down at BS633551. Two US KIA resulted from the downed gunship. Before the .51 caliber position could be destroyed by air strikes, the enemy placed effective fire on another gunship resulting in one US KIA and also one downed Light Observation Helicopter at BS633513. The downed LOH was mortared resulting in one US KIA and one ARVN WIA. Gunships were called and began taking the enemy position under fire. After the gunships had completed their mission, the 4/4 ARVN swept the area at BS625545 and found five NVA KIA by gunships. An additional two NVA KIA and one AK-47 captured by 4/4 ARVN during the sweep.

c. At BS624544 on 141230 March, the 4/4 ARVN Regiment made contact with an unknown size enemy force resulting in seven VC KIA and one AK-47 captured. The 4/4 ARVN had negative killed and wounded during the contact.

d. 3/B/1-20 Infantry at BS666505 on 201755 March observed and engaged nine VC along a treeline 500 meters away. Artillery and gunships were called for support resulting in one VC KIA by gunships and one VC KIA by artillery.

e. 1/4 ARVN Regiment at BS625522 on 221500 March engaged an unknown size enemy element resulting in two VC KIA.

12. (C) RESULTS. The 4th ARVN Regiment was given an area of operation that was known to have an enemy concentration. The 4th Regiment responded with a total of 40 enemy KIA, 10 small arms CIA, and one crew served weapon CIA. The 4th ARVN Regiment suffered a total of 15 KIA. Elements of the 198th Infantry Brigade suffered a total of 11 WIA during the operation. Gunships and artillery were credited with 7 enemy KIA, with gunships accounting for 6 and Artillery one.

13. (U) ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS.

a. Supply. There was not a noted shortage of supplies during the operation. Resupply of units was accomplished by air in most cases.

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b. Maintenance. Maintenance support came from the 723d Maintenance Battalion. There was not a noted problem in the maintenance of equipment during the operation.

c. Treatment of Casualties. Normal evacuation and treatment was conducted. Casualties were initially treated by the medical aidman in the field, and air evacuated by helicopter to the 91st Evacuation or 27th Surgical Hospitals at Chu Lai. Lightly wounded personnel were held at the 23d Medical Battalion. Seriously wounded personnel were kept at one of the two hospitals and then evacuated to Japan or CONUS.

d. Transportation. The nonavailability of helicopters and bad weather reduced the ability to move forces. The inability to redeploy troops when the situation dictated affected the results of the operation.

14. SPECIAL EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES.

a. In conjunction with the first day of operation, a 55-gallon flame drum drop was made in the An Ba area, vicinity BS667578. The flame drop was used to destroy booby traps, bunkers, a supply corridor, and intermittent crop sources. The flame drop was very effective, but the area desired was not completely covered because of underestimation in the number of drums used. Only 16% of the desired coverage was obtained during the drop.

b. A total of 9 broadcasts and leaflet drops were made during the operation. On each of the 9 missions flown, there were 45 minutes of broadcast time and 200,000 leaflets dropped. PSYOP themes were distributed with the following emphasis:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----|
| (1) Chieu Hoi | 50% |
| (2) Demoralization | 30% |
| (3) Rice Denial | 10% |
| (4) Family Reunion | 5% |
| (5) Pro-GVN | 5% |

There were no significant results from the PSYOP Campaign.

15. (C) COMMANDER'S ANALYSIS.

a. Enemy Tactics. The enemy proved to be very elusive. The enemy, in true guerrilla style, was never found in larger than squad-size elements. While he was operating in these small elements, the enemy generally confined his attacks on US units to sniping and harassing fire. Contacts seldom lasted more than 15-20 minutes. Against such an elusive foe, finding and fixing the enemy was extremely difficult. His favorite weapon was the mine/booby trap. Armament of the enemy consisted of AK-47's, captured M-16's and M-79's, 60mm and 82mm mortars, RPG-7's and .51 caliber machine guns.

b. Friendly Tactics. The US forces were inserted on the high ground of

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Song Ve Valley in order to contain the enemy forces. The ARVN forces were employed as the sweep element along the valley floor. The small unit concept was used by the US forces with the company breaking into platoon size forces. This gave the capability of covering larger areas of the high ground. The ARVN forces conducted company size sweeps, expecting to find a large enemy force. The ARVN unit was used in the valley because of the population.

16. (C) RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a. That reaction time to a strongly supported intelligence report be kept at a minimum.
- b. That the use of flame drops in heavily booby trapped areas be continued.
- c. That the use of ARVN Forces in highly contested/populated areas be continued for the following reasons:
 - (1) The ARVN's can question the population and check identification cards in a more proficient manner than US Forces.
 - (2) The ARVN's rules of engagement are unrestricted in the built up areas.
 - (3) This gives the contested population a chance to see ARVN in action in an unsecure area.

Charles R. Smith
CHARLES R. SMITH
Colonel, Infantry
Commanding

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