

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
Headquarters, 198th Infantry Brigade, Americal Division
APO San Francisco 96219

13 file

AVDF-BCC

2 August 1968

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report

Commanding General
23rd Infantry Division
ATTN: AVDF-GC (DOT)
APO San Francisco 96374

1. Type of Operation: Night Movement and Engagement in Operation Burlington trail.

2. Date of Operation: 081850 June 1968.

3. Location: Chu Lai, RVN
Map Reference: 1:25,000
Sheet Number: 66391

4. Command and Control Headquarters: 198th Infantry Brigade (Lt).

5. Reporting Officers:

- a. Col Charles B. Thomas, CO 198th Inf Bde (Lt).
- b. LTC William D. Kelly, CO 1-6 Inf, 198th LIB.
- c. 1Lt John Mills, CO, B/1-46 Inf, 198th LIB.
- d. CPT Larry S. Umberger, CO, C/1-46 Inf, 198th LIB.
- e. 1Lt Robert E. Miller, CO, D/1-46 Inf, 198th LIB.
- f. LTC Elbert E. Fuller, Jr., CO, 1-52 Inf, 198th LIB.
- g. CPT John A. Bierden, CO, A/1-52 Inf, 198th LIB.
- h. CPT Leonard G. Goldman, CO, B/1-52 Inf, 198th LIB.
- i. 1Lt Jack W. Sorenson, CO, D/1-52 Inf, 198th LIB.

6. Task Organization:

a. Headquarters, 1-6 Infantry.

- (1) B/1-46 Infantry
- (2) C/1-46 Infantry
- (3) D/1-46 Infantry (Initial part of the operation)

b. Headquarters, 1-52 Infantry.

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- (1) A/1-52 Infantry
- (2) B/1-52 Infantry
- (3) D/1-52 Infantry
- (4) D/1-46 Infantry (latter portion of the operation)

7. Supporting Forces:

a. D/1-14 Arty (PROV) was direct support artillery for 1-6 Infantry, and C/1-14 Arty was direct support artillery for 1-6 Infantry. Both batteries performed with outstanding accuracy during the night operation as they continually provided immediate close-in fire support and H&I fires.

b. Aviation support was provided by the 14th Aviation Battalion, primarily the 176th Aviation Company. The "MINUTEMAN" furnished command and control as well as utility helicopters on 8 and 9 June 1968. Numerous sorties were flown in all categories, to include visual reconnaissance, resupply, command and control, and dustoff. The courage, skill, and desire to excel on the part of the "MINUTEMAN" pilots significantly contributed to the success of reorganizing and resupply of all ground elements.

c. Communications Platoon (-), 1-6 Infantry set up a relay station on LZ Cliffor (BT25703) which greatly aided in maintaining good communications with the maneuvering companies.

8. Intelligence:

a. Terrain: The terrain provides the enemy with excellent cover and concealment from ground and air observation. Numerous deep gorges give the enemy excellent protection from air and artillery fire, and the narrow valleys with steep slopes offer similar protection. The valley extending to the west from the units initial location is generally flat or rolling terrain with numerous open rice paddies and grassy areas. At the objective, the area adjoining the river banks on the north and south sides is also flat and open. This open terrain offers no terrain obstacles to movement nor cover or concealment for the enemy. Open areas provide good fields of fire, but the mountainous terrain offers poor fields of fire. The river and streams are easily forded in most areas. The major avenues of approach into the objective area to the north-south road in grid square BT2206 and the trail entering the objective area at BT198060. Enemy avenues of approach are along several trails coming from the south of the objective area and entering at BT199053, BT208040, BT222047, and BT225050 and the road entering from the southeast along the river valley. Key terrain in the objective area consists of the mountains to the north and south of the river. During the operation some friendly units experienced difficulties in confirming their locations due to the double and triple canopy growth. The rugged terrain with steep slopes experienced by 1-52 Infantry limited the ground commander's ability to maneuver rapidly. Water was plentiful

in nearly all the valleys leading up into the high ground. Landing zones for resupply were extremely difficult to locate and prepare. Units in the 1-6 Infantry area found the terrain easier to operate in since it was not as rugged.

b. Weather: Temperatures ranging from a high of 98 degrees to a low of 67 degrees coupled with the dense vegetation, increased troop fatigue. The night of the operation there was a slight overcast which limited the amount of light for the movement. On 8 June the moonrise was at 1637 hours and EENT was at 2006 hours. On the morning of 9 June the moon set at 0418 hours and BMNT was at 0522 hours. Therefore, the nearly full moon was overhead during all but approximately an hour of the night.

c. Enemy:

(1) Available information initially confirmed several enemy units in the area. Information obtained from a PW and captured documents, indicated that the 80th Battalion, 1st VC Regiment and portions of the 2d NV Division were in the area of operation. On 7 June 1968, documents taken from another VC killed in action stated that elements of the 409th Main Force Sapper Battalion were also operating in the area.

(2) Information from other sources listed the 80th Battalion at a strength of approximately 350 men. The 80th Battalion was deployed with one company at BT 215063, one at BT 227067, and one at BT 215058. It was also indicated that the mission of the 80th Battalion was to provide a security force for the 1st Regimental Headquarters, believed to be located on the ridge line 3000 meters to the south in the vicinity of BT 225035. See overlay #1.

(3) The 198th Bde had confirmed reports of trench works and dug in positions at BT 209076, BT 209068, and BT 205085. The area in the vicinity of BT2006 was continuously hazardous to all aircraft due to 12.7mm and smaller caliber anti-aircraft fire. The major contact during the night movement occurred near BT209076, one of the locations given above.

(4) The enemy soldiers were completely equipped for sustained ground combat operations to include complete web equipment and protective masks. Their weaponry included the normal individual weapons with 60mm and 82mm mortars, light and heavy machine guns, RPG-2's and hand grenades. The enemy frequently fired upon maneuvering companies and mortared friendly troops both during daylight and night hours. In daylight hours enemy troops were observed moving in well organized formations to the south. Civilians were scattered throughout the valley floor, but they were not concentrated in large groups.

9. Mission: The 1-6 Infantry and the 1-52 Infantry were directed to conduct a night movement from their location beginning at 082000 June 1968 to locations north of the Song Bong Miou River. On order, units were to conduct a night river crossing and search the high ground south of the river.

10. Concept of Operations:

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a. The 1-52 Infantry was directed to maneuver C, B, D Companies, 1-46 Infantry west and to release the units to the operational control of the 1-6 Infantry upon crossing the 1-52 Infantry/1-6 Infantry boundary which is shown on overlay 2.

b. 1-6 Infantry was given an area to search and clear bounded as follows: from the road junction BT224076, west along the road to BT194077, south to the Song Bong Mieu River, follow the river south and southwest to BT222053, north along the trail to the road at BT224064, north along the road to junction BT224067. The 1-6 Infantry to accomplish this search and clear mission directed the three OCON companies to maneuver west and then south along three different routes as shown on overlay #2.

c. The 1-52 Infantry was given an area to search and clear bounded as follows: the western boundary was the same as the eastern boundary for the 1-6 Infantry, from BT225075 south along the road and trail, continuing from BT222053, east along the Song Bong Mieu River to BT240053, north along the north-south 24 grid line to the trail at BT240074, west along the trail to the 1-6 Infantry boundary at BT225075. To accomplish their search mission the 1-52 Infantry sent their three companies along three different routes generally in a southern direction toward the river.

d. 1-6 Infantry and 1-52 Infantry were ordered to be prepared to continued operations in the high ground to the southwest on order.

11. Execution:

a. At the beginning of the day on 8 June 1968; B, C, And D Companies 1-46 Infantry and A, B, and D Companies 1-52 Infantry were under the operational control of the 1-52 Infantry. The companies were directed to search out the area in which they were initially located and prepare for the night movement to the river beginning at 082100 hours.

b. 081850 June 1968. 1-6 Infantry assumed operational control of B, C, and D Companies, 1-46 Infantry as final preparations were being made for the night operation.

c. 082120 June 1968. All elements of the 1-52 Infantry and all elements of the 1-6 Infantry, except C Company, 1-46 Infantry, began the planned movement to the Song Bong Mieu River. C Company, 1-46 Infantry was delayed due to a medivac of 8 VN civilians.

d. 082212 June 1968. D Company, 1-46 Infantry was first to gain contact with the enemy when the unit received one round of sniper fire with negative casualties at BT223073.

e. 082230 June 1968. After B Company, 1-46 Infantry, received some small arms fire at BT217075, LTC Kolley ordered C Company to close on B Company's right flank for mutual support during the sweep.

f. 082303 June 1968. D Company, 1-46 Infantry, at BT222072 engaged four enemy coming out of a hut killing all four and capturing 1 AK-47, 4 loaded AK-47 magazines, and 1 complete set of web gear including pistol belt,

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first aid packet, and ammunition containers.

g. 082307 June 1968. When B Company, 1-46 Infantry at BT215076 engaged 4 VC in the area of a destroyed village, the VC tried to evade without engaging, but the unit killed 2 of the enemy and captured 3 pistol bolts with pouches and 1 M-1 carbine. C Company was continuing to sweep the northern side of the valley in an effort to link up on B Company's right flank.

h. 082336 June 1968. B Company, 1-46 Infantry, received 10-15 rounds of AK-47 fire from approximately 300 meters to their northeast. The hostile fire inflicted wounds upon 4 men, and B Company requested a medivac helicopter be sent to BT215076.

i. 082341 June 1968. D Company, 1-46 Infantry, at BT226068 engaged an AW bunker position killing 2 VC.

j. 082356 June 1968. B Company, 1-46 Infantry, received a mortar attack from grid BT218081 and small arms fire on 3 sides of their secured landing zone. The small arms fire was coming from a range of 300-400 meters. B Company sustained casualties of 4 more men wounded during the action. Gunships were requested to support B Company and to cover the medivac helicopter.

k. 090012 June 1968. First platoon, B Company, 1-46 Infantry, reached a small rise at BT211075, and B Company (-) received another mortar attack. The First Platoon observed the mortar flashes at BT206074 and called artillery on that location. The enemy mortars ceased firing. C Company, 1-46 Infantry, was directed to close on B Company's rear elements.

l. 090030 June 1968. C Company, 1-46 Infantry's lead element linked up with B Company's trail elements.

m. 090036 June 1968. The medivac helicopter received a heavy volume of fire from the southwest at a range of about 600 meters, but B Company (-), 1-46 Infantry, completed the medivac of 5 of their wounded personnel and all of their gear. The gunships (Firebird 99) covered the medivac and expended all of their ordinance on suspected enemy locations. B Company (-) still had 3 lightly wounded men waiting for a second medivac.

n. 090050 June 1968. At BT209075 First Platoon, B Company, 1-46 Infantry had massive enemy movement around their position. B Company (-) moved to join the First Platoon, and C Company secured the landing zone for the next medivac. The First Platoon leader called in artillery to the west and south of his location as B Company (-) closed toward his position.

o. 090103 June 1968. B Company (-), 1-46 Infantry, received fire from the south and could observe one machinegun position and many dug-in positions as they joined the First Platoon at its location. The First Platoon killed 1 more enemy at the company joined them.

p. 090123 June 1968. B Company, 1-46 Infantry, completed the medivac of 3 wounded personnel, and again the medivac helicopter received fire during take off.

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q. 090128 June 1968. D Company, 1-46 at DT 209075 reported receiving sporadic fire from 360 degrees and having had 3 more men wounded and 1 man killed while moving into positions with the First Platoon.

r. 090142 June 1968. D Company, 1-46 Infantry captured 1 VC at DT 228057. The PW upon questioning by an interpreter stated that there was an ambush at DT 224057 which was on the planned route for D Company. The captured enemy also informed the D Company commander that there were emplacements at Dt 224056 and claimed that there is much foot-movement on the north-south trail at DT 223059.

s. 090143 June 1968. D Company, 1-46 Infantry decided not to medivac the last casualties until morning because of the heavy ground fire.

t. 090219 June 1968. D Company, 1-46 Infantry reported harrassing fire from all sides of their perimeter, varying in range from 50 meters to 150 meters and that the enemy were crawling up to the perimeter and throwing hand grenades.

u. 090220 June 1968. By moving the First Platoon to the south, D Company, 1-46 Infantry attempted to enlarge the perimeter. The First Platoon engaged approximately 20 enemy at a range of about 25-50 meters on the south side of the rise at DT 209075 resulting in 3 enemy killed with one AK-47 and one 7.62mm machinegun captured. No additional friendly casualties were sustained. C Company, 1-46 Infantry moved to B Company's location at this time.

v. 090257 June 1968. D Company, 1-46 Infantry was now back in the 1-52 Infantry area of operation and returned to their operational control. The 1-52 Infantry elements were moving to the same general vicinity as D Company, 1-46 Infantry.

w. 090258 June 1968. D Company, 1-46 Infantry reported receiving sporadic hand grenades and small arms fire and returned fire continuously throughout the period of engagement using artillery and small arms. Enemy forces around D and C Companies were estimated at 30 to 35 personnel with more on the high ground over looking friendly positions. Both companies were directed by LTC Kelly to move south using probes from their compromised positions and continue their mission.

x. 090445 June 1968. Both D and C Companies completed reorganization and began movement as they proceeded with careful probes through the woods to their south.

y. 090610 June 1968. Both D and C Companies, 1-46 Infantry were at DT 208070. D Company left security at DT 209075 to secure the 3 wounded men and the 1 man killed during early morning contacts.

z. 090728 June 1968. Medivac for B Company, 1-46 Infantry was completed and resupply initiated. The medivac extracted 1 man killed and 6 men wounded, 4 of which were minor wounds. B Company closed back to DT

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209075 to redistribute supplies and C Company remained at BT 208070 receiving resupplies at that location. All resupply and extractions were completed without incident.

ac. 0909056 June 1968. B Company, 1-46 Infantry was still at BT 209075 when they received 2 mortar rounds from BT 206074, and returned fire with Artillery on that location. B Company had 8 additional casualties and a medivac was requested.

bb. 091001 June 1968. C Company, 1-46 Infantry received a mortar attack at grid BT 208070 in which 5 men were wounded.

cc. 091025 June 1968. Medivac was completed for both B and C companies, 1-46 Infantry.

dd. 091026 June 1968. C Company, 1-46 Infantry received another mortar attack causing 4 more lightly wounded personnel.

ee. 091106 June 1968. C Company, 1-46 Infantry reported medivac complete for 4 additional men wounded from BT 206073.

ff. 091200 June 1968. B and C Companies, 1-46 Infantry were continuing their mission to move south as the 1-46 Infantry assumed control of LZ Downman and their maneuver elements.

gg. B and C Company continued movement into logger positions to the south with negative contact.

hh. B Company, 1-52 Infantry followed by A Company, 1-52 Infantry came into contact with double and triple canopy vegetation which hampered all movement. During the conclusion of the movement there was negative contact by any of the companies under the control of the 1-52 Infantry. All units proceeded to their preplanned location so that they could be prepared to cross the river.

12. Results:

a. Enemy losses:

(1) Personnel:

(a) 12 KIA

(b) 1 CIA

(2) Equipment:

(a) 2 IW CIA

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- (b) 1 CSW CIA
- (c) 13 Uniforms
- (d) 4 Sets of Web Gear
- (e) 6 Magazines
- (f) 1130 Rounds Small Arms Ammunition
- (g) 10 Chicom Hand Grenades

b. Friendly Losses.

- (1) 1 US KIA
- (2) 28 US MIA(E)

13. Administrative matters;

a. Supply; Ammunition, food, and water were airlifted to the rifle companies prior to movement. All units carried a normal basic combat load. Normal TO & E weapons were employed, along with organic supporting fires and direct support artillery. Artillery ammunition on hand was sufficient to support operation.

b. Maintenance; No significant maintenance problems were encountered since only combat elements were engaged. Normal first echelon maintenance of weapons and equipment was accomplished in the field as required.

c. Casualties; The unit medics displayed outstanding courage and proficiency during the entire battle. Casualties were immediately treated in the field and evacuated as rapidly as possible. The medical ships took several hits but continued the evacuations.

d. Transportation; All transportation of casualties and supplies was conducted by helicopter. Units of the 1-52 Infantry found landing zones had to be literally cut into the thick vegetation so that resupply could be received.

e. Communications; 1-6 Infantry had minor communication problems when rifle companies were using short antennas; however radio relays established with adjoining units at LZ Clifford practically eliminated the problems. Other elements had no problems with communications.

14. Special Equipment and Techniques:

- a. Units operating with the 1-6 Infantry used Starlight Scopes

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with the point and flank elements. The value of the scope was initially limited due to the heavy overcast; however, in the early morning hours, clouds cleared and the scopes were very useful in observing danger areas.

b. During the operation, B Company, 1-52 Infantry used Scout Dogs. The dogs improved the companies alertness and security. At the completion of the movement all 1-52 Infantry companies used panel markers so that an air observer could pinpoint all locations.

15. Commanders Analysis:

a. Commanders all agreed that this move had disproved a previous statement that units could not move in the jungle during the hours of darkness and still remain an effective, maneuverable force. B Company, 1-52 Infantry hacked their way foot by foot through the triple canopy vegetation and still kept their bearing and remained an effective fighting force. The success of the movement is evident by the rapid withdrawal of all enemy from the area of operation.

b. Company size night operations against a determined enemy force, who avoids decisive combat and relies heavily upon mortar attacks, are capable of meeting with more success than daylight operations. The enemy's ability to fix friendly forces is reduced while the ability to detect enemy mortar locations is increased. This is illustrated in the results of this action, in that all enemy kills were obtained during darkness with a majority of the US casualties being inflicted during daylight hours.

c. Movement in open areas and astride trails can be accomplished at night with greater relative safety than during daylight. The possibility of successful contact with the enemy is frequently increased if the enemy is attempting to avoid contact.

d. The increased difficulty in conducting aerial medevac at night is greatly offset by the ease in which wounded can be recovered from an enemy kill zone under the cover of darkness. All troops must be instilled with the necessary drive to develop enemy contact rapidly so that any friendly casualties can be uncovered by forward movement.

e. Enemy expertise at daylight camouflage is negated at night. His positions are revealed when he fires small arms, and his light and noise discipline is generally poor.

f. The reduction in the effectiveness of gunships at night can be offset by maximum use of artillery fires to the front and flanks during movement. Waiting to use artillery until contact is made can be a mistake, as night contact is frequently at such close range that the immediate situation can not be influenced by artillery. Insufficient artillery was employed by the infantry company commanders on the operation.

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g. Difficulty was experienced in linkup by B and C Companies, 1-46 Infantry in the dark while on the move. Detailed coordination and control must be accomplished before such a linkup is attempted.

h. Every attempt must be made to clear an area rapidly that has been fixed by enemy indirect fire. Casualties should be carried to a pickup zone which has not received fire. To accept resupply in an area recently subjected to indirect fire is a tactical error.

16. Recommendations: That greater emphasis continue to be placed on night operations at the rifle company and smaller elements, but avoid establishing a pattern.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

- 3 Incl
1. Intelligence
2. Boundries & Movement
3. Contacts

[Signature]
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