

6
AFTER ACTION REPORTS: RANGER
OPERATIONS PHOU-BINH-THANH
SPECIAL ZONE

- OPERATION HOLIDAY 3 to 9 JAN '65

- HARDTIMES II

• PHASE 1 - FEB 24 to MAR 3 '65

• PHASE 2 - MAR 4 to MAR 10 '65

- HARDTIMES III APR 6 to MAY 29 '65

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HEADQUARTERS
U. S. MAAG DETACHMENT
PHUOC BINH THANH SPECIAL ZONE
SONG BE, VIETNAM

MAGTN-PBTSZ

17 January 1963

SUBJECT: (U) After Action Report on Ranger Operations in Zone D. Part 2, Phase III "Operation Holiday", 3 Jan to 9 Jan 63.

TO: Senior Advisor
III Corps
Saigon, Vietnam
ATTN: G-3 Advisor

1. (C) FORCES

a. Column A. 30th Special Battalion (344, 340 and 337 ranger companies): Commanded by Lt Col Dien, PBT Special Zone Commander, accompanied by Major Nulsen, Senior Advisor, and Lt Keenan, Ranger Advisor. This column had been commanded by Captain Blet, 30th Special Battalion Commander, during part 1 of Phase III and remained in Zone D for part 2.

b. Column B. Ranger Task Force (316, 327 and 345 ranger companies): Commanded initially by Major Chinh, Deputy Phuoc Long Province Chief, and later by Major Man, Chief of Staff for PBT Special Zone, accompanied by Major Pitts, Deputy Senior Advisor, and SFC Delmont, Medic, from 5 to 9 January 1963. This column was airlifted into Zone D by helicopters on 3 January 1963.

c. Column C. Phuoc Thanh Ranger Task Force (335, 336 and 350 ranger companies): Commanded by Major Hao, Phuoc Thanh Province Chief, accompanied by Major Morrison, Sector Advisor, and Lt Mullenix, Sector Ranger Advisor. This column came in from the south on 5 January and returned to Phuoc Vinh on 8 January. Report of their activities attached as Annex A.

2. (C) CONDUCT

a. Part 2 of Phase III of "Operation Holiday" was an extension of operations conducted by the 32d Regiment and 30th Special Battalion between 29 December 1962 and 3 January 1963. The after action report from the 32d Regiment was submitted to your headquarters on 7 January 1963. No U.S. Advisor accompanied the 30th Special Battalion. A summary of the operation highlights obtained from ARVN sources is enclosed as Annex B.

b. For Part 2, Phase III, the 30th Special Battalion secured IZ YT 105625 on 2 January 1963 to protect the helicopter landings of the Ranger Task Force on 3 January 1963. See overlay Annex C.

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c. The plan called for a two column envelopment of an area south of LZ YT 120565, hereafter referred to as "LZ Dien". From analysis of aerial photographs, documents previously captured, the questioning of 2 defectors and 1 prisoner, and earlier probes; the area was believed to contain a VC regiment. A & B Columns left the LZ in one column at 031500 Jan 63. The next morning A & B Columns split and followed the trace shown on overlay, Annex C. Column B arrived at objective area before Column A and made contact resulting in some ranger casualties to include the wounding of Major Chinh, Column Commander. The next morning (5 January) Column B secured LZ Dien and evacuated the dead and wounded by H-34's.

d. Column A then moved to LZ Dien on 5 January and received the 2d Bn of the 32d Regiment and 1 mortar platoon which was sent in by helicopter lift to secure LZ Dien while Columns A & B conducted operations in the area for the next 3 days. Location of these operations can be found on overlay Annex D and an explanation of the results are in the analysis that follows.

e. Column C's movement from Phuoc Thanh had originally been planned to act as an intercept force for VC fleeing south as a result of Column A & B's operations. They actually acted as an independent force with no real control exercised by the Tactical Zone Commander. After action report attached as Annex A.

f. Actions in the target area actually covered a period that began earlier in "Operation Holiday". The contacts made and, the engagements of the 30th Special Battalion, 32d Regiment and the Ranger Task Force are shown on Annex D. The accumulation of information obtained from all of these actions led to eventual discovery and destruction of all company installations of what later was identified as VC Battalion D-14.

g. The next 3 days, January 6, 7, and 8 were characterized by ranger reconnaissance-in-force missions, raids and ambushes conducted from LZ Dien as a base of operations. During this phase the base was protected by the 2d Battalion, 32d Regiment; 2 tubes of 4.2 Mortars, and 2 tubes of 155mm howitzers from Phuoc Vinh. The VC made probes each night and fired 81mm Mortars into the perimeter. No casualties were caused by the probes or mortar fire. A prisoner caught on the 6th of January assisted in the eventual discovery of 6 company installations and a field hospital (200 beds). A summary of VC casualties, equipment and documents captured as well as installations destroyed appears in Intelligence Annex E.

h. The 4.2 platoon was helicopter lifted from LZ Dien on 8 January. Columns A & B and the 2/32 moved out of the area to return to Phuoc Long at 082000 January 1963. The march was continued on 9 January 63 with all Columns closing in Dong Xuai by 091800 January 63.

3. (U) TERRAIN

Some area as described in previous after action reports of Ranger Operations in Zone D.

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4. (C) ANALYSIS

a. This operation was the last phase of a 21 day operation, (19 Dec 62 to 9 Jan 63) named "Operation Holiday", that utilized 9 ranger companies, 1 regiment, 1 platoon of 4.2 mortars, 1 battery of 155mm howitzers, 2 helicopter operations and VNAF air support. The important points are: It was the longest operation ever conducted in Zone D, it essentially was conducted by battalion size columns, it placed continuous pressure on the same VC units, it utilized numerous supporting elements (air, helicopter, 4.2" mortars, 155mm how, aerial photography and previous intelligence reports), and damaged one of the VC main supply routes from North Vietnam to III and IV Corps areas. The buildup of information through continuous contacts and the use of prisoners captured and defectors gave the necessary basis for follow-through operations. The dislocation and damage done to D-14 and the Field Hospital could have never been accomplished if the Tactical Zone Commander had not been willing to push his advantage. The value of constant pressure and follow through on timely information were fully recognized.

b. Although the Tactical Zone Commander can be criticized for leaving his headquarters and personally assuming command of a small portion of his forces in the field, the situation under which he went to the field must be taken into account. The 30th Special Battalion, which has been operating with the TZ Commander for many years, lost one of their company commanders 2 days previous to the beginning of this part of Phase III. Most of the troops and commanders were tired and demoralized; they needed a boost. The TZ Commander's presence in the field, at this time, was a tremendous boost to the troops. From the time he entered the field until the end of the operation the morale of the rangers rose steadily. They revenged the deaths of Captain Cang, the 337th Ranger Company Commander, and their fellow soldiers. It is my opinion that this probably could not have been accomplished by anyone else other than the TZ Commander.

c. On the day after the helicopter landing (4 Jan 63). Column A discovered a rice depot containing approximately 6 tons of rice. The TZ Commander ordered the depot burned. We spent about an hour and a half trying to burn the storage hut and rice. In witnessing more than a dozen attempts at burning rice, I am convinced that over 50% of it can be recovered by the VC. It may be that the smoke has penetrated it to the extent that it will taste bad when cooked, but it will still furnish rice for hungry VC's. Some sort of chemical should be developed that can be sprayed on large quantities of rice to make it inedible. This would save time and make certain that no rice can be recovered.

d. This was the first operation in Zone "D" where a base was set up for a period of 4 days (4 Jan to 8 Jan) from which continuous local raids and ambushes were conducted by small units without too serious a threat to the base by the VC. Although the VC probed each night, fired a few small arms rounds and tossed in several 81mm rounds, there were no casualties. The main reasons for the lack of a serious threat were the size of the force protecting the base (9 companies), 4.2" Mortar support, 155mm how support and daylight air support. The use of 4.2's and 155's at night is devastating to the morale of the VC

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that are within several kilometers of the impact area. It discourages them from coming anywhere near the base area. The air attacks during daylight also have the same effect. This type of protection for an operational base astride the main VC line of communications in Zone D proved effective. It is my belief that this base could have held out indefinitely. The real problem of such a course of action is the difficulty of replacing troops. When ranger companies are relieved under the present set up they go back to a compound where they have their families. It would be awkward, indeed, to replace another ranger company in a compound where other families are living. The plan of staying in this particular area was discussed with the TZ Commander. He agreed with the desirability of the plan but indicated he would need more troop strength. This is a judgment that only the commander with the responsibility can make. I believe, that after more damage is done to the VC in Zone D, this plan can be implemented with troops now available.

e. It is believed that this was the first air-supported ranger operation in Zone D. Preplanned, on call and opportunity targets were fired. Rangers actually went into the areas bombed, from several hours to several days after bombing. Post strike analysis of targets hit is enclosed as Annex F. Two areas that had been napalmed on 23 Dec 62 were also spotted. The napalm bombs landed in a heavily wooded area. They left no leaves or undergrowth in an area approximately 60 meters in diameter.

(1) Because of poor communications with the L-19 directing a B-26 strike on 5 Jan 63, I communicated directly with the pilot in the B-26 and obtained an immediate air strike which was responsive to subsequent changes. Other air strikes that were directed by the TZ Commander through a Vietnamese observer in his L-19 were not as responsive. On one occasion there appeared to be a several hour delay that was never explained satisfactorily to me. I think that the TZ Commander knew that going through the L-19 to direct air strikes was not satisfactory, because when the opportunity came he always wanted me to contact the bomber in the air. By U.S./GVN agreement, this is a Vietnamese responsibility and a trained Vietnamese observer in an L-19 must direct the strike. On three successive days there were different L-19's in the air directing the strikes or at least they had different call signs. The observers were at a disadvantage because they had no personal contact with the commander on the ground and did not know the situation. I have recommended that the L-19 observers, responsible for directing strikes during an operation, be present during the planning and briefing phases. I believe that this may present many problems because I understand there are a limited number of trained Vietnamese observers and they are on-call for any spot in South Vietnam. Although the air strikes did accomplish their mission by hitting some targets and terrifying the VC, there did not appear to be any great degree of control over the time of strike. In the two instances where U.S. Advisors have been called upon to direct strikes because of breakdown in Vietnamese communications the strikes have been immediate and responsive.

(2) Air strikes with rangers on the ground ready to take advantage of the shock action proved very valuable and probably accounted for the successful dislodgement of D-14 which heretofore had withstood 3 previous attacks. The prisoner captured on 5 Jan 63 indicated that many VC had been wounded by air strikes and that

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jungle and scattered. Having been in the jungle some 500 to 1000 meters away from an air strike, I can say that the sound of the planes and the noise of bombing is very frightening. Aerial bombardment is a good method of keeping the VC on the move, even though the bombs do not hit an installation.

f. It is the generally accepted opinion of the Vietnamese Officers and American Advisors in PBT Special Zone that the recent operations in Zone D have caused a shortage of food as well as demoralizing the VC through air and artillery strikes. Evidence gathered from prisoners and those that surrendered indicated that many VC are willing to surrender if given the opportunity. As a result of this information the TZ Commander has initiated a program of surrender broadcasts from a C-47 and distribution of surrender passes to be alternated with periods of air strikes to impress the VC with the urgency of their decision. If carried out expertly, it should bring good results.

g. One day the TZ Commander devised a well thought out plan for an attack on a suspected VC installation. It involved 2 forces moving not more than 2 kilometers through the jungle in a pincer movement. The movement to the attack position took all day and was later called off as a failure when it was discovered neither force was in the right position. Separate movements by two forces in the jungle relying solely on compass and maps to get them to specific spots are nearly impossible. It has been the experience of rangers in Zone D that if you want to find a VC camp, you must either follow a VC trail or follow a stream that is deep enough not to dry up in the dry season. All VC camps of any size in Zone D are situated within 100 meters of large, flowing streams. This fact will help in planning future air strikes.

h. Four encounters with VC units near LZ Dien were made by the 32d Regiment and ranger companies of PBT Special Zone (See Annex D).

(1) The first fire fight was 230910 Dec 62 by a ranger task force. The task force had split into 3 separate columns. Two companies, the 327 and 337, came under small arms fire and 81mm mortar fire. The task force withdrew after 45 minutes with no casualties. No known VC casualties were inflicted.

(2) The second firefight was 311330 Dec 62 by the 1st Bn 32d Regiment. The 1st Bn followed the main supply trail from LZ Dien south into a position which subsequently was found to be C-4 of D-14. They withdrew after sustaining 1 KIA and 1 WIA and one known VC KIA. At 1630 the same day, the 3d Bn, 32d Regiment followed a stream bed south and engaged what later was determined as C-2, D-14. The 3d Bn had 2 KIA and 11 WIA. The VC casualties were unknown.

(3) The third encounter was on 011200 Jan 63 by the 30th Special Battalion. The 337th Ranger Company was leading the column. One platoon was in front accompanied by the Company Commander, Captain Gang. The VC let the platoon come within 10 meters of prepared positions protecting what later was determined as a field hospital. The VC opened

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with a IMG killing Captain Cang and 3 others and wounding 9. The rangers returned the fire and withdrew almost immediately. Ten minutes later they returned to evacuate the dead and wounded. The rangers could not determine the number of VC casualties at the time, but subsequently a VC was captured who had been in the hospital at the time and he stated that 35 VC were killed and 5 wounded by this particular engagement. He also stated that the VC withdrew immediately after firing on the 337.

(4) The fourth encounter was at 041745 Jan 63 by a ranger task force. They made contact with what later was determined to be C-3, D-14. They withdrew after sustaining 1 KIA and 7 WIA, including Major Chinh the task force commander. The rangers on the ground reported counting 12 VC KIA.

(5) In all four encounters it appears that the rangers and 32d Regiment failed to press the attack after sustaining casualties. From the report of the prisoners cited above, and subsequent raids which brought the rangers into all of these camps, it was apparent that the VC had also withdrawn and probably had sustained heavy casualties. If the rangers and 32d regiment had pressed their advantage, it probably would not have been necessary to conduct part 2 of phase III of "Operation Holiday". Or at least, it would not have taken the entire 7 days of part 2 to move D-14 and field hospital from their installations. Pressing the attack after initial casualties have been sustained is the work of a well-trained outfit and will certainly bring better results and save lives in the long run.

5. (C) LESSONS LEARNED

a. One of the more important lessons learned was the carrying through of an earlier recommendation by the U.S. Advisors to set up a base camp in VC controlled territory and operate for longer than 4 to 5 day periods. This was possible because of two helicopter resupply missions to the 30th Special Battalion (the 30th stayed in 12 days) and one to the ranger task force (the task force stayed in 7 days). The PET Special Zone forces stayed at LZ Dien for 3 1/2 days. As a consequence they stayed long enough to inflict heavy damage on D-14 and completely rout that unit.

b. Secondly, even though a maneuver may be simple and over short distances (1 to 2 kilometers) in the jungle, it is next to impossible to coordinate an envelopment.

c. Thirdly, it was discovered that the best way to find VC camps in Zone D is to follow trails, (VC trails usually are well worn and have little irrigation ditches down the middle) and streams that do not dry up after rainy season.

d. Fourthly, aerial observers in L-19 aircraft should be briefed on the area of operations and general tactical plan before the operation and the same observer should support the entire operation. Aerial observers should also check their PRC 10's before flying a mission. This is the only radio with which they can contact the ground element.

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e. Aerial bombardment and 155mm How support with ranger operations proved highly successful and should be further developed.

f. It appeared after the initial firefight in the ranger/VC encounters, both sides withdrew. Pressing the attack after the first casualties have been sustained will bring better results and in the long run less casualties.

6. (C) RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Advantage must be taken of the lowered morale and combat efficiency of the VC in this portion of Zone D by continuing the pressure and making surrender appeals. NOTE: This is now the plan of the PBF Special Zone Commander.

b. Closer coordination between VNAF observers and pilots must be made to produce more effective air support.

c. U.S. Advisors should remind their counterparts that 2 column envelopments in the jungle are next to impossible and pressing the attack after sustaining the initial casualties will bring greater chances for success and will in the long run produce less casualties.

d. In locating VC camps in Zone D from maps and aerial photographs, photo interpreters should pay particular attention to the areas 100 meters from the larger streams and in particular around stream junctions.

e. A chemical that can be dispensed through aerosol bombs should be developed to destroy large quantities of rice.

Robert R. Rafferty, Capt, Inf
for CHARLES K NULSEN JR
Major, Infantry
Senior Advisor

- Annex
- A. Column C Activities
 - B. Summary of 30th Bn Opns
 - C. Operation Overlay
 - D. Operation Area enlargement
 - E. Intelligence (Not included)
 - F. Air Strike Report

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ANNEX A: (U) Column C Activities

1. (U) Phuoc Binh Thanh Operation.
2. (U) 051400 Jan 63 to 091100 Jan 63.
3. (U) Phuoc Thanh Province between SUOI and MADA rivers and north of the SONG BE river.
4. (C) Sector Headquarters under control PBT Special Zone Headquarters.
5. (C) Headquarters, Phuoc Thanh Sector, 335th, 336th, and 350th Ranger Companies.
6. (C) One Plat 5th Inf Div Arty (105), One Btry III Corps Arty (155).
7. (C) Major Morrison present with Control Headquarters, Lt Mullenix with assault elements. Plans for operation made at PBT Special Zone Headquarters.
8. (C) No intelligence available locally or from PBT Special Zone.
9. (C) Mission to ambush VC that may be withdrawing or reinforcing elements of PBT Special Zone engaged to the north.
10. (C) Concept of operation was to establish ambushes with ranger companies in area of operation - exact positions to be selected by the Province Chief. (See attached overlay).
11. (C) Force departed Phuoc Vinh 051400 Jan and moved to bivouac area. (See point #1 on overlay). Force departed bivouac area at 061000 Jan and moved to ambush positions on trails vic YT 088471 and YT086470 (See point #2 on attached overlay). Ambushes were maintained from 061845 to 070800 with negative results. At 071000 force sighted three VC on trail vic point #3, attached overlay. VC fled east into jungle. Force then moved to point #4 on sketch where one VC fired on end of column and fled into jungle. Force continued to move to point #5 on attached overlay and placed platoon ambush on north-south trail vic 068483. Remained in area until 080745 Then moved to point #6 on overlay, established three platoon ambushes in vic with negative results. Departed area at 090940 and arrived Phuoc Vinh at 091100 Jan 63.
12. (U) Supply was adequate - no resupply necessary. Communications were good. Adequate medical personnel were with force if needed.
13. (C) Results of operation were negative in that there were no known VC casualties. No loss of personnel or equipment occurred within the ARVN Forces.
14. (U) No special equipment or techniques used.

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15. (C) Advisory Analysis:

- a. The mission assigned was beyond the capabilities of the force available.
- b. Planning was at PBT Special Zone.
- c. All forces available were used, however this was insufficient to properly seal off the battle area of the Phuoc Long Forces.
- d. Intelligence of area was negative.
- e. Coordination between higher Headquarters and supporting Arty was good.
- f. Operation executed in a professional manner, but the force utilized was too little and employed too late.
- g. Fire plan was good and all available fires were used.
- h. Communications, Command and Control were good.
- i. Logistical support was not necessary in that all supplies and equipment was carried by individuals. No resupply was necessary.
- j. No psychological, economic or civil affairs techniques were used in that no VC were captured nor were any civilians encountered.
- k. It is my opinion that the operation was a failure except the units involved did improve in such matters as light and noise discipline, perimeter defense and movement in the jungle. The participation by Phuoc Thanh Forces did not effect the outcome of the Phuoc Long engagement.

16. (U) No new lessons learned.

17. N/A

18. (C) That missions from higher headquarters be assigned which are realistic and within the capabilities of the forces available.

19. (U) The above remarks were made by Major Morrison, Sector Advisor, Phuoc Thanh Province, who accompanied column C.

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ANNEX B: (U) Summary of 30th Ranger Battalion Operations from 29 Dec 62 to 3 Jan 63.

1. (U) This summary, obtained from ARVN sources covers the period 29 Dec 62 thru 3 Jan 63.

2. (C) The 30th Ranger Bn, composed of the 337, 340 and 344 Ranger Co's departed Dong Xoai vic YT 070550 on D Day 29 Dec 62. No U.S. Advisors accompanied the column.

3. (C) The 30th Ranger Bn accompanied the 32d Inf Regt (-) until open field Vic YT 103625 camp was made for the night in that location and on D+1 the ranger battalion moved generally south. No contact was made and camp was made vic YT 089551. On D+2 the ranger battalion moved generally southeast. The move was made slowly and cautiously as the column wanted to maintain secrecy. On D+3 camp was made vic YT 131518. On D+4 01 Jan 63, the 337 Ranger Co was sent to patrol the route ahead of the main body. The route was initially northwest turning later northeast. At 011200 Jan 63, 337 Ranger Co made contact vic YT 132538. Result of this contact were four (4) Rangers KIA and 9 WIA. Capt Cang, CO, 337 Ranger Co was hit in the face by 30 cal IMG. His carbine and SOI were captured by the VC. VC casualties unknown. The rangers withdrew to open field vic YT 120565 to evacuate KIA and WIA. During the withdrawal three of the WIA died. After the evacuation the 30th Bn moved to open field vic YT 070550 where they secured the LZ for reinforcements that would arrive on D+5.

4. (U) See attached overlay (appendix 1 to Annex B) for route in and out of the objective.

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ANNEX F: (U) Air Strike Report (Bomb Damage Assessment)

1. (C) At approximately 1400 hours, 7 January, the Deputy Senior Advisor, PBT Tactical Zone, was with column B, consisting of three ranger companies, commanded by Major Man, in assault positions via YT 125540, awaiting the signal from the PBT Commander to attack elements of D-14 battalion. At this time, AD-6 aircraft began a strafing - bombing attack on the target area approximately 500 meters to our front. Column B was not alarmed at the closeness of the air strike as it was believed, the PBT Commander was directing the strike. It was determined later that the PBT Commander did not call the strike and the aircraft were unaware of our presence in the target area.

2. (C) The following day, 8 January, at approximately 1300 hours, column B again entered the target area and Major Pitts, Deputy Senior Advisor, PBT Special Zone, observed the extensive damage caused by the air strike. Generally, all six camps in the area had been hit, along with trails connecting the camps. There was obvious evidence of mass confusion and panic in the camps. Shoes, clothing, supplies and equipment had been abandoned. There was some evidence of casualties, although no estimation can be given on the number. Major Pitts commented to other Advisors on the accuracy of the strike. Specifically, the following ordnance effects were observed:

a. .50 Caliber machine guns - hundreds of cases and links were observed on trails and in the camps. .50 caliber projectiles penetrated the jungle cover to ground level as evidenced by shattered trees and ground appearance. Trees four inches in diameter were shattered. Effects of .50 caliber in the jungle is considered by Advisors to be excellent.

b. Rockets - extensive damage observed in camps is believed by Advisors to have been primarily caused by rockets. Trees up to six inches in diameter were severed or shattered. Buildings (bamboo and grass) were badly torn up. Some rockets penetrated the jungle cover and exploded on impact with the ground, making a crater about 1 meter long, 1/2 meter wide and 12 inches deep. Rocket fragments covered the ground in all camp sites. A bag of rice, with a large blood pool beside it, was found to contain rocket fragments.

c. Bombs - only one bomb crater was observed. This was obviously a 500 lb bomb which had struck a large tree about 1 meter in diameter. The tree looked as if lightning had struck it. One half of the trunk had been blown away and limbs and branches were scattered over an area about 10 yards square. Advisors unanimously agree that all types of Ordnance available are very effective in the jungle. The belief that thick cover attenuates the effects is unfounded and not true.

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S. MAAG DETACHMENT
PHUOC BINH THANH SPECIAL ZONE
SONG BE, VIETNAM

MAGTN-PBTSZ

19 March 1963

SUBJECT: After Action Report *HARDTIMES II*

TO: Senior Advisor
III Corps
Saigon, Vietnam
ATTN: G-3 Advisor

1. (C) TASK ORGANIZATION:

a. Controlling Hq

Lt Col Dien, PBTSZ Commander, assisted by Major Chi, Commanding Officer, 32d Regiment, utilizing a combined 32d Regiment - PBTSZ Staff. Accompanied by Major Nulsen, PBTSZ Senior Advisor, Captain Rafferty, PBTSZ G-3 Advisor, Captain Owen, 32d Regiment Staff Advisor and Captain Frazier (USAF), ALO PBTSZ.

b. Column A (Phuoc Thanh)

314th, 335th, 336th and 350th Ranger Companies, Commanded by Major Man, Phuoc Thanh Province Chief accompanied by Major Morrison, Sector Advisor, Lt Mullenix, Ranger Advisor, Lt McCall, Ranger Advisor and N/Sgt Wilson, Ranger Advisor.

c. Column B (Phuoc Long)

326th, 327th and 346th Ranger Companies, Commanded by Major Nghiem, PBT Chief of Staff, accompanied by Major Pitts, Phuoc Long Sector Advisor, Major Thomas, III Corps Artillery Advisor, and Captain Rivera, Ranger Advisor.

d. Column C (Phuoc Long)

316th, 337th, 340th and 344th Ranger Companies, Commanded by Captain Biet, Commanding Officer, 30th Special Battalion accompanied by Captain Boon, Ranger Advisor, Lt Keenan, Ranger Advisor and Sergeant Blachard, Ranger Advisor.

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e. Column D

1st and 2nd Special Forces Companies, 77th SF Gp., reinforced by three (3) A Teams and one (1) B Team. No US Advisors accompanied this column.

f. Column E (Combined Reinforcement Element)

329th and 313th Ranger Companies, 5th Mech Company, 1st Cav Sqd, III Corps; 2d Platoon, 5th Mortar Battalion, (4.2 mortar), accompanied by Lt O'Mera, 5th Mech Company US Advisor.

g. Supporting Units

A Battery, 30th FA Battalion, (155 How), two (2) CH-21 helicopters 33d Transportation Battalion, (U.S.), two (2) L-19 VNAF and one (1) H-34 VNAF.

2. (C) CONCEPT OF THE OPERATION (ANNEX A, OPERATION OVERLAY)

The three (3) Ranger Task Forces (Column A, B, and C, were to move thru the jungle to the Mada River in Zone D, patrol and find C-58, regimental-type Hq, D-500, D-700 and miscellaneous VC installations along the Mada River. Column D was to screen the south bank of the Mada River to cut off escapees from the area of operation. Column E committed on D+11, was to reinforce and provide mortar support to Column B and C.

3. (C) CONDUCT OF THE OPERATION

a. Phase I: 24 Feb 63, (D-1) to 3 Mar 63, (D+6)

(1) General: Operation Hardtimes II began on Sunday, 24 February 1963, (D-1) by assembling Columns B and C in Dong Xoai, Column A in Phuoc Hoa and Column D in Phuoc Vinh. Columns A and D terminated their portion of the operation on Sunday 3 March 1963. Column B and C continued on Phase II from 4 March 1963, to 10 March 1963.

(2) Column A:

(a) Initial contact occurred vic YT 116387 at 1000 on D+3. An estimated eight (8) VC's ambushed the lead company in the column. A short fire fight ensued during which the VC withdrew leaving behind one (1) VC KIA by M-79 grenade launcher and captured one (1) MAS 36 rifle. (See Annex D, Test Report, par 1, M-79 grenade launcher). Two rangers were WIA.

(b) The second contact occurred vic YT 055129 at 1520 on D+5. Approximately 25 rangers were bathing in the Giac River without security. The VC threw a grenade in the river opened fire with approximately two (2) squads supported by an LMG. Six (6) rangers and one (1) US Advisor WIA. (Lt Mullenix WIA by grenade fragments).

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(c) The third and last contact for Column A occurred at 1440 on D+6 vic YT016429 when the lead element of the column was ambushed by an estimated 15 VC's. (See Annex E, Intelligence) A mine, equivalent to an 81mm mortar round was detonated followed immediately by small arms fire. The VC's withdrew leaving behind five (5) rangers WIA and one (1) ranger KIA. No VC casualties. Prior to this engagement a VC camp was found where Lt Mullenix, who had returned to the column after treatment for his grenade wound, fell in a mantrap receiving a wound in the left leg.

(3) Column B: 24 Feb 63 (D-1) to 3 Mar 63 (D+6)

(a) First contact occurred at 1305 D+1 vic YT 112500 when VC scouts stumbled into the column's rearguard. A short fire fight ensued in which one VC was KIA and one (1) carbine captured. Shortly after at 1415 the column reached the objective area at YT 125415. The VC had evacuated the camp leaving a token force to cover withdrawal. Five (5) camps and 22 structures were destroyed. Documents captured proved this camp belonged to C-58 in addition to a political unit and a supply company. (See Annex E, Intelligence). That night at 2125 VC scouts probed the perimeter without results.

(b) Second contact occurred at 0625 on D+2 when VC scouts again probed the perimeter with negative results. At 0720 as the column began to move a VC scout who had infiltrated the perimeter, finding himself surrounded, opened fire on the CP group with a MAT 49 SMG. Three (3) rangers were WIA, the VC was KIA by one of the wounded rangers. The MAT 49 was recovered. Helicopter evacuation of the wounded rangers was successfully accomplished at 1730 vic YT 083528.

(c) Last contact for Phase II occurred at 1540 vic YT 103534 when three (3) VC scouts trailing Column B found the rear guard and opened fire. Fire was returned but no casualties were sustained by either side. 155mm H&I concentrations were fired on suspected VC camps throughout the night.

(d) Column B reached LZ "DIEN" for resupply at 1130 on D+4. On D+5 U.S. Advisor, Captain Rivera, was evacuated to Bien Hoa with dysentery.

(4) Column C: 24 Feb 63, (D-1) to 3 Mar 63, (D+2)

a) First contact for Column C occurred at 1015 on D+2 when rear of the column received sniper fire. No results. At 1030 hours a VC was seen and wounded but managed to escape, leaving behind a US type pack with miscellaneous items. At 1500 a small camp with four (4) VC was found. As the units deployed to attack a VMAF AD-6 made a dry run scattering the VC. No casualties on either side. Documents captured state the unit was C-650. The area was not searched fully nor were two (2) gardens on either side of the river bank destroyed.

(b) Column C linked up with Column B at LZ Dien at 1330 on D+4.

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ (5) Column D: 24 Feb 63, (D-1) to 3 Mar 63 (D+6)
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ (4) First contact was made at noon of D+1 when two (2) VC's were captured. One male armed with a home made rifle and one (1) female.

(b) Next contact was made at 1830 on D+1 vic YT 005400 when 11 VC's were KIA and two (2) sampans destroyed. No weapons nor documents were captured due to the depth of the river.

(c) On the morning of D+4 Column D found and destroyed an abandoned house with 100 shovels at YT 087419.

b. Phase II: 4 Mar 63, (D+7) to 10 Mar 63, (D+13)

(1) General: Columns E and C rested and were resupplied on D+5 and D+6. Lt Col Dien, accompanied by Major Nulsen and Captain Rafferty, went to the LZ to issue the order for Phase II. At this time the columns were reorganized for combat. The 316th Ranger Company was transferred from Column C to Column B. Major Nghiem was given command of both columns for Phase II. There was one US Advisory change due to Captain Rivera's evacuation. Major Pitts and Captain Boon accompanied Column B and Lt Keenen and Sgt Blanchard accompanied Column C. The mission of Column B and C was to move generally east along the Mada River to find a suspected VC mortar battalion, an ordnance depot and to patrol known VC installations fixed during Hardtimes I. Both columns to move together up to vic YT 228570 where they would split. Column B going after the mortar battalion and the ordnance depot and Column C returning to Zone D HQ which was found on Hardtimes I.

(2) Column B:

(a) At 1700 hours on D+7 an abandoned camp, believed to be C-45 was found vic YT273580. The camp and 27 structures were destroyed.

(b) On D+8 Column B returned to the hospital which was found during Hardtimes I. It was still abandoned and no attempt was made to burn it. At 1330 a peanut cache was found and destroyed. At 1420 one (1) ranger was WIA by a VC sniper. At 1615 a large camp was found vic YT 280606. At this time VC signal shots were heard from four (4) different areas in the immediate vicinity. The Column Commander felt that his forces were not of sufficient strength to attack an objective which he believed to be of regimental size. A patrol was sent out to reconnoiter the left flank of the objective. The patrol made no contact but they found a large camp consisting of 25 large structures and prepared fortified positions. Column B withdrew to join Column C to reorganize and plan the attack. Air strikes were requested for the objective area.

(c) On D+9 at 1205 one VC probed the perimeter of the column; one (1) ranger KIA and one (1) WIA.

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(d) From 0915 to 1130, D+10 B-26's and D-6's bombed the objective vic YT 280606. Column B and C reached the objective at 1700 hours. Nineteen (19) structures were found burning from the air strike. No ground contact was made. The column withdrew one (1) KM away for the night.

(e) On D+11 the search continued until 1500 hours when two (2) battalion-sized camps still under construction were found. The camps were destroyed. Column B and C returned to Rang Rang bridge where one (1) ranger was WIA by VC sniper.

(f) On D+13 on the way to Dong Xoai Column B found an open field with seven (7) dead buffaloes apparently killed by air strike or artillery. Column B closed in Dong Xoai 1700 hours.

(3) Column C

(a) First contact occurred at 1645 hours D+7 when an abandoned camp vic YT 234578 was found. Nine (9) structures and five (5) kitchens were destroyed.

(b) Column C joined Column B for attack of objective on D+10 and D+11. Column C had no contacts except for sporadic sniping by VC's. The only casualty sustained by Column C occurred when the lead element of the column doubled back into the column and a fire fight occurred between friendly troops in which one ranger was WIA by SA AR 15.

(c) Column C joined Column B for march to Dong Xoai.

(4) Column E: 8 Mar 63 (D+10) to 10 Mar 63 (D+13)

(a) Column E was committed on D+11 to reinforce and provide mortar support to Column B and C during the attack on objective area on D+11. The column moved by road to Rang Rang bridge from Dong Xoai. Mortars were utilized for H&I fires. Troop units were not engaged.

(b) Column E returned to Dong Xoai along with Column B and C on D+13.

4. (C) ANALYSIS

a. For the first time on a PBT operation the TZ Chief, Lt Col Dien, controlled the operation from a tactical CP rather than personally leading one of the columns and attempting to command the entire operation at the same time. He also used the CO and staff of the 32d Inf Regt combined with his own PBT staff to direct the operation. It was noted "one man show". As a result the operation was better coordinated than any of the previous operations and all troops involved were fully utilized. This was a major breakthrough for the US advisory effort since the TACTICAL CP has been proposed to Lt Col Dien in almost every previous after-action critique.

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C - 1st AF
S - 2nd AF
Y - 3rd AF

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b. Another "first" of significance was achieved on this operation. For the first time since 1961 a convoy moved over Route 16 from Dong Xoai to Phuoc Vinh. This route had been cut by the VC several years ago. The convoy was lead by an engineer unit which filled the cuts and repaired the road as it moved. After the operation the convoy returned to Dong Xoai over the same route. On the second trip the troops started a number of fires along the road to clear the underbrush. It is the plan of the PBT Chief to keep this route open.

c. During this operation and Hardtimes I, the feeling has been growing in the ARVN forces that the VC would eventually attempt to halt our penetrations of Zone D by massing and attacking our columns in force, or at least putting up a stubborn defense. However, despite the damage our activities are inflicting on the VC in their sanctuary they have continued to follow the previous pattern of harassing the columns, and refusing to stand and fight.

d. The M79 grenade launcher has proved to be an ideal weapon for use of ranger companies (See par 1, Annex C).

5. (C) LESSON LEARNED

With the exception of the benefits in employing the M-79 in the jungle, the lessons learned on this operation merely reinforced those of previous operations.

6. (C) RECOMMENDATIONS

a. At least two more M-79 grenade launchers should be issued to each ranger company in PBT.

b. The use of the DECCA navigational system for experimental night bombing of Zone D should be pushed by higher headquarters (See par 3, Annex C).

c. Demolitions should be issued to the ranger companies for use in destroying VC bunkers and stores.

d. As stated in previous reports, it is imperative that PBT air strike requests be filled promptly if maximum advantage is to be taken of the VC need to camp near the main streams during the dry season. Once the rainy season starts the targets will scatter to a point that they will no longer offer a profitable target.

ANNEXES:

- A - Operation Overlay
- B - Intelligence
- C - Test Results

for Robert P. Rafferty
 CHARLES K. NULSEN JR.
 Major, Inf.
 PBT SZ Senior Advisor

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ANNEX B: INTELLIGENCE ANNEX

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1. TERRAIN:

No change from previous reports.

2. OBSERVATIONS OF IMPORTANCE:

a. C 58 Hq, vic YT 125494. The Hq consisted of a series of connecting camps with a total of 22 structures. It was determined by captured documents that in addition to C 58, a political unit and a supply unit were based in this area. Many bunkers were found in the area but could not be destroyed due to lack of demolitions. The bunkers ranged in size from 4 to 5 feet deep, 3 to 4 feet wide, and 5 to 7 feet long. Some had one entrance others two, some rectangular others curved. All bunkers had 2 to 3 feet of overhead cover consisting of logs and dirt. All smaller camps were interconnected by well used trails with trail signs. There were double fences at the entrance of all camps with guard posts. The connecting trails were fenced by undergrowth and small trees. The trails continued east and west for a considerable distance. It is believed that major trails leading out of the main camp connect major units laterally. The entire camp was approximately 800 to 900 meters in length running north to south 15 to 100 meters from the river bank (Mada River).

b. A large camp (unit undetermined) was found vic YT 284607. This camp consisted of approximately 25 structures, equivalent to battalion size camp. It was felt by ARVN Commander that a regimental size unit was in the area and this camp belonged to C 58 and two suspected ordnance companies.

3. RESULTS:

a. Friendly Casualties:

(1) KIA 3

(2) WIA 18

b. Enemy Casualties:

(1) KIA 13

(2) POW 2

B-1

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g. Enemy Equipment Captured or Destroyed:

- 1 Carbine
- 1 Homeade rifle
- 1 MAT 49
- 2 MAS 36
- 1 Binocular
- 2 Sewing machines
- 3 Manual printing presses
- a. Structures
 - 9 Camps
 - 1 Peanut cache
 - 7 Water buffaloes
 - 2 Boats
- 100 Shovels
- 2 Mines
- Documents

B-2

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ANNEX C: TEST RESULTS

1. M-79 Grenade Launcher.

a. Prior to the operation all ranger companies received a two (2) hour class in operation, maintenance and firing of the grenade launcher M-79. The instruction was minimal due to lack of training ammunition.

b. During the operation the launcher was employed several times but due to lack of training in tactical employment technical results at this time are limited except for one instance. The lead element of Column A was ambushed by approximately eight (8) VC's. The company commander, who was carrying an M-79, fired one round which hit a tree approximately one meter from a VC. The VC was killed instantly by two pieces of grenade fragments that entered his forehead blowing the back of his head completely off. The brunt of the explosion evidently caught the VC in the shoulder as this was completely pulverized. Two more rounds were fired in the direction of the VC ending the ambush.

c. The unusual part of this action was that the VC's departed in such haste that the dead VC was left behind with his M16 36 rifle. This is the first time that the VC have failed to retrieve the weapon from a dead comrade. It is certain that the consternation felt by having grenades bursting in their position while the nearest ranger was approximately 100 meters away completely demoralized the enemy.

2. CDTC-V Antenna:

a. The CDTC-V, portable VHF antenna was tested during the past operation, however due to structural weaknesses, the lack of familiarity of its use by Vietnamese and the fact that an actual operation was being conducted precluded a complete evaluation of the antenna.

b. Recommendations for the structural improvement and design, the latter bases on an after operation test, will be furnished to R&D.

3. DECCA Navigational System.

We attempted on two different occasions to mark known targets during the hours of darkness. The tests were not too successful due to shortage of time and equipment malfunction however, Lt Col Page and Maj Welch were helpful in explaining the system's capability to both the ARVN staff and the American Advisors. The ARVN were quite impressed and we are developing a plan to utilize it.

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HEADQUARTERS
U.S. MAAG DETACHMENT
PHUOC BINH THANH SPECIAL ZONE
PHUOC VINH, VIETNAM

MAGTN-PBTSZ-C

10 July 1963

SUBJECT: After Action Report Hardtimes III (U)

TO: Senior Advisor
III Corps
Saigon, Vietnam
ATTN: G3 Advisor

1. (U) NAME AND DATES OF OPERATION

OPERATION HARDTIMES III began 06 April and ended 29 May 1963.

2. (C) TASK ORGANIZATION

a. Controlling Headquarters

The overall commander was Lt Col Dien, the PBTSZ commander. The command of the troops at the Rang Rang base was alternated between Major Nghiem, the PBTSZ Chief of Staff and Major Hyen, the PBTSZ Deputy for Operations. Initially they used the commander and staff of the 30th Special Battalion as the Task Force staff and in the final stages of the operation they did the same with the commander and staff of the 3rd Bn, 48th Infantry Regt.

b. Troop units

(1) The basic task organization called for the equivalent of two infantry battalions, two platoons of armor, a 4.2" mortar platoon and an engineer battalion. The armor, mortar and engineer units remained the same throughout the operation, but the infantry units were rotated to keep the two battalion equivalent.

(2) Units: 30th Special Bn, 313, 342, 346 Ranger Companies, 3rd Bn, 48th Infantry Regt, 301 Engineer Bn, PBTSZ 4.2 inch Mortar Platoon, one platoon Armored Infantry (MI13), one Armored Recon platoon (MI14), and five "A" Teams of Montagnard Commandos.

c. Advisors

As the troop units and commanders rotated the advisors also changed. At various times the following advisors were on the operation: Major Nulsen, Senior Advisor, PBTSZ, Captain Rafferty, G3 Advisor, PBTSZ, Captain Nauert, G2 Advisor, PBTSZ, Captain Rivera and Lt Keenan, Ranger Advisors for Phuoc Long, Captain Valentine, G2 Advisor Phuoc Long, Lt Boyle, Ranger Advisor Binh Long, Captain Ellis, Engineer Bn Advisor, Captain Weikert,

Bn Advisor to the 3rd Bn, 48th Infantry Regt, Captain Steinbach, Signal Advisor, PBT SZ, and Lt McCall, M/Sgt Gillespie and SFC Linden of Ranger Training Team #1. The mission was to establish an operational base to include an airstrip capable of handling C-123 aircraft at the abandoned Rang Rang Bridge (YT203550) in the heart of Zone D.

The Task Force mission was to establish an operational base to include an airstrip capable of handling C-123 aircraft at the abandoned Rang Rang Bridge (YT203550) in the heart of Zone D.

(C) CONCEPT OF OPERATION

The PBT SZ task force, using ranger units, seized and secured the ground around Rang Rang Bridge to permit the engineer battalion to construct the airfield then continued to secure the base by patrols and outposts, and also by conducting operations from the base. The 4.2 inch mortar platoon provided fire support with VMAF air support on call.

(C) CONDUCT OF THE OPERATION

a. General

(1) This operation was initiated and planned by Lt Col Dien, the PBT SZ Commander.

(2) It officially began 060530 April with the departure of 30th Special Bn (-) (337 and 340 Ranger Co's). These ranger units moved into ambush positions and patrolled the area vicinity YT030610 to screen one flank of the planned move of the engineer battalion from Dong Xoai to Rang Rang.

(3) The remainder of the task force was assembled at Dong Xoai on 06 and 07 June. It consisted of the 316 and 344 ranger companies (30th Special Bn) from Song Be, the 313 and 342 ranger companies from Binh Long, and the 301st Engineer Battalion. Major Nghiem, Chief of Staff of PBT SZ assumed command of the task force on 07 June.

(4) The column of four ranger companies and the engineer battalion made the march to Rang Rang on 08 and 09 April. The engineers repaired the road and fixed the bridge by-passes on the way. The column arrived at the new base area on 09 April. The only incident enroute was an accident in which an engineer EM was killed.

b. Establishing the Base

(1) The first VC contact was made during the night of 11 - 12 April when the 316 Ranger Company ambushed and killed two VC at YT238541. One carbine and one M-1 rifle were recovered.

(2) On 13 April a recon patrol consisting of six defectors was sent out from the base. All but one of the defectors had been under Lt Col Dien's control for several months and had participated in previous operations. The one who was not had defected in another province and been sent to Col Dien for use on this operation. That night, during the latter defector's turn at guard he threw two hand grenades at the sleeping patrol and escaped into the jungle. Four men in the patrol were wounded, but they managed to get back to the base and were evacuated by HUIB.

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(3) The first combat casualty at the base itself occurred at 141915 April when a VC sniper shot an engineer in the arm as he was laying a minefield. The VC escaped.

(4) On 15 April the 30th Special Bn (-) arrived to complete the task force. It was accompanied by two armor platoon; consisting of three M113's and six M114, and the 4.2 inch Mortar Platoon. The convoy also brought in parts to repair the Rang Rang bridge, barbed wire and food.

(5) The VC sniped at the task force several times in the next few days, despite ranger patrols.

(6) At 180755 April a ranger was wounded as he moved out to secure the airstrip for the engineers. He died before he could be evacuated to the Battalion Aid Station.

(7) At 181900 April two ranger companies moved out of the perimeter to secure the airstrip for the night. Approximately 700 meters south of the base perimeter they ran into a VC mine ambush and three rangers were WIA. The M114's were then sent out from the perimeter on a recon by fire. They went down both sides of the road to the end of the airstrip firing their machine guns into the jungle. The rangers then moved in and took up their security positions around the airstrip. The three WIA were evacuated by HUIB the following day.

(8) Also on 18 April two platoon-sized patrols from the 316 Ranger Company hit VC ambushes at YT201545. Three rangers were WIA at the first ambush and five WIA at the second. VC casualties were not known.

(9) On 20 April, at dusk, a ranger dressed in black shorts and shirt coming back to the perimeter from an outposts was mistaken for a VC and wounded by members of his own company.

(10) On 22 April an engineer wood cutting detail hit a mine. There were no casualties however, the engineers reacted to the explosion as they would to any ambush by opening fire into the jungle around them. Their fire wounded a ranger who was several hundred meters away. Just before noon another engineer was killed by a mine.

(11) On 25 April one ranger from the 313 Ranger Company was wounded by an APVN mine.

(12) The same day the 316 Ranger Company on patrol engaged an estimated VC company vicinity YT165506. One VC was KIA and an unknown number WIA. The rangers destroyed a camp consisting of sixteen structures. They burned a ton of rice and captured two M-1 rifles, one mine, eight grenades, twenty hammocks, eleven canteens and some documents. Documents showed it was a unit of Battalion D-900.

(13) The first instance of ground fire against the PBT-HUIB occurred on 27 April when a VC concealed approximately 200 meters north of the perimeter fired three rounds as the helicopter took off. He did not hit it.

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(14) On 28 April the airstrip was declared ready to receive an L-19. That same day the 316 Ranger Company had two more WIA from a grenade booby trap.

(15) At 1630 on 01 May an HUIB brought in the pilots of the Caribou that was scheduled to make the first landing on the new strip. They walked the strip and inspected it. The HUIB flew them back to Phuoc Vinh where their aircraft was parked and at 1730 they flew it in and landed at Rang Rang.

(16) During the unit change-over on the morning of 05 May two VC mines were exploded. The first was an AP mine that was pulled across the road in front of an M113 at YT195656. There were no casualties. The second was a 105 mine with a pressure type fuse that was detonated by a truck at YT194696. Eleven rangers from the 346 Ranger Company and one from the 316 Ranger Company were lightly wounded. Seven of these were evacuated by VNAF H-34.

(17) A ranger from the 340 Ranger Company was wounded by a mine on 06 May. The ranger companies had been sent out to form a perimeter about two kilometers from the base to secure the area for the visit of the ARVN Chief of The General Staff, Lieut General Ty.

(18) Every day since the operation began the rangers had at least one and usually two companies on patrol. On 06 May, Lt Col Dien ordered a five day operation to start 07 May involving four ranger companies in two columns to attack some known VC production areas to the south and east of the base and to recon the route of a proposed road. Colonel Dien and Major Nilsen were to go with the two companies to the east and Major Luyen and Captain Rafferty with two companies to the south. The night of 06 May the colonel received a call from Saigon to go in to see the President. This cancelled out half the operation.

(19) The southern half of the operation started at 070635 May. All four companies of the 30th Special Battalion moved out - the 316 and 337 and an engineer platoon down the road to the south and the 340 and 344 paralleling them on a jungle path to the east of the road. At 0920 there were two mine explosions set off vicinity YT232515. This was in the area where the 316 was deployed, but there were no casualties. The mines were 105 rounds electrically detonated. The VC escaped. The four companies met for lunch approximately 10 kilometers down the road and then the 316 and 337 proceeded on the operation while the Bn (-) returned to the base. The 337 Ranger Company and the command group were forced to return to the base the evening of 09 May because no water was found in the objective area. For two days they had lived on rain water collected the night of 07 May. The 316 Ranger Company continued the operation one more day with negative results.

(20) On 11 May the 30th Special Battalion (-) destroyed several gardens vicinity YT150515 and YT153515. An abandoned camp was found and destroyed at YT155512.

(21) At 121015 May the 337 Ranger Company had one ranger KIA in a mine ambush vicinity YT180680. The company was clearing the road from Rang Rang to Dong Xoai in preparation for another unit change-over. Four mines were detonated.

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(22) There were no further significant VC contacts made until the day the operation was terminated. On 291100 May three mines were electrically detonated on the shoulder of the road at YT187693 as the troops made their withdrawal from the base. The mines proved to be 2.75" air-ground rockets. There were no casualties.

(23) The operation was officially terminated at 291640 May when the last units closed at Dong Xoai (YT079758).

6. (C) ANALYSIS

a. The Rang Rang base was a bold idea, boldly executed that for the time seized the initiative from the Viet Cong in their own stronghold of Zone D. There were many mistakes made in the execution of this idea - but the very fact that the airfield was built and the primary mission accomplished far outweighs the tactical or technical errors.

b. This operation was conceived by Lt Col Dien while working on the possibilities of establishing an operational base closer to Zone D. His first plan was to establish the base at Dong Xoai. Several times he jokingly spoke to the senior advisor about setting up the base at Rang Rang, an idea that the senior advisor encouraged him to investigate more thoroughly. Finally after a visit to the President he came back and announced that the President had approved his plan to establish the base at Rang Rang. No definite time was set for the operation, but he mentioned starting before the end of April. Several days later the President came to visit Colonel Dien at Song Be and at that time the colonel found that the 301st Engineer Bn was already assigned to build the airfield and were ready to go into the operational area in the next few days. This forced Colonel Dien to change his plans and start the operation without sufficient planning time.

c. The engineers moved into the area with a plan and immediately started work. Their achievements are outstanding. The ranger units, on the other hand, had no plan and despite the continuous urging of the US advisors no true defense plan was ever prepared. The lengthy list of deficiencies pointed out by the advisors were treated in one of three ways, depending on the Vietnamese officer involved, - they were corrected immediately, corrected later in a haphazard manner, or not corrected at all. The majority of the actions were of the latter two types. A good troop unit could have put in a better hasty defense in six hours by SOP's than the ranger units put in the entire time they occupied the perimeter. Later in the operation when the 3rd Bn, 48th Infantry Regt arrived and took over half of the perimeter the defense posture improved considerably.

d. Since there was no complete defense order the weaknesses in the defense were numerous. There was no barrier plan, no fire plan, positions were poorly sited and poorly prepared using the old French aperture style that considerably limited the field of fire of the riflemen, there was no depth within the position, no security and surveillance plan, no counterattack plans, few supplementary positions, no alert system. The CP was located too near the bridge which would be a prime target for VC mortars. There was no tactical CP and communications within the perimeter were austere. The defense of any one part of the perimeter appeared to depend on the initiative of the company commander in that sector. The ranger

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battalion commander and the task force commander's orders were vague and they rarely checked the preparation of the defense unless the US advisor requested them to do it.

e. Several deficiencies that plagued the advisors through most of the operation were: a gap in the eastern half of the perimeter that it took almost a month to close, the lack of understanding of proper employment of the 4.2 mortars and other crew served weapons, and improper utilization of the attached armor.

f. Initially the airfield was located outside the perimeter. Each day the engineers and rangers went off to resecure the strip before the engineers could begin work. After they took several casualties in this daily grind, Lt Col Dien took the advisors recommendation, in part, and set up an extended perimeter at night to secure the strip.

g. Despite the obvious defects in the defense, which could certainly be found easily by the VC probing the area, the VC did not attack the perimeter at anytime. They contented themselves with mine ambushes and sniping. The continuous ranger patrols did not contact any large VC units after the first few days which backs up previous assumptions that the VC in Zone D will move to avoid contact that might draw them in to a fire fight, and that they will generally abandon any area once a large ARVN unit enters that area.

h. On 25 April helicopters brought seven scout dogs into the base. They were to be used by the rangers on patrols. The dogs did not prove an asset to the defense for the following reasons: (1) Both the dogs and the handlers tired easily and could not keep up with the ranger patrols, (2) The dogs and handlers were not trained for jungle operations, (3) The problem of resupplying special food for the dogs added to the already overburdened supply system. The dogs were evacuated on 28 April.

i. As stated in the beginning of this analysis, despite the tactical blunders, the mission was accomplished. An airstrip is setting in the heart of Zone D and whenever it is necessary to use that strip a task force could resecure and rehabilitate it in a few days. This accomplishment was a tactical and a psychological blow to the VC effort.

7. (C) INTELLIGENCE

a. The Viet Cong was believed to occupy Zone "D" with a headquarters unit and three battalion sized units and a mortar company. It was anticipated that the Viet Cong would resist any attempt to build a base in Rang Rang with every means available.

b. No units of larger strength than a company were engaged during the entire operation. Harassment in the form of snipers and mine ambushes were prevalent but not one attack was launched against the Rang Rang base.

c. The terrain in this area is dense jungle with three canopies. Trees average about 125 feet in height. Water is scarce in this area during the dry season and the Suoi Ma Da was not flowing during the entire operation.

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d. Intelligence gathering was dependent upon patrols which were sent out from the base camp. Little information was gathered during the operation other than the fact that the Viet Cong did not in fact occupy this portion of Zone "D" in strengths that were considered as facts prior to the operation.

e. The question of where the VC moved is still not resolved. The reports of heavy movement of the VC to the south and to the east during the month of April as reported by the Phuoc Thanh Sector may indicate that they moved toward the Ben Cat area or to Zone "C".

8. (U) LESSONS LEARNED

No lessons were learned on this operation which have not been reported in previous after action reports.

9. (C) RECOMMENDATIONS

The US advisory detachments at III Corps and higher headquarters can materially aid the FBTSZ commander by continually emphasizing to their counterparts the following points:

a. FBTSZ operations would be better planned and better organized if the concept of a ranger brigade for the zone was approved and implemented. This would give Lt Col Dien adequate staffs and commanders for planning and supervision at brigade level and for execution at battalion level.

b. The mission at Rang Rang was a success. There is now a base-in-being in the heart of Zone D. Every possible assistance available to the higher headquarters should be given to Lt Col Dien to assist in the execution of his plans to establish other bases in that area.

FOR THE SENIOR ADVISOR:



CHARLES R. KUDER
Captain, Infantry
Administrative Officer

ANNEXES:

- A - Logistics
- B - Communications
- C - Photos of Rang Rang area
(First copy only)

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ANNEX A (LOGISTICS) TO AFTER ACTION REPORT, HARDTIMES III (U)

1. (C) MISSION: To support logistically all the operational units at Rang Rang.

2. (C) CONCEPT OF OPERATION: Each ARVN element would be resupplied by its parent unit or thru its province of origin.

3. (C) CONDUCT AND ANALYSIS:

a. All resupply was conducted on an individual basis as indicated below:

- (1) Ranger units from province of origin.
- (2) Engineer and armored units from parent organization in FBT Saigon.

b. As a result a systematic method of resupply was not established nor was a supply point established from which convoys and air shipments could be coordinated.

c. Dong Xoai should have been selected as the consolidating supply point for the following reasons:

- (1) An improved airstrip (approved for CV2B and C-123) at base depots in Saigon.
- (2) Accessible by road from all provinces in FBT as well as the base depots in Saigon.
- (3) 10-12 air minutes from Dong Xoai to Rang Rang.
- (4) The engineers had improved the road between Dong Xoai and Rang Rang.
- (5) Sufficient area to establish a storage point for all classes of supplies.

d. Dong Xoai was unofficially used by the engineers and later the rangers, however not on a coordinated basis.

e. During the early stages, Rang Rang was resupplied by HULB's and later H-21's, CV2B. Air resupply was utilized because the PBTSZ commander felt he could not afford the troops which would be required to escort a vehicle convoy to the Rang Rang area. Later when the PBTSZ commander realized that road convoy was the only efficient and effective manner of resupply because of the bulk and quantity of supplies, twice monthly convoys were scheduled for Rang Rang. Air observation and cover were provided for all convoys in and out of the Rang Rang area. However, critical items of supplies continued to be airlifted.

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f. All classes of supplies were moved in the Rang Rang operational area however, none were as difficult to manage as Class I supplies. This occurred for several reasons:

(1) The Vietnamese will not eat a type "C" ration. Their ration except for rice, salt and fishes consisted primarily of fresh fruits, vegetables, and live fowl.

(2) All Class I is purchased and packaged for an individual within each unit thereby causing a management problem in getting the right package to the right man.

(3) Finally, approximately 80% of all air resupply missions to Rang Rang was Class I items because of the perishable nature of the food stuffs. In an operation the scope of Rang Rang, the Vietnamese should have been required to utilize a type "C" ration as the basic ration and fresh food only as a supplement.

g. Receiving points were not established at Rang Rang, consequently when air shipments were received there was no designated individual or group of individuals available to process supplies to the receiving units. Supplies were handled as they arrived by whomever was available and consequently Class I supplies were lost and batteries, ammunition, etc., were not received by the requesting units or individuals.

h. Medical evacuation was handled on an individual basis with each unit processing its own casualties. This process resulted on one occasion in some casualties not receiving dextran when it was available in another unit. Also, casualties did not receive the best treatment possible since the small unit aid station could not be as efficient as one well organized and staffed to handle all casualties.

The method of requesting medical evacuation also was accomplished on an individual unit basis.

j. The only effective manner in which casualties should have been handled is thru one aid station serving all the units in the area. That aid station should have coordinated all aspects of the medical evacuation to include insuring that casualties were quickly and properly loaded on evacuation aircraft.

4. (C) LESSONS LEARNED:

a. An operation the scope of Rang Rang must be planned logistically as well as tactically.

b. Units who are attached to a task force headquarters must function in and thru that headquarters.

c. Vehicle convoys are the most efficient and effective means of resupply and must be utilized.

d. Consolidated issuing and receiving supply points must be established if a point to point type distribution system is to be utilized.

e. In this type of a base the most efficient method of handling casualties is with a combined general aid station.

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5. (C) RECOMMENDATIONS:

a. That before III Corps approves the attachment of units to PBT SZ the Corps require that a plan be submitted to show the planned tactical utilization and logistical support for the unit.

b. That when troops are attached from III Corps that such additional logistical support units be made available to the PBT SZ as required, i.e., service and medical troop units to support the operation.

NULSEN
Major

OFFICIAL:

Steinbach
STEINBACH
G-4 Advisor

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ANNEX B (COMMUNICATIONS) TO AFTER ACTION REPORT HARDTIMES III (U)

1. (U) CONCEPT: All ARVN elements in the Rang Rang area would operate within their own organizational command net.

2. (C) CONDUCT AND ANALYSIS: The ARVN elements established communications as outlined below.

a. Ranger Command Net (AN/GRC-9)

Fhuoc Long - FBTSZ Hq

Dong Xoai

Fhuoc Vinh

Bau Ca Tre - 48th Regt Hq

b. Engineer Command Net (AN/GRC-9)

Rang Rang

Saigon - Bn rear CP & Gp Hqs

c. Armored Command Net (AN/GRC-9)

Rang Rang

Saigon - 1st Squadron

d. Inf Command Net (AN/GRC-9)

Rang Rang - 3d Bn, 48th Regt

Bau Ca Tre - 48th Regt Hq

e. Air to Ground Communication (AN/IRC 10)

f. No attempt was made to establish a communications center thru which all messages could be processed. This situation seriously hampered coordination of tactical and logistical directives to the units at Rang Rang and unfortunately delayed proper action on medical evacuation requests and administrative actions.

g. Good communication techniques were not utilized to insure communications in the operations area. Several specific deficiencies are as outlined below:

(1) The Ranger command net radio was located on the lowest terrain at Rang Rang and had its antenna deployed thru heavy vegetation.

(2) The air to ground radio was also located in heavy vegetation using a makeshift type antenna (WDL/TT to combat antenna on forty-foot pole) rather than the ground plane elements from an RC-292 antenna and 50 ft coax.

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h. The above noted deficiencies and many others were corrected when the CP was relocated in a more suitable location.

3. (C) LESSONS LEARNED

a. A Signal Plan must be prepared for an operation the scope of Rang Rang as it is obvious a SOI isn't sufficient.

b. A Single command net should have been established to insure direct control over all units in the operation.

c. A Comm Center should have been established to coordinate all the incoming and out going traffic thru one headquarters.

d. Continued emphasis must be placed on the use of communications techniques.

4. (C) RECOMMENDATION

All communication be processed thru one controlling Hq rather than requiring attached units maintain OFFICIAL communication with their parent organization.

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