

THE RAID**1. PLANNING:**

a. At 1930 hrs on 17 October, a briefing was held in the 121st Assault Helicopter Company Operations by Capt. Wilkinson. It was explained that the 121st was selected to provide, with the assistance of the 336th Helicopter Company, the means to carry out a raid in the vicinity of Vi Thanh. Those present were:

- (1) Major Lee Whithead, 13th Avn Bn S-3
- (2) Major C. A. Croeman, SO, 121st Assault Helicopter Co.
- (3) Major Fred Kemp, Operations Officer, 121st Aslt Hel Co.
- (4) Major Ray Matter, (Armed Platoon leader), 121st Aslt Hel Co.
- (5) Major Richard Buxton, (Assistant Operations Officer)

b. Following requirements were outlined:

- (1) A Command and Control aircraft to be airborne during the raid.
- (2) Enough Transport aircraft to place 120 Chinese raiders and their ten advisors into four landing zones, and to extract the force, along with any prisoners that might be recaptured from the Viet Cong.
- (3) One armed platoon to fly cover over the raider force while they were on the ground.
- (4) A Landing time of exactly 1300 hrs, 18 October, simultaneously in four landing zones.
- (5) A muster area at Soc Trung for the raider force, to be occupied from 0930 until 1215, when they would board helicopters.

c. The following plan was developed:

- (1) The Command and Control aircraft, with the Viking Armed Platoon to depart Soc Trung for Vi Thanh at 1130 hrs, 18 October, landing at Vi Thanh at 1200 hrs. They would refuel and rendezvous with the flight of transports, with takeoff time from Vi Thanh, 1240 hrs.

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- (2) Seventeen transports, in a flight of five, followed by three flights of four, to depart Soc Trang at 1230, 18 October, and proceed directly to the landing zones, at coordinates NR 433 845. Flying time, approximately 30 minutes.
- (3) The transports would return to Vi Thanh after dropping the raiding party off in the landing zones. It was thought the raid would be completed within 30 minutes and the transports would return to the landing zones and transport the raiding force direct to Soc Trang.
- (4) A reconnaissance would be conducted with the four flight leaders, Mission Commander, and the commander of the raider force in a single aircraft, departing Soc Trang at 0945, 18 October. An Air Force G-130 was to land at Soc Trang with the raider force at 0930 hrs, 18 October.
- (5) Holding area for the raiders was to be the area Northeast of the Approach and of Runway 22, between 8th Aerial Port and the Tennis Courts.
- (6) Colored slides and 8 X 10 prints of the four landing areas were studied by the four flight leaders, who were:
 - (a) Major Duxton, Tiger One flight, flight of five. Major Duxton was a former transport platoon leader, and Viking Armed Platoon leader for five months. He had operated many times in the objective area and knew the area intimately at low level. He had turned over command of the Viking Armed Platoon to Major Ray Hutter on 15 October, two days before.
 - (b) Major Fred Kemp, Tiger two flight, flight of four. Major Kemp had been a Transport Platoon Leader, and assumed as Company Operations Officer on 1 October.
 - (c) Captain Koegel, Tiger three flight, flight of four. Captain Koegel was 2d Airlift Platoon Leader, and flew regularly as lead ship in company formations.
 - (d) Captain Greene, Tiger four flight, flight of four. Captain Greene was 1st Airlift platoon leader, and flew regularly as Tiger lead, alternating with Captain Koegel. The raider platoons were given the designations. Papa 1, Papa 2, Papa 3, and Papa 4. The numerical designations corresponded with flight numbers and landing zones. Papa 1 was the critical raider platoon, since it would land nearest the objective, a suspected prison hut.

- (7) Organization of the mission: The 121st Helicopter Company provided 9 Transport aircraft for the mission. The 336th was contacted, and eight transports requested. The operations officer of the 336th was briefed on the operation. The 82d Medical Detachment was contacted and one Medical evacuation helicopter requested, to accompany the C & C and the Armed Platoon to Vi Thanh at 1130 hrs, 18 October. An operations order was prepared. Normal company G and L missions were received for eight transport aircraft to depart Soc Trang at 0700 hrs 18 October. However, release times were all specified as 1100 hrs or earlier.

2. EXECUTION:

a. Company transport helicopters departed as usual by 0700 hrs 18 October. At 0845, Capt. Wilkinson received a call that the G-130 carrying the raider force and the force commander would be delayed one hour, since it had gone initially to the wrong pickup airfield. The reconnaissance aircraft carrying the armed platoon commander, mission commander, and Tiger 1, 3 and 4 flight leaders departed at 0920 to the objective area. With an easterly wind of 15-20, the flight to the objective area took 25 minutes. A run at 2500 feet, from South to North, was made, with the flight leaders attempting to pinpoint the landing zones that had been studied the night before. A return run was made from North to South at the same altitude along the same path about ten minutes later. Clouds were forming in the objective area at 1500-2,000 feet, but the objective could be seen through cloud breaks. The reconnaissance aircraft returned to Soc Trang and landed at 1030 hrs. The G-130 carrying the raider force landed approximately five minutes later.

b. The Raider force commander, Major Sousa arrived at the 121st Operations at approximately 1100 hrs. He did not discuss the operation with the mission commander, CO, 121st Assault Helicopter Company.

c. At 1130 hrs, the Viking Armed Platoon, six aircraft, followed by a medical evacuation aircraft from the 82d Medical Detachment and the Command and control aircraft piloted by the mission commander, Major Crossin, and CWO Fillipi, departed for Vi Thanh. Major Sousa was the only passenger in the C & C aircraft.

d. A heavy rainstorm was over Vi Thanh as the aircraft landed. The storm was moving West toward the operational area at about 20 miles per hour. After refueling, the Command and Control aircraft departed Vi Thanh at 1240 hrs. Passengers included BG Nguyen Van Ninh, CO, 21st ARVN Infantry Division, and his senior advisor, Col Hathaway, U.S. Army; also aboard was Major Sousa.

e. At that time, the flight should have been approaching the Release Point. The mission commander called Tiger Lead One on the 121st UHF frequency, 346.0, but there was no answer. Upon switching to Soc Trang tower frequency,

the mission commander learned that the flight was delayed on takeoff from Soc Trang because of a heavy rainstorm over the field. The Command and Control aircraft orbited Vinh Quoi in the clear. The line of dark rainstorms was clearly visible to the East in the direction of Soc Trang. Major Duxton was advised by the mission commander that the worst of the storm could be circumnavigated to the South, and that the storm extended only about ten miles from Soc Trang. Upon receiving this information, Major Duxton departed Soc Trang at 1254 hrs. The rainstorm over Vi Thanh had moved over the operational area, and it appeared that it might be clear by the time the flight arrived.

f. The Viking Armed Platoon had returned to Vi Thanh and landed. Five Vikings were airborne at 1310, and established a rendezvous with the seventeen transports and the Command and Control aircraft directly South of Vi Thanh. As the flight turned North toward the objective area, a descent was begun to get under the clouds that hung over the area at 1900 feet. The flights continued to descend to maintain contact with the ground, and entered the heavy rain that was falling in the operational area. Flight one was closely followed by flight two, since they were to land close together. Permission was asked by Major Duxton to land to the East rather than to the North as planned, because the wind was gusting at 15 to 20 knots from the Southeast. Permission was granted by the mission commander. Flight four, led by Capt. Greene, made contact with the river running Northeast, and proceeded to the landing zone, and open field to the West of the main canal. Capt. Greene saw his landing zone, turned East, and landed. He was first to land. Flight three flew to the North West, apparently following a crooked canal line similar to the one leading to the proposed landing zone. Captain Koegel saw what he identified as his landing zone, and landed. Flights one and two had made one pass over the landing zone, and the flight leader, Major Duxton, saw his area too late to slow, flare and land. He went around, followed by Major Kemp. After a right turn, once again he came up on the landing zone, but visibility was down to approximately 100 meters, and he did not have time to slow and land. Again he went around, followed by Major Kemp and his flight. The third time, Major Duxton went into a landing attitude and began his descent before he saw his touchdown point. This time, when it came into sight, his flight was slow and descending, so a successful landing was accomplished in the designated landing zones by both flights one and two. Papa 1, 2, and 4 went immediately to their objective. The prison hut was unoccupied, and there was no trace of the prison or prisoners that had been reported. They burned the hut, and withdrew for liftout.

g. The landing was accomplished at 1317 hrs. At 1330, the rainstorm had moved to the West, leaving the objective area clear. At this time it was determined that Papa 3 had been landed to the West about 1300 meters from the rest of the raider force. They came under heavy fire immediately on exiting the helicopters. Two Americans accompanying Papa 3 were wounded immediately, and requested medical evacuation. Vikings fired into suspected positions, then Major Russell and Major Counselman, flying Dustoff 85, escorted by Vikings, came into the landing zone to make the pickup. They were hit by automatic weapons fire and broke off, returning to Vi Thanh, the aircraft badly damaged.

Viking two and Viking four were covering the landing zones of Papa 1, 2, and 4. Viking Lead, Viking one, and Viking three were receiving and returning fire in the vicinity of Papa 3's location. Viking three received several hits, the crew chief was hit, and Viking three returned to Vi Thanh escorting the damaged medical evacuation aircraft. Bustaff 85 Viking two and four were called over to the West by Viking Lead, and Viking Four was hit almost immediately, his tail rotor shot out. He returned to Vi Thanh and landed, escorted by the sixth Viking who has come to the operational area from Vi Thanh. At this time, Viking Lead and his two team chiefs were the only armed aircraft left over Papa 3. Viking Lead decided to make the medical evacuation himself at about 1420, and was shot down in the attempt by automatic weapons fire from the ground. The pilot shot through the head. After the crash, Major Hutter, crew chief and gunner, still under fire evacuated the aircraft and crawled away. BG Hinh returned to Vi Thanh and decided to airlift the 1st MI, and 3d of the 31st regiment into a landing zone 1500 meters South of Papa 3's location, and called for airstrikes. Two flights of 12 transports had been formed at Vi Thanh and were standing by for airlift. Shortly after 1600, when the first flight of 12 aircraft went into the landing zone, they were hit on three sides by automatic weapons fire. Seven of the twelve were damaged too severely to fly, although they successfully returned to Vi Thanh. Of the second flight of twelve, only four were flyable upon their return to Vi Thanh. Meantime, airstrikes, and strikes by armed helicopters were punishing the tree lines. Vikings were relieved by Mavericks, the armed platoon of the 175th Aviation Company at Vinh Long, and the reinforcement of ARVN troops continued with the remaining transports. After the fourth lift, helicopter transports were landing and departing without receiving fire. Contact was lost with Papa 3 shortly after Viking Lead crashed. The last word received from this group was that a total of 24 of the 32 in the group were wounded. They withdrew into the open, and were firing when an airstrike on the tree line West of their position shifted East, and dropped napalm on the panels they had set out. I seemed unlikely that any of this group would survive.

h. By nightfall, three battalions of ARVN troops had been airlanded at Coordinates WR 411 831. Papa 1, 2, and 3 prepared to spend the night. They had not been in contact. Ten 121st Aviation Company personnel had been wounded, one killed. Eleven aircraft were damaged. Three were wounded in the 336th, and eight aircraft damaged. One aircraft from the 175th Aviation Company was shot down in the LZ where it was left for the night. The three flyable aircraft from the Viking platoon were left at Vi Thanh for the night, with Lt Col Kennedy, CO, 336th Assault Helicopter Company. Lt Col Kennedy was alternate mission commander. He had arrived at Vi Thanh at 1400 hrs.

1. The next morning, the 1/33 battalion was airlanded near the downed Viking aircraft. Their mission was to search the crash site and determine the situation of Papa 3. On the first lift in, one lone survivor of the Papa 3 force, gravely wounded, was seen by the Vikings on station, and evacuated. At 0930, the three survivors of the Viking crash were spotted and picked up.

Major Matter, SP5 Olson, and Sgt ES Swindler were evacuated by the 82d Medical Detachment.

J. Concurrently with the lift into the landing zone of the 1/33, the 82d Medical Detachment evacuated dead and wounded from the positions of the 1st, 2d, and 3d of the 31st. There were a total of 40 dead and 50 wounded.

K. No VC were encountered on the 19th of October. The VC forces, which were identified as the U-Min 10 battalion with a strength of 350, and the 306th battalion, with an estimated strength of 700, withdrew during the night. Papa 3 landed virtually surrounded by the U-Min 10, and the 306th battalion was deployed in the tree lines on three sides of the landing zone of the three ARVN battalions. 150 VC dead and wounded were claimed by the 21st Division.

L. By 1400 hrs on 19 October, all friendly troops had been extracted from the operational area. Damaged aircraft left overnight at Vi Thanh were returned to their home stations by OH-47. The raider force, with approximately 18 dead and 11 missing, boarded a C-130 and returned to their home base.

3. CONCLUSIONS:

a. The heavy rainstorm obscuring the landing zones had two affects:

(1) It made the landing difficult, and accounts for the landing of one flight 1300 meters from the planned touchdown.

(2) It reduced enemy reaction to the extent that four aircraft landed in the midst of prepared positions and departed without being hit.

b. All contingencies were not planned for. Action to be taken by aviation elements in the event the raider force made heavy contact was not discussed. Did the raiders plan for extraction under fire from a hot pickup zone?

c. It is suggested that:

(1) A pickup would not be appropriate from a hot LZ while raiders were in contact.

(2) A rendezvous point be specified in the Raider plan to which they would withdraw for pickup. If this was planned for, it was not mentioned to the mission commander.

d. Once contact was made in the LZ of the three ARVN battalion, Armed Platoons and Tactical Air Support were successful in suppressing well-prepared enemy positions in a short time.

e. Considering the volume of fire being received by the first three lifts into the landing zone, enemy fires were not effective against helicopters. Only one was shot down in the landing zone.

f. Coordination between the commander of the raider forces and the mission commander should be made out

(1) Under what conditions the mission should be delayed or aborted.

(2) What aviation support is expected in the event of heavy contact on the ground. (Lift-out under fire, etc.)

(3) Alternate courses of action in the event of delay, or in the event that contact could not be broken before nightfall on the ground.

g. A lift-in of three AFWN battalions had the following affect:

(1) It did not minimize casualties in the raider force.

(2) It was costly in AFWN dead and wounded.

(3) It encouraged the VC to withdraw during the night, enabling the three survivors of the Viking helicopter crash to be recovered.

DEBRIEFING COMMENTS

The following comments were made by CPT Robert F. Greene Platoon Commander 1st Airlift Platoon 121st Ault Hal Co. CPT Greene was the flight leader of the forth flight.

On 17 October 1966 early in the evening I was informed of a mission briefing. The briefing concerned a raid mission to be flown the following day, 18 October 1966. As a flight leader of four aircraft I was assigned to land my flight in landing zone #4. During the evening briefing pictures, color slides, and maps were available. The flight leaders were also instructed to meet the next morning for a visual reconnaissance of the objective area.

During the morning of the 18th the unit commander, the flight leaders, and the gunship platoon leaders flew a visual reconnaissance of the objective area. All areas were identified for the mission. Major Baxton, the overall flight leader, then set the final brief time for 1145 hours. The pilots involved in the lift attended the final briefing. The areas were pointed out and each man was given his position in the flight, and instructions on lining up for takeoff. The aviators concerned were also told that the mission was to be a raid, but that its objective was classified.

To the best of my memory the take-off time was 1240 hours. However a storm moved over Soc Trang Airfield and the flight was delayed. Weather conditions had improved by 1250, and the four flights took off in trail formation. Prior to take-off, while the flight was holding for weather, I coordinated with the leader of the ground force in my aircraft. I told him that my flight of four would be landing in LZ #4. I then explained that the 1st and 3rd transports would land to the East on the North side of the L.Z., and the 2nd and 4th transport would land to the East on the South side of the L.Z. To clarify the landing plan I drew a diagram in the margin of my operational map. He stated that he was not properly loaded for this plan, so I recommended he shift his troops. He agreed and did this.

Shortly after take-off the flight formed for the assault. My position was on the left and abreast with the leader of flight number one. My flight of four was in a heavy right configuration. As we approached RP #4 I observed a rain shower which obscured the operational area. Shortly before reaching RP #1 I lost sight of the rest of the flights because of heavy rain. I had by this time descended to approximately 200-300' terrain. When I was abreast RP #1 I told my pilot, Lt. Nhon, to turn to a heading of 040°. He did this and I held this heading for 40-50 sec. Then to insure that I hit the canal line where LZ #4 was located, I turned further right to 060°. After holding this heading for approximately 30 sec. I saw the L.Z. about 70° off the aircraft nose to the right. I identified LZ #4 by a long canal running N.E./S.W. with a short tree line coming out of it to the NW. There were open rice paddies to the west of

the canal line. Because of the visibility I was forced to turn sharply into the LZ. This made it impossible for the #2 and #4 aircraft to land South of the short woodline as planned. The whole flight landed to the North of the woodline about 100 meters from the canal line.

After the troops left the aircraft I immediately turned 180° and departed across the rice paddies at low level in a westerly direction. As I was climbing a flight of 4 passed overhead from SW/NE. I then turned left, climbed, and broke out of the rain shower South of RP #1. I returned to RP #4 and then to Vi Thanh Airfield.

121ST ASSAULT HELICOPTER COMPANY (UH-1)
MISSION SHEET

18 October 1966

MISSION NO	A/C NO	AC	PILOT	DESTIN	BRIEF	ETD	RLS	REMARKS	CREW CHIEF
TBA	921	CROSMUN x	FILLIP! x	TBA	11:00	11:30	M/C	C & C	CRAY x
	580	BUXTON x	YOST x		11:55	12:25		(Flight 1) Tiger Lead	KELLY x
	663	KRASNO x	KOOP x					A-2	? SMITH
	688	LATTIN x	TIEN					A-3	? PAUL
	731	✓ KEMP	ANGEL x					(Flight 2) B Lead	YURKO x
	573	? YOUNG	IEBDA x					B-2	MERIMEE x
	595	EVERETT x	GILL x					B-3	STEVENS x
	728	KOEGEL x	PAER x					(Flight 3) C Lead	WOOD x
	670	TINKER x	LOFTEN * x					C-2	KIRK* x
	124	✓ GREEN	NHOM					(Flight 4) D Lead	McGOVERN x
	967	LUNDIN x	? DAVIS					W TECKER	? ARMOLD
	549	HARGROVE * x	MUTTER * x		11:00	11:30		V-Lead	OLSON * x
	655	GRIER x	? JOH SON					V-1	MARTIN x
	688	McFARLAND x	MALLORY x					V-3	HE TER * x
	674	NICHOLAS x	? WILSON					V-2	FARINGER x
	669	PERRY x	MENDOZA x					V-4	ROY x
	933	? WADE	MALLORY x					V-5	HOY x

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WIA **

KIA

N.B's	
E	HURRYE x
R	? MILLER
:	? WHITE
R	WINSOR x
TY	BUSHEY x
HTER	? SLAUGHTER
LNA	MESSINA x
ENG	KILLING x
*	LEGG x
	? ROWE
LI	KASAI x (MAINTENANCE)
OLER *	SWINDLER x
ER *	WALKER x
YAN *	MIS. LYAN x
ABRI	OLABARRI x
ORTH	ASHWORTH x
BING	STIEBING x