

NND873541

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, 196TH INFANTRY BRIGADE (LIGHT) (SEPARATE)
APO San Francisco 96256

AVBFSC

16 February 1968

SUBJECT: Combat Action Report (RCS AVDF-GC 1)

TO: Commanding General
Americal Division
ATTN: AVDF-GC (DOT)
APO S.F. 96374

1. NAME OR TYPE OF OPERATION: WHEELER/WALLOWA
 2. DATES OF OPERATION: 3 - 10 January 1968
 3. LOCATION: MAP Vietnam 1:50,000, Series L7014, sheet 6640 III, grid AT9024 to AT9927, SONG LAU River Valley from HIEP DUC to NUI LAC SON.
 4. COMMAND HEADQUARTERS: 196th Light Infantry Brigade
 5. REPORTING OFFICER: 196th Lt Inf Bde - COL Louis Gelling
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2-1 Inf - LTC Hammond, Lyman H. Jr. | 3-21 Inf - LTC Champlain, Allen R. |
| B Co - CPT Connally John F | A Co - CPT Yurchak, Paul N. |
| C Co - CPT Thomasson, John T. (WHA) | B Co - CPT Belcher, Roland (KHA) |
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- | |
|-------------------------------------|
| 4-31 Inf - LTC Cully, Frederick R. |
| A Co - CPT Byers, Larry R. |
| B Co - CPT Speer, William L. |
| C Co - CPT Stringham, Joseph S. |
| D Co - CPT Richards, James F. (WHA) |
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6. TASK ORGANIZATION: The control headquarters was the 196th Light Infantry Brigade with no units detached. The following units were attached/OPCON.
- 1st Squadron, 1st Armored Cavalry (-)
C Troop, 7th Squadron, 17th Air Cavalry
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7. SUPPORTING FORCES: Forces used in support of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade during this operation consisted of air strikes from the 3rd Combat Support Group and artillery from the following USA artillery

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battalions: 3d Bn, 82 Arty (105 How); 3d Bn, 16th Arty (155 How)
3d Bn, 18th Arty (8" How and 175 Gun), and 1st Bn, 21st Arty (105 How).

a. USAF: The Air Force flew 16 (37 sorties) preplanned missions, 15 (32 sorties) immediate missions and 21 radar directed missions against troop concentrations, supply routes and routes of egress. The Air Force gunships and flareships were used in support each night of the operation providing continuous illumination of the battlefield and suppressive fires during enemy attacks. Three B-52 strikes were flown against troop concentrations in the area immediately west of the operational area with unknown results.

b. USA Artillery: Army artillery accounted for 141 enemy killed while fire 12,960 rds against enemy forces and enemy routes of egress.

8. INTELLIGENCE:

a. Weather: During the period 3 - 10 January 1968 the weather in the area of operations was influenced by the northeast monsoon. Increased cloudiness and ceiling of 5,000 feet were common with ceiling of 2,000 feet occurring during periods of darkness and early morning hours. Visibility of zero to three miles was common in the early morning hours on the mountains and in the valleys of the operational area while afternoon visibility increased to 5 - 7 miles.

b. Terrain:

(1) Observation and fields of fire - The rice lands offered excellent to poor fields of fire with the limiting factors being the numerous dikes. The low hills offered excellent fields of fire while the mountains and valleys which are characterized by brush and grass 1-3 meters high offered fair to poor observation and fields of fire. Air observation was good in the rice lands and poor in the heavily canopied forest.

(2) Cover and concealment - Concealment was poor in rice land with fair cover provided by the paddy dikes. Cover and concealment in the rolling plains was excellent to poor depending on vegetation and relief. Excellent concealment and fair cover was provided in the mountain forest.

(3) Obstacles - Obstacles to foot traffic were provided by flooded rice paddies and dense vegetation in the mountains.

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(4) Key terrain features - High ground on either side of the valley controlled avenues of approach and offered excellent observation and fields of fire. Populated areas were considered key terrain to the enemy.

(5) Avenues of approach - Streams and valleys offered adequate avenues of approach for foot traffic in all directions. In the heavily canopied mountain areas, helicopter landing zones and airborne drop zones were limited.

c. Enemy capabilities, strength and disposition: The enemy was capable of launching a Division size attack (2nd NVA Div) along the western and northwestern border of the Brigade AO, while reinforced Bn sized attack capabilities in the northeastern part of the Brigade AO were possessed by the 70th Main Force Bn supported by two local forces companies and one Bn from the 3d NVA Regiment. One local forces Bn and five local force companies were capable of harassing friendly operations. Village and hamlet guerrillas also possessed a harassing capability and were capable of supporting main force/NVA units in terms of resupply and fortification. Enemy disposition and strengths the first week of Jan 1968 were as follows:

<u>UNIT</u>	<u>STRENGTH</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
2nd NVA Div	7,700	
HQ	700	AT8831
33rd Arty Regt/2nd NVA Div	1,800	
HQ	125	AT9231
GK 30 Sig Bn	220	AT9132
GK 31 AA Bn (12.7mm)	380	AT9231
GK 32 RR Bn (75mm)	200	AT9429
GK 33 Mort Bn (81/82mm)	230	AT9032
GK 40 Engr Bn	200	BT1739
1st MF Regt/2nd NVA Div	1,700	
HQ	350	AT8724
40th Bn	450	AT9028
60th Bn	450	BT0621
70th Bn (Independent)	350	BT2337
90th Bn	450	BT1331
21st NVA Regt/2nd NVA Div	1,800	
HQ	300	AT9439
60th Bn (AKA -11th Bn)	500	AT9540
70th Bn (AKA-22nd Bn)	500	AT9839
70th Bn (AKA-33rd Bn)	500	AT9940
3rd NVA Regt/2nd NVA Div	1,600	
HQ	300	AT8833
1st Bn (AKA-7th Bn)	450	BT2739

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2nd Bn (AKA-8th Bn)	450	AT9034
3rd Bn (AKA-9th Bn)	450	AT8935
Main Force Units		
105th Bn	410	BT1042
409th Sapper Bn	300	BT1912
70th Co/409th Bn	120	BT2118
Local Force		
72nd Bn	275	BT2118
V-14th Co (AKA-K-53)	100	BT2514
V-15th Co (AKA-K-51)	100	BT1836
K-52nd Co	100	BT1419
K-54th Co (AKA V-12)	100	BT2324
74th Co	120	BT2116
75th Co (AKA K-55)	110	BT3128
78th Co (Poss)	120	BT2346

9. MISSION: Search for and destroy enemy forces within the SONG LAU River Valley and interdict enemy movement along the valley from HIEP DUC to NUI LAC SON.

10. EXECUTION: On 2 January 1968 the Brigade conducted extensive S&D operations throughout the AO. A CA was conducted by C/4-31 into a cold LZ vic AT943213. Significant enemy action was confined to the interdiction of highway #1 at two locations, (BT217362 and BT264277), by destroying the culverts at those locations. Reference MAP #1 - high locations 2 Jan 68.

At 0145 on the morning of 3 Jan 68 LZ's ROSS and LESLIE came under attack and shortly thereafter FSB WEST reported incoming hand grenades and mortar rounds.

The Brigade Commander issued orders to the 3-21 Inf to have D/3-21, in stand-down at CHU LAI, prepared to CA into an LZ north of FSB CENTER 30 minutes after BMNT, and to the 4-31 Inf to have A/4-31 and D/4-31 move into the valley north of FSB WEST to block while C/4-31 crossed the river in sweep north to the valley.

At 0430 D/4-31 observed 60-70 NVA between them and FSB WEST and shortly thereafter gained contact with an unknown size force vic AT945269.

In a move to reinforce D/4-31, C/4-31 combat assaulted into a LZ vic AT935245 secured by A/4-31, and began moving north immediately. A Co moved to vic AT954259 to establish blocking positions.

C and D companies linked up at 1222 vic AT954269 and began moving

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SE to their night locations. Casualties for this action were 1 KHA, 2 WHA-evac, 6 WHA-minor, enemy body count totaled 35 VC KIA(BC). Reference MAP #2 - day movement and night locations 3 Jan 68.

FSB WEST reported 45 incoming mortar rounds between 2135 and 2234 hrs, and at 0128 on 4 Jan 68 D/4-31 reported they were in heavy contact at their night location.

C/4-31 Inf moved from their night positions to link with and support D Company and was itself in heavy contact by 0256 only 100m from D/4-31 position.

Contact was broken and the link-up completed at 0611 and both companies started sweeping operations in the area of contact. D and C companies lost a total of 4 KHA, 14 WHA-evac and 2 WHA-minor. Enemy casualties are unknown.

During the remainder of the day 4-31 Inf was reinforced by two rifle companies. C/2-1 Inf conducted a CA into an LZ secured by A/4-31 vic AT961262 while A/3-21 walked into 4-31 AO through the NUI LAC SON NFZ. Reference MAP #3 - day movement and night locations.

During the daylight hours of 5 Jan 68 units in the 4-31 AO, in particular C/2-1 Inf reported SA, AW, and A/A fire periodically. However, no firm contact was gained during daylight hours. Reference MAP #4 - night locations 5 Jan 68.

At 1800 hrs C/2-1 came in contact at their night location in what was to be the longest sustained contact of the NVA offensive. The Co. commander and one platoon leader were the first casualties and shortly after they were dusted off the company was heavily engaged with the enemy (1856) and trying to move south. C/2-1 Inf's situation deteriorated rapidly and within 2 hours (2040) the company reported their perimeter had been penetrated. A/4-31 was moved from night positions to reinforce C/2-1 and by 044 6 Jan 68 had completed the linkup and was itself taking casualties in the continuing attack.

A/4-31 and C/2-1 remained in heavy contact until 0431. At 0545 A/4-31 reported that they received fire only when they tried to move in search of personnel from C/2-1. This type of delaying and harassing fire continued as late as 0915 hrs.

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At 0930 6 Jan 68 C/2-1 Inf was declared combat ineffective having suffered 19 KHA, 28 WHA-evac, and 32 WHA-minor vs. 186 enemy KIA (BC), and was returned to the 2-1 FSB. 4-31 Inf was reinforced by two rifle companies during the afternoon of 6 Jan with B/2-1 conducting a CA into an LZ vic AT965265 and D/3-21 CAing into vic AT966264. D/4-31 returned to FSB WEST and B/4-31 moved from the FSB to replace D Co in the valley. Reference MAP #5 - night locations 6 Jan and planned movement on 7 Jan 68.

There was no significant ground contact reported on 7 Jan. However shortly after midnight TAM KY came under a mortar attack and at 0200 CHARGER HILL received 18 mortar rounds. On the night of the seventh LZ's ROSS and LESLIE reported incoming mortars/rockets and at 2305 word was received that DA NANG was under rocket attack.

Reference MAP #6 - day movement and night locations 7 Jan 68

Reference MAP #7 - B/4-31, D/3-21 opns on morning of 8 Jan 68

On the morning of 8 Jan 68 D/3-21 and B/4-31 started sweeping opns as shown on MAP #7. By noon D/3-21 was in position vic AT958265 where they stopped for lunch. One of the helicopters resupplying D/3-21 at lunch reported observing 10 VC vic AT959268. D/3-21 sent 3 10 man teams (1 from each plat) north to check this out. They were soon followed by the D/3-21 command group and shortly behind them the remainder of the company less the weapons platoon.

Reference MAP #8 - movements after lunch 8 Jan 68

At vic AT959258 D/3-21 received SA fire from the west and 10 men were sent to suppress it. The remainder of the company continued north across the river and then SW and crossed the river again. At this point the company came under intense SA, AW and mortar fire from vic AT953271. The company was split during this action and shortly thereafter (1448?) radio communication with the company was lost. A/3-21 was sent north to assist D/3-21 and at 1331 gained contact vic AT955268 with one platoon of VC with one 60mm mortar and five machine guns. B/4-31 was also in contact at this time on the high ground NE of D/3-21. By 1845 all contact was broken and A/4-31, A/3-21 and D/3-21 had linked up vic AT960269. C/4-31, B/2-1 and B/4-31 had linked up vic AT965272. D/3-21 and A/3-21 suffered 13 KHA, 5 WHA-evac, 13 WHA-minor vs. 70 enemy KIA (BC). Reference MAP #9 - night locations 8 Jan 68 (B and C/3-21 Inf located at AT992292)

The situation in the valley during the night was quiet but FSB WEST reported continued sporadic mortar fire.

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TASK ORGANIZATION - LISE - B/4-31, C/4-31, B/2-1

HERMAN - A/4-31, A/3-21, D/3-21

Reference MAP #10 - contact on 9 Jan 68

On the morning of 9 Jan Task Force LISE and HERMAN started sweeping toward the west from their night locations. Both Task Forces had a 200-400 meter front and had one flank on the river. C/4-31 was on the northern flank of LISE and A/3-21 was the northern flank of HERMAN.

At 1025 C/4-31 started drawing heavy SA and AW fire from their north, and at 1117 A/3-21 gained heavy contact from the north.

A/4-31 moved from their position on the southern flank of HERMAN to each flank of A/3-21 and together D/3-21 broke contact and moved SE at 1205.

With the remainder of Task Force LISE providing covering fire from their south, C/4-31 moved south, joined B/4-31 and B/2-1 and Task Force LISE moved south of the river breaking contact.

The remainder of the NVA Offensive consisted of sporadic mortar fire directed at TF HERMAN and FSB WEST during the night of 9-10 Jan 68.

Shortly before nightfall on 9 Jan (1600) D/2-35 Inf arrived at FSB WEST to provide additional security there and Task Force BRAVO (B and C 3-21) from the 3-21 Inf moved into the high ground north of TF HERMAN and LISE and established night positions as shown on MAP #11. Reference MAP #11 - night locations 9 Jan 68.

11. RESULTS:

Friendly losses.

64 US KHA
92 US WHA-evac
112 US WHA-minor

Enemy losses.

191 VC KIA (BC)
238 NVA KIA (BC)
10 gas masks captured
28 individual wpns captured
3 crew-served wpns captured
45 HG captured
299 small arms rds captured
2.5 tons rice captured

12. COMMANDERS ANALYSIS:

a. Operations against the NVA regulars during the period

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3-10 Jan 68 indicated a significant difference in the type operations conducted by the NVA as opposed to the Viet Cong. The NVA are well equipped, well trained and will stay and fight whenever they are dug in or when they gain an advantage over an American unit. These operations indicated the NVA will attempt to have small groups of soldiers fire on an American unit and then withdraw from contact. Units which pursue the enemy force are frequently ambushed, cutoff from the main body and then engaged with heavy volumes of direct and indirect fire.

b. During the period 3-10 Jan 68 heaviest contact was made during the hours of darkness. The full effectiveness of available combat support was not realized because supporting agencies had difficulty identifying limits of unit positions. The currently available pyrotechnic devices were found to lack effectiveness when units are under fire and require immediate support.

c. All types of air support were required in order to resist enemy attacks during the early part of Jan 68. The concentration of all resources in a localized area operating on the supported companies frequency created a complicated control problem as well as hazardous conditions for air supporting agency due to the possibility of being hit by friendly artillery/mortar fires.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS:

a. When operating against confirmed NVA forces units should not pursue retreating enemy forces with less than a company sized force. Two company task force operations are advisable so that the companies within reinforcing distance of each other.

b. It is believed that electro liminescent tape and strobe light, Light Marker Distress FSN 6230-06705209 would prove to be a more satisfactory means of positively identifying friendly front lines than the methods presently being used.

c. Air support agencies should be controlled on the fire direction net of the Inf Bn being supported. This would allow all aircraft to be keep abreast of friendly fires through the Bn's artillery LNO as well as allow the supported Co. direct communications with the supporting agency through the company's Forward Observer's radio.

FOR THE COMMANDER

11 Incls:
Maps 1 - 11

THOMAS M. FINNEGAN
1LT, Infantry
Asst Adj