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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, 1ST BRIGADE, 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMORALE)
APO San Francisco 96490

AVDABR-SA

4 December 1969

SUBJECT: Letter of Transmittal

Commanding General
1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile)
ATTN: G2
APO San Francisco 96490

Forwarded for your information is a summary of enemy actions before, during and after the attack on Fire Support Base Ike on 3 November 1969.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

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as

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ATTACK ON FSB IKE 3-4 NOVEMBER 1969

FSB Ike (XT 338719), a 1st Cavalry Division FSB located in Central War Zone C, was attacked by elements of the 9th VC Division on the night of 3-4 November 1969. FSB Ike, currently occupied by the 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry and a battery of the 1st Battalion, 77th Field Artillery, has received ground attacks at least six times in the preceding six months, not to include numerous indirect fire harrassing attacks during the same period. Since the 3-4 November attack, a thorough analysis of all available information has been made in an effort to reconstruct the enemy movements and to provide lessons learned for application in future operations. The following summary is based on an analysis of prisoner of war interrogation reports, trail movement by ground and air resources, captured documents, OB files, enemy history, and information available from higher headquarters.

I. BACKGROUND AND PRE-ATTACK

A. During October, elements of the C95 Reconnaissance Company of the 9th VC Division thoroughly reconned FSB Ike and the surrounding area to include FSB's Barbara (XT 264680) and Grant (XT 368625). In early October while the 272d Regiment was operating in War Zone C, the 271st Regiment began its move westward from Binh Long Province into the Fishhook area and eventually into eastern and central War Zone C.

B. Approximately 15 October, small elements of the 1st Battalion and the C20 Signal Company of the regiment were detected vicinity XT 4477, 8-10 kilometers northeast of FSB Ike, probably conducting reconnaissance of base areas and establishing cache sites and trails to prepare for the regiment to move further south into War Zone C. During the last week in October, the 3d Battalion moved into positions vicinity XT 4474 where the 1st Battalion had previously reconned. The regimental headquarters remained to the north with security elements from the 1st Battalion. The 2d Battalion moved to a base area vicinity XT 4783. The T28 Sapper Battalion, previously known as the T95 Sapper Battalion of the 9th VC Division, had already moved from its base area in Cambodia to a base area vicinity XT 4187.

C. At 1400 hours on 2 November the T 28 Sapper Battalion left its base area (XT 4187) and walked south for eight hours to another base area (XT 3770) where it joined the 2d Bn 271st regt at 2200 hours. The infantry battalion had left its base area XT (4783) earlier the same afternoon and had arrived at the new base area approximately the same time as the sappers. The two units rested in separate but close areas for the night while the commanders finalized the plans for the attack. The men of the units were told they were going to attack the American base at the 'A-2 Point' and that, after the attack was successful, they would return to North Vietnam for a rest.

D. About 1600 hours on 3 November, the sappers departed the staging area and moved south-southwest for six hours to an assembly point about 200 meters north of FSB Ike. After giving the sappers a one hour head-start, the 2d Bn 271 left the staging area to follow and join the sappers at the assembly area north of the FSB. The two battalions had radios, but maintained radio silence during the move.

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E. The 12C Sappers established a CP approximately 150 meters north of Ike, and the infantry battalion set up its CP 250 meters north of the FSB. Communication wire was strung between the two units and also to the north, east, and west sides of the firebase so the progress of the battle could be reported to the battalion CP's and coordination could be maintained at all times.

III. PLAN OF ATTACK

A. The plan for the attack was as follows: Three 16-man sapper teams were to be positioned on the north, east, and west sides of the FSB. During an intense indirect fire attack the sapper units were to breach the perimeter from all three sides. As the first wave of sappers reached the FSB perimeter the 2d wave (also three groups of 16) was to attack in support. The sappers were to fight their way to the center of the firebase near the IOC, reorganize, and start fighting their way out. As soon as the sappers had breached the perimeter and had moved to the center of the firebase, the 2d Bn/271, on a pre-arranged signal, was to attack from the same three sides using B40 and B41's, AK-47's, and prepositioned machine gun fire.

B. Indirect fire support was to be provided by the heavy weapons element of the 2d Bn/271 and by elements of the 22d Artillery Bn. Indirect fire support was to include 92mm mortars, 60mm mortars, 107mm rockets and 57mm Recoilless Rifles. In addition, the sappers were to employ B40 and B41 rocket launchers, hand grenades, and satchel charges. The fires were to begin at 2330 hours but were delayed more than an hour while the sapper and infantry companies got into position for the attack.

C. To supplement the other fire support and to take pressure off the ground units, an element of the 24th Anti-aircraft battalion, also of the 9th VC Division, provided at least three .51 caliber machine guns. These guns were prepositioned around the FSB 400 to 1000 meters out from the perimeter in the north, northwest and northeast directions. During the attack, the guns were to shoot down US aircraft and attract attention away from the preselected withdrawal route. During the attack, the weapons were to change locations periodically to avoid detection and destruction.

D. After overrunning the FSB, killing all of the Americans, and confiscating all of the available equipment, the men were to regroup to the north at their battalion CP's, 150 meters and 250 meters north of the FSB for withdrawal to the previous night's base areas. The CP's were to wait for 30 minutes after the attack and then begin the withdrawal. Guides and porters were to be left behind to escort and carry the wounded and stragglers back to the staging area.

III. CONDUCT OF ATTACK

A. During the attack only one sapper team actually breached the perimeter on the north side of the FSB. Under the intense indirect fire, the 16 man team destroyed two bunkers on the berm and got into the kitchen and cooks' sleeping areas. The battalion cooks and other men on the north side met the

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sappers in the area where the perimeter was breached and, with the help of direct-fire artillery and the FSB's Quick Reaction Force, destroyed the penetrating enemy force. In fact, all 16 bodies of the north side sapper force were found dead inside or on the berm the following morning. Due to timing, the sapper teams on the east and west sides were discovered prematurely when the attack on the north side alerted all of the defenders. Consequently, the sappers on the east and west sides were destroyed before they could be effective. Some 271st infantrymen reached the berm on the northside, but all were killed, routed or rendered ineffective after the sapper attack. Two of the infantrymen and three of the surviving sappers were captured on the northside of the FSB. With the attack so obviously unsuccessful, the enemy began his withdrawal to the north and north-northeast where he was met with further destruction trying to get back to his base areas.

IV. SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

A. Following is an analysis of some considerations as to why the defense was successful:

1. The attack was poorly coordinated. The sapper teams on the north side evidently reached the berm prior to the teams on the east and west sides, thereby starting the attack too soon. This left the teams on the other two sides exposed, ineffective and subsequently destroyed and defeated.

2. As they are trained to do, and as they have done on previous attacks, the sappers attacked three bunkers on the north side. They completely destroyed one, and partially destroyed two with satchel charges or B40 rounds. However, the US troops had evacuated the bunkers because they were full of water. The US troops were in position along the berm and no casualties resulted from the enemy's destruction of the bunkers. When the sappers hit the bunkers, they gained nothing and exposed themselves to heavy friendly fire.

3. The supporting artillery fires available from FSB's Grant, Barbara, and Vicky, plus the direct fire from FSB Ike, destroyed the enemy infantry ground attack before it began. Also, two Shadow aircraft rotated over the target area along with Blue Max, Nighthawk, and flareships to destroy the .51 caliber machine guns and enemy infantry, along the woodlines around Ike. The weather was ideal for night flying conditions and permitted full employment of all air assets.

4. The indirect fire attack began approximately at 0100 hours and the ground sapper attack materialized at 0210 hours. At 0310 hours, when the enemy withdrew, the PPS-5 radar detected the retreating forces on the northeast side of the FSB. This was the expected route of withdrawal as previously determined at Brigade and Battalion headquarters. During the night after an analysis of known bunker complexes, trail systems, and other pertinent intelligence data, it was determined that the enemy would retreat to the bunker area northeast or west of FSB Ike. When radar confirmed the move to the northeast, A Troop 1/9 CAV, the AF/FAC, the artillery FO, and the

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brigade scouts were briefed on this situation. Early morning weather conditions were perfect and all available air resources were directed over the predicted routes of withdrawal at first light. A company of the 1/12 Cav and a company of the 2/5 Cav air-assaulted into two likely withdrawal areas, and the A 1/9 infantry platoon was inserted into another. As a result of the combined air and ground effort, the enemy lost one .51 caliber machine gun and an additional 33 men killed while attempting to withdraw.

B. The final results of the action were as follows: 1 US KIA, 11 US WIA, 99 IVA KIA, and 5 IVA PW's. In addition to enemy personnel losses, US forces captured or destroyed the following equipment: 15 AK-47's, 8 B40 rocket launchers, 2 B41 rocket launchers, 1 .51 caliber machine gun, 1 heavy .30 caliber machine gun on wheels, 1 AK-50 (dest), 2 K54 pistols, 30 AK-47 magazines, 1000 S/A rounds, 2 10 pound shaped charges, 1 IVA radio, and 1 120mm mortar ammunition cache.

C. Since the FSB attack, additional enemy bodies and other incidental items of equipment and ammunition have been found near the FSB and along the enemy withdrawal route. These were undoubtedly also related to the attack. The total enemy casualties and equipment losses when compared to the light US losses certainly reflect one of the 1st Cavalry Divisions most successful defenses against such a large enemy force.

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