

DECLASSIFIED PER EXECUTIVE ORDER 12356, SECTION 3.3, NND PROJECT
 NUMBER NND 873541, BY RFB/VSW, DATE 2/12/96

RC 472

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
 28TH MILITARY HISTORY DETACHMENT
 11TH ARMORED CAVALRY REGIMENT
 APO SAN FRANCISCO 96257

AVIC-WE

9 May 1970

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Interview Report

file-copy

THRU: Commanding General
 United States Army, Vietnam
 ATTN: Command Historian
 APO San Francisco 96375

TO: Headquarters
 Department of the Army
 Office of the Chief of Military History
 Washington, D. C. 20315

1. NAME AND TYPE OF OPERATION: Operation LONG REACH I (Battle Strike), an operation to locate and interdict enemy infiltration and relieve pressure on BO DUC/ BU DOP.

2. LOCATION: Reference Map Series L7014, Sheet Number 6332 IV, LOC NINH Republic of Vietnam.

3. REFERENCES AND SOURCES: 11th ACR SITREPS and INTSUMS (7-23 November 69); Regimental S-3 Daily Journal and Duty Officers Report (7-23 November 69); Interviews with Regimental, Squadron and Troop Commanders and personnel; personal observation.

4. CONTROL HEADQUARTERS: F Troop, 2/11th ACR, was controlled initially by Headquarters, 11th ACR; following their airlift to BU DOP they were OPCON to Third Brigade, First Air Cavalry Division (AM). The remainder of 2/11th ACR was controlled by Headquarters, 11th ACR.

5. INTELLIGENCE: Information about the enemy was very limited for this operation. The military intelligence people knew about the increasing number of contacts in the area but they knew little about the who and why that is so necessary for military planning. Fortunately, they were more familiar with the physical characteristics of this portion of III Corps.

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The land between LCC NINH and BU DOP is molded into rolling hills covered by thick single and double canopy jungle with bamboo thickets and some rubber interspersed in a random pattern. There are not many streams, but during this time of year most low areas still are filled with water from the monsoons. The resulting bogs make cross country operations hazardous at best. Because of these thick jungles and swampy areas, avenues of approach for armor vehicles are limited and their movement is quite canalized. The main arteries of movement for tracked vehicles are Highway 14A and one or two local roads near BU DOP.

This area has all the requirements for a good infiltration route and that is exactly what it is. From the Cambodian border leading south, southeast, the NVA have developed an intricate maze of trails and pathways on which they move troops and supplies. These myriad trails have been named Serges jungle Highway after their discoverer. Serges Highway passes very close to the BU DOP BO DUC area. Also near this area to the west and contiguous to Cambodia is the enemy base area 350 and 351 to the northeast. The NVA have built many base camp and bunker complexes to store supplies and allow men to rest while infiltrating along Serges Highway.

This supply and logistical artery is so important to the enemy that in the past he has defended it tenaciously. This defense has been so effective that QL 14A, the main highway, has been closed for about one and one-half years, and no U. S. forces have really penetrated this area since then.

In late October and November, the enemy greatly increased his activity in the area. On 4 November 1969 the enemy launched many rocket and mortar attacks in the area. During early November, FSB ELLEN, southeast of BU DOP, was the object of a fierce attack. On 5 November, near BU DOP, the local CIDG had a skirmish with what was believed to be the C-18 Anti-aircraft Company which is part of the 165th NVA Regiment. Three days later, an NVA soldier was captured who stated that he was with C20 Engineers of the 141st Regiment. Their mission, he said, was to build a road from FSB ELLEN to somewhere near FSB JERRI (this was thought to be either a route to BA 350 or an avenue of attack against FSB JERRI).

This sketchy information was pieced together and supplemented with knowledge that intelligence personnel had already gleaned from previous encounters, to develop a positive idea of the enemy situation. It appeared that at least two battalions of the 165th NVA Regiment were north and west of BU DOP while the 141st had two battalions to the south. BU DOP, BO DUC, and FSB JERRI were faced with a large enemy force which could be quickly reinforced heavily with near-by forces in Cambodia.

6. OPERATIONS: Opposing this threat were Special Forces advisors and CIDG at BU DOP, elements of the 1st Cav Div (AM) at FSB JERRI, the Third Mobile Strike Force, and the 36th Ranger Battalion at BO DUC. These units needed reinforcing to withstand the enemy threat. On 6 November, Colonel James Leach

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Lieutenant Colonel George Hoffmaster, and Lieutenant Colonel James Reed (CO, XO and S-3, 11th ACR respectively) met with Brigadier General Casey in the Third Brigade Headquarters at QUAN LOI to develop plans to counter-attack this menace.

This plan evolved into FRAGO 52 (dated 7 Nov 69) which had the following mission; " 11th ACR conducts reconnaissance operations along QL 14A from LOC NINH as far as possible toward BU DOP to relieve pressure in BO DUC District, fixing and destroying NVA/VC forces encountered enroute." This was potentially a difficult mission for three reasons: the road had not been travelled in over a year and might be heavily mined; the jungle had grown up to the edge of the road and the jungle floor was still soft, thus this cul-de-sac was a good ambush site and one from which it would be difficult for our tracks to maneuver; finally the enemy force and capability were not completely known.

G Troop, which was to march to BO DUC, was at their SP about 1140 hours on 7 November. By dusk they were located at XU 841137 near FSB DEB. In the meantime, E Troop swept the dusty road to DEB and then returned to the west (XU 805135) where they established an NDP. F Troop, which was at the LOC NINH airstrip in the morning had by night fall closed to FSB MARGE.

At 1335 hours, Regimental operations, located in a bunker at QUAN LOI, received word that H Company and 3 Howitzers (SP) were near the gates of DEB, but they had to wait about an hour to sweep the area for mines before entering. (The remainder of the howitzers were at FSB MARGE) All the 2/11th ACR units remained in these stated locations during the night. However, in the late afternoon before they reached the NDP, the Engineers found a mine at XU 852148. The area on the road near the planted mine was filled with fresh tracks - and sandal prints not more than a few minutes old. The engineers cleared the mine, but while they were working they observed some yellow smoke curling skyward. They reasoned that the enemy soldiers who had planted the mine had popped the smoke grenade to keep Red 28 (flying in the area) from engaging them.

The Regimental Commander directed the Second Squadron to reconnoiter by artillery fire when they continued to BO DUP the following morning. Then, at 2100 hours, the nightly briefing was radioed to 2/11th ACR. Their orders for 8 November—"Be prepared to move F Troop to BU DOP by air. Be prepared to re-establish FSB MARGE with one troop and the Howitzer Battery of First Squadron if I Troop departs and 2/11 remains committed along QL 14A. Use more recon by artillery fire along QL 14A."

By 0700 8 November, E Troop had started its morning sweep of the roads, and G Troop's vehicles were rolling up QL 14A to BU DOP. By 0940 hours, 2/11 HQS was on their way from MARGE to DEB where they were to set up a new CP to control the road march of G Troop and the tentative airlift of F Troop to BU DOP. About one hour later, 2/11 HQS was at FSB DEB - about 24 hours late.

At this same time, Regimental operations received a report that would by the end of the afternoon become quite common - a track had hit a mine. This vehicle struck the mine even though the road had been swept and other tracks had already passed over it. Second Squadron personnel observed that "all of

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the mines we have been finding have been wrapped in 5 or 6 layers of plastic bags, and the mine detectors are not picking them up."

Despite the difficulty in detecting the mines, our engineer sweep teams discovered and removed fifteen mines on that day. This was demanding work, however, and it soon exhausted the men. At noon G Troop radioed that the men on their sweep teams were getting tired, and they requested additional teams and three more detectors.

Around mid-day this method of operation was changed radically. Major General Roberts, 1st Cav Div Commander, ordered that the 11th ACR get to FSB JERRI as quickly as possible without any losses. (This was passed to COL Leach by BG Casey.) At 1236 hours, acting on these orders, the Regiment sent the following order to 2/11th ACR: "Proceed as rapidly as possible. Objective — to get into JERRI by dusk today. Reduce sweeping to suspected points, accepting some risks versus 100% sweep. Do not commit F Troop. It is still on airlift stand-by. Move some 155mm howitzers into position to support JERRI. Regimental Commander suggests now is time to put some M-48's up front."

Before this order, G Troop had moved about five kilometers and had hit only one mine, but between noon and the time they set up their NDP, they moved only two more kilometers and lost 4 tracks due to mines. That day, even though they found 15 mines, 2/11th ACR lost 8 tracks because of undetected mines. Most of the mines had been buried from 2 days to two weeks, according to Second Squadron personnel.

By darkness, G Troop was about midway between FSB DEB and FSB JERRI. E Troop was about a kilometer northeast of DEB, and F Troop was back at MARGE. Also, at dusk the ARP's were extracted. They had been sweeping a portion of the road a few kilometers ahead of G Troop so that the road march would be speeded. The operation had thus far been having difficulty and it's fate was not decided until quite late that night. At a briefing, LTC Brookshire, Commander of 2/11, told the Regimental Commander that he had not brought forward his AVLB's, tanks and howitzers although COL Leach had suggested it. LTC Brookshire stated that the road would not support the weight of these heavier vehicles. Some staff members argued that it would. Major Abbey, Air Cavalry Troop Commander, who had been with the ARP's, said it would support the weight. Although there were several varying opinions, the problem was finally solved later that evening

At 1924 hours, BG Casey radioed COL Leach and told him to "dust as planned to BU DOP" with the whole squadron (less one troop and half of the Howitzer Battery which would secure FSB DEB). This was later modified somewhat. The 2/11th ACR was ordered to "hold in place" and prepare for F Troop's airlift to BU DOP the following day. Also, G Troop was to establish a FSB in their present area to support JERRI. Regimental S-3 Plans ordered this base to be situated at XU 857162 or G Troop's location.

Finally the mission was completely formed in its final version. It had changed during the last few weeks several times— initially the operation was to be strictly an airlift to BU DOP, later changed to a road sweep, which was modified to light sweeping; finally, the present mission evolved of airlifting F Troop and having G Troop set up a FSB, and keeping a major portion of the road

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QL 14A open.

By 0700 hours the next day, G Troop was sweeping a portion of the road back in the direction of FSB DEB. This move was for the purpose of establishing a new FSB near their present location which could support FSB JERRI. During this move they discovered more mines on the same ground they had swept the previous day. They managed to find two mines but a third (near XU 855160) destroyed a Sheridan and wounded one man. E Troop was also working on QL 14A but nearer to LOC NINH in the area of XU 7614.

Northeast at Bo DUP, the airlift was running into difficulty. The loading and movement had been performed without any problems, but the first C-130 that attempted to land at BU DOP received .51 caliber machinegun fire which hit its engine and started it on fire. The aircraft had to return to LOC NINH without landing. The second C-130 bounced too hard upon landing and had to take off again also - the pilot feared that a landing gear was broken. Fortunately the rest of the planes managed to land with their cargo of F Troop's tracks, but during the morning of 9 November it still looked quite doubtful.

At Headquarters 2/11, there was much confusion that morning. As with all military planning, the variables change so that the original plan is never completed exactly as designed. The mark of good leader is the skill and ability to formulate instant decisions and carry out the new action when the plans go astray. That was exactly what LTC Brookshire was doing that morning. G Troop was having troubles in moving back, therefore he flew out to the area to direct it and also sent out some tracks and a dozer to meet G Troop. This way they would not be left in an untenable position that night.

By the end of November 9, half of the airlift was completed and the next day all of the trooper (minus Sheridans) were at BO DOP and OPCON to the Third Brigade.

After these first hectic days of planning and operations, the work became much more routine and the number of contacts sharply decreased. E and G Troops, H Company, Headquarters and the Howitzer Battery worked hard to develop FSB JOEL, clear the road, recon the surrounding area and strengthen the large breach they had made in the enemy position in the area.

On 10 November, operations progressed well for the Second Squadron. E Troop conducted ground reconnaissance in the rubber north of LOC NINH where they had no enemy contact but did discover and destroy a 23-lb ChiCom mine. Near the intersection of QL13 and QL14A, they set up an NDP. G Troop continued to develop FSB JOEL and performed a ground reconnaissance from FSB DEB to land near FSB JOEL.

The pattern of operation was quite similar on 11 and 12 November. E Troop (-) covered the area generally north of LOC NINH. While one of their platoons swept the road in the area of FSB DEB. G Troop, working more to the northwest conducted ground reconnaissance along QL 14A between FSB DEB and JOEL.

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H Company on the 11th remained near DEB as a ready reaction force and on 12 November moved into the area south of DEB to conduct their reconnaissance operations.

The mission for E Troop on 13 November was more ground reconnaissance. G Troop marched back over the route they covered the day before. About 0910 hours, G Troop made contact with an unknown size enemy force. One of their ACAV's was hit by RPG fire but only lightly damaged. The troop fired back with their organic weapons and were reinforced with artillery, Blue Max, and a Light Fire Team. In the action, three US troops were wounded and three NVA were killed.

On November 15 and 16, 2/11 worked the same general areas that they had previously worked. They attempted to find the NVA by reconning near or along 14A. G Troop made no contact but at 1755 hours, 15 November, they did find two NVA killed the night before and a .51 caliber machine gun position with expended brass lying about. Near DEB, H Company found and destroyed several bunkers.

The next day the First Platoon of G Troop swept QL 14A from FSB JOEL to FSB DEB while escorting two 155mm howitzers. Also on the 16th, the remainder of the troop pushed west of FSB JOEL on a reconnaissance. E Troop, working in their operational area had no contact. One of their Sheridans hit a mine at XU 775150, which wounded one man and moderately damaged the track,

On 17 November, H Company, which had been the ready reaction force at DEB, moved to FSB MARGE. That day, most of G Troop conducted ground reconnaissance in the area around DEB, while one platoon drove north from DEB to JOEL. Both G and E Troop, which was also reconning, found enemy equipment but neither had any contact.

During the next five days, there was little contact. G Troop moved to QUAN LOI with her damaged vehicles for a standdown. H Company continued to be the ready reaction force for FSB MARGE. Based at DEB, E Troop conducted reconnaissance in the surrounding area.

This is how the operation went in its first weeks. Much had been completed in a short period of time. Second Squadron had accomplished the mission of relieving the pressure on BU DOP. In doing so the Squadron partially opened the road that had been closed for one and one-half years, set up a new fire support base (JOEL) to aid JERRI and BU DOP/BO DUC, conducted reconnaissance over a large area contiguous with QL 14A and airlifted an air cavalry troop to BO DUP to aid in that area's defense against the NVA. There were no long lists of enemy killed or captured, and when reading the statistics for these weeks they do not seem singularly impressive. However, in a war like Vietnam, statistics and lists of accomplishments are not a true measure of success even though they are used by some to gage it. Success accomplishing the given mission in an efficient manner — that is what the Second Squadron did. They accomplished a very difficult move and greatly lessened the enemy pressure and dominance in the area -- this then is success.

