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

AVIC-WE

27 May 1970

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Interview Report

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

TO: Headquarters
Department of the Army
ATTN: O.C.M.H.
Washington, D.C. 20315

1. NAME AND TYPE OF OPERATION: An attack by fire against FSB Fort Defiance, Command Post of 2nd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment.
2. DATE OF ATTACK: 9 April 1970.
3. LOCATION: Reference Map Series I607, Sheet Number 6232, XT504832.
4. PERSONS BEING INTERVIEWED: 1LT Mark F. Selvidge, Assistant S-3; First Sergeant Paul S. Curran, H Company; and various members of Headquarters Troop and H Company, 2nd Squadron.
5. TASK ORGANIZATION: Headquarters Troop, H Company, and Howitzer Battery, 2/11th ACR.
6. SUPPORTING FORCES: Light fire teams, Blue Max (ARA), artillery and Shadow supported the defense.
7. BACKGROUND INFORMATION: Second Squadron moved into FSB Fort Defiance on 8 March 1970, with the mission of continuing the Rome Flow cuts in eastern War Zone C and destroying the enemy in the AO. Throughout March, the 2nd Squadron interdicted the important Saigon - Michelin Corridor. Captured documents told the difficulties of the 50th Rear Service Group in supplying Sub-Regions 1 and 5. During March, the enemy gradually increased his harassment and economy of force measures.

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From 19 to 24 March, there were several enemy initiated attacks in the 1st and 3rd Squadrons' operational area. Although several main force units of the 7th NVA Division were known to be in or near the 2nd Squadron AO, they were not committed in large scale actions. Some Regimental personnel speculated that the attacks against the 1/11th and 3/11 ACR were designed to force the 11th ACR to shift the 2nd Squadron out of their own AO to reinforce either of the other two squadrons. This action, it was thought, would then open up the supply lines that 2/11th ACR was blocking with their activity around Fort Defiance.

Since the 2nd Squadron stayed in the corridor, the enemy accelerated the harassment tactics in the latter part of March. Intelligence reports during the period noted the upswing of enemy activity in the area of Fort Defiance, as the enemy moved more men and supplies in the area.

On 1 April, the Air Cavalry Troop, 11th ACR, discovered 30-40 individuals moving south along the Mustang Trail. The ACT visual reconnaissance also noticed five trails used within the previous two days, and two bunker complexes showing recent use. (This was in the 2/11th ACR AO.)

On 2 April, E Troop made contact at XT541902. H Company reinforced and killed one NVA from the K6 Battalion, 7th NVA Division. There were no US casualties. G Troop found three new TM-46 mines on Highway 246, while Headquarters Troop struck a mine on the same highway, damaging a M88 but causing no casualties.

On 3 April, the 4th Platoon of the 919th Engineers (OPCON to 2/11 ACR) found a communication wire crossing Highway 246 at XT475819. They began tracing the wire when an automatic ambush activated in front of them. In the ensuing sweep, they sighted and killed an NVA. E Troop reacted to the sighting and, subsequently killed another NVA.

On 4 April, E Troop and G Troop had automatic ambushes activated. E Troop swept with negative results, but G Troop found two NVA killed, one AK-47 and one AK-50. F Troop found two TM-46 mines on LTL 13. The same day, the 4th Platoon of the 919th Engineers saw 10 NVA crossing Highway 246 near XT471821. The enemy was engaged, but returned no fire. Near Highway 246 Headquarters elements were checking the communication wire found on 3 April, when they were engaged in small arms fire. E Troop and H Company reacted, but did not make contact.

On 5 April, 4/919th Engineers made a broad sweep and received one RPG and small arms fire at XT482819. The contact broke immediately resulting in two NVA killed and a RPG-7 and RPG-2 launcher destroyed. On 6 April, F Troop found an east-west trail at XT408840. G Troop found communication wire across Highway 246 at XT475820. H Company found a week old bunker at XT516806. At XT408840, E Troop's dismounted elements made contact, receiving B.40 fire. There were neither US nor NVA casualties.

On 7 April, a G Troop ambush patrol at XT464820 had a trip flare ignited 50

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meters from their position. They engaged 25 NVA who did not return fire. The at first light netted 3 dead NVA, 1 AK-47, 1 US .45 caliber pistol, 580 lbs of rice, 60 lbs of fish, 50 lbs of sugar, 15 lbs grain, 4 medical packs, 30 NVA uniforms and packs, and documents. These identified the 50th Rear Service Group and 2154 Infiltration Group, which has supplied men to 101st NVA Regiment in the past. The E Troop NDP received one 122mm rocket, eight 82mm mortar rockets, and five RPG rounds from the north which wounded four US. Later, E Troop, at XT408856, received two RPG rounds in front of a vehicle. Artillery and a light fire team supported, but there were negative results.

The increase of incidents showed the willingness of the enemy to engage US forces in an attempt to free the NVA LOC to the south. The 2/11th ACR, in the middle of these lines of communications, was a prime threat to the enemy and an important target to the NVA.

8. THE STAND-OFF ATTACK: Fort Defiance sits in the middle of an old forest, now mostly overgrown with young jungle. The large trees, some fifty feet or higher, remnants of the old forest, are spread thirty or forty meters apart. The young upstart jungle covers the distance between them. In the young jungle many short trees, twenty to forty feet high, have no branches on their lower two-thirds. Between the shorter trees and competing with them for sunlight, are large scrub bushes that spread over the area, while the tough Savannah grasses carpet the jungle floor to a one foot height.

Fort Defiance is a 150 meter circle (diameter measurement) in the middle of such an encircling jungle. The fire support base is surrounded by a five to six foot high earth berm of reddish-tan clay. Beyond the berm forty meters is crushed brush, flattened by the tracks and tanks. Beyond that is the jungle. Another earth berm, along an east-west axis, divides the FSB into northern and southern halves.

In the southern half, directly behind the berm axis, is the Squadron TOC. The Howitzer Battery spreads around the remainder of the southern semi-circle. In the northern half is the aid station and the communication section. Behind them, next to the axis berm, are two trenches, six feet deep, which house the trailer-hootches of the CO, S-3, Command Sergeant Major, and Operations Sergeant. West of the aid station and trenches is the H Company Command Post. (See sketch on opposite page.)

In the northern half, on the east side behind the H Company CP, are two field tents which house the squadron maintenance personnel. The men of the H Company CP sleep under canvas attached to the tracks. West of the aid station is the officers' tent. The men of the 2nd Howitzer Battery sleep south of the TOC in small field tents. Many troops in H Company and Headquarters Troop sleep by their vehicles under ponchos and canvas. All around the berm are the tracks of Headquarters Troop and the tanks from H Company.

At 0002 hours on 9 April, an intense mortar barrage hit FSB Fort Defiance.

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1st Lieutenant Mark F. Selvidge, on duty in the Squadron TOC, heard the incoming rounds and immediately made his way to the aid station to check on casualties. The troopers on guard duty immediately returned fire. The tankers used HE rounds for maximum penetration of the thick jungle.

Captain Silvio J. Romero, from Regimental Artillery Section, observed the attack and gave the following account: "CPT Richard W. Trageman, Howitzer Battery Commander, reported to the Squadron Tactical Operations Center after the initial rounds. Then he returned to the battery to check his personnel, both in the firing battery and on the berm. This he continued doing periodically until on or about 0230 hours when he retired for the evening.... I estimate the rounds received by Fort Defiance in excess of seventy."

First Sergeant Paul S. Curran of H Company, seeing that a round had hit a tank and started a fire, accompanied a medic to help. While the medic administered aid to the two wounded men, 1SG Curran beat out the fire with his flak jacket. When the fire resisted his efforts, he shoveled dirt on it.

The barrage intensified; besides 60mm and 82mm mortars, 107mm and 122mm rockets began impacting within the FSB. Most of the men were safely in tracks and tanks, returning fire. Four medics left the aid station to assist casualties. Two medics traveled in opposite directions around the berm, checking the tracks and tanks for wounded. The other two checked the interior positions, the tents and bunkers for possible wounded men. The serious casualties were carried by litter to the aid station.

CPT Romero's account continues, "The reaction of the battery was outstanding. Personnel promptly took cover and those close to the perimeter engaged with small arms fire. Within a few minutes the firing battery was active and fired counter mortar fires. The Number 6 gun especially deserves attention. The gun is deadlined because the power pack is being replaced and a final drive has not been received. The gun, however, can fire at certain deflections and at high angle. In either case, all systems (traverse, elevation and loading) must be operated manually. To free the other three Howitzers for firing HE, Number 6 was given the mission to fire self-illumination, firing charge 1 at a QE of 1125 mils. They did this, firing a total of 15-16 illumination rounds in a one hour period."

Meanwhile, 1LT Selvidge returned from the aid station to the Squadron TOC and reported the situation. He then started for the aid station again. As he passed the trench housing CSM Burkett's trailer, he saw PFC Williams, the S-3's driver. PFC Williams had been checking on everyone for flak jackets, steel pots and weapons. He had just reached CSM Burkett when a 82mm round hit the corner of the trailer, throwing him to the bottom of the trench and killing him. 1LT Selvidge saw him and called for medics and a body bag. The Command Sergeant Major received shrapnel in the head from the blast. As he tried to make his way to the aid station, another round impacted near him, ripping off his right arm at the elbow.

In LTC Brookshire's track (6-6), which was on the northeast corner of the berm,

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one M-60 machine gunner was killed instantly by a RPG round. The H Company medic, trying to pull the man free of the burning track, suffered burns on both hands.

There were only two persons injured in the Howitzer Battery, both from minor shrapnel wounds. Staff Sergeant Vientos was routinely dusted off 9 April. The other man remained in the battery.

Despite the heavy barrage and counter fires, the troopers noticed RPG, AK-47 and .51 caliber machine gun fire. However, because of the heavy fires, precise location of the fire's origin was impossible except for the general direction of north.

Within a short time, LTC Brookshire, 2nd Squadron Commander, aided by his S-3, MAJ Frederick M. Franks Jr., had obtained and was directing Shadow, Light Fire Teams and Blue Max.

The 2/11th Howitzer Battery suffered several hits. The Number 6 piece was hit by a B-40 round and the entire .50 caliber machine gun mount was blown off. The Number 5 piece received two hits. One, a B-40 rocket, hit on the right front, went through the hull, burned the track and penetrated the engine compartment, where it damaged the water and electrical systems and destroyed the final drive. The fire that ensued was quickly put out by section personnel. The second hit was a 82mm round on the berm surrounding the piece. It hit on the ammunition bunker; however, the USAF pallet and two layers of sandbags covering the top completely absorbed the impact and there was no damage to the ammunition. The Number 4 piece received an 82mm round on the berm surrounding the piece. A hot piece of shrapnel ignited one of the powder bags, starting a fire. Again, prompt action by one of the crewmen kept the fire from extending any further. Additionally, 16-18 more mortar and B-40 rockets landed in the battery area, causing minor damage.

First Sergeant Curran was kept busy by the rapid fire of H Company. He ran from tank to tank resupplying and redistributing the 90mm canister and HE rounds.

1LT Selvidge directed dust-off operations. Because the commander of H Company was on R&R and the executive officer in Di An, a platoon leader assumed command. To secure the medevac operation, H Company tanks cranked up and roared over the berm to the Chinook pad, forming a tight circle while firing into the jungle. 1LT Selvidge directed the medevac ships in and supervised the loading of the wounded troopers. "For a while I didn't think the Command Sergeant Major would make it," he commented. "But, finally, the medical ship came in."

By 0015 hours, it was over; about 90 rockets and mortars had landed in an area of almost 17,000 square meters. The Squadron Commander estimated that over 50 rounds impacted outside the perimeter. Two Blackhorse troopers were killed, fifteen were wounded and dusted-off. Many troopers had slight wounds from shrapnel.

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The next morning at 0802 hours, FSB Fort Defiance received three 107mm rockets and three 82mm mortar rounds. H Company swept the area and found one bangalore torpedo, three B-41 rounds, 5 Chicom grenades, one rifle grenade, three shovels, four canisters, B-20 fuses, five 107mm rocket launchers, assorted tools, one AK-47, one SKS rifle, and documents which identified the 165th NVA Regiment. Interestingly enough, the rocket launchers, with an accurate range of 5,000-7,000 meters, were within 300-400 meters of the fire support base. CPT Romero reported, "Shrapnel found the following morning indicated that some of the 107mm rockets were of the 'garbage can' type (over caliber). As the enemy lobbed in some of these heavy rockets, much of the counter mortar fire passed harmlessly over the rocket positions.

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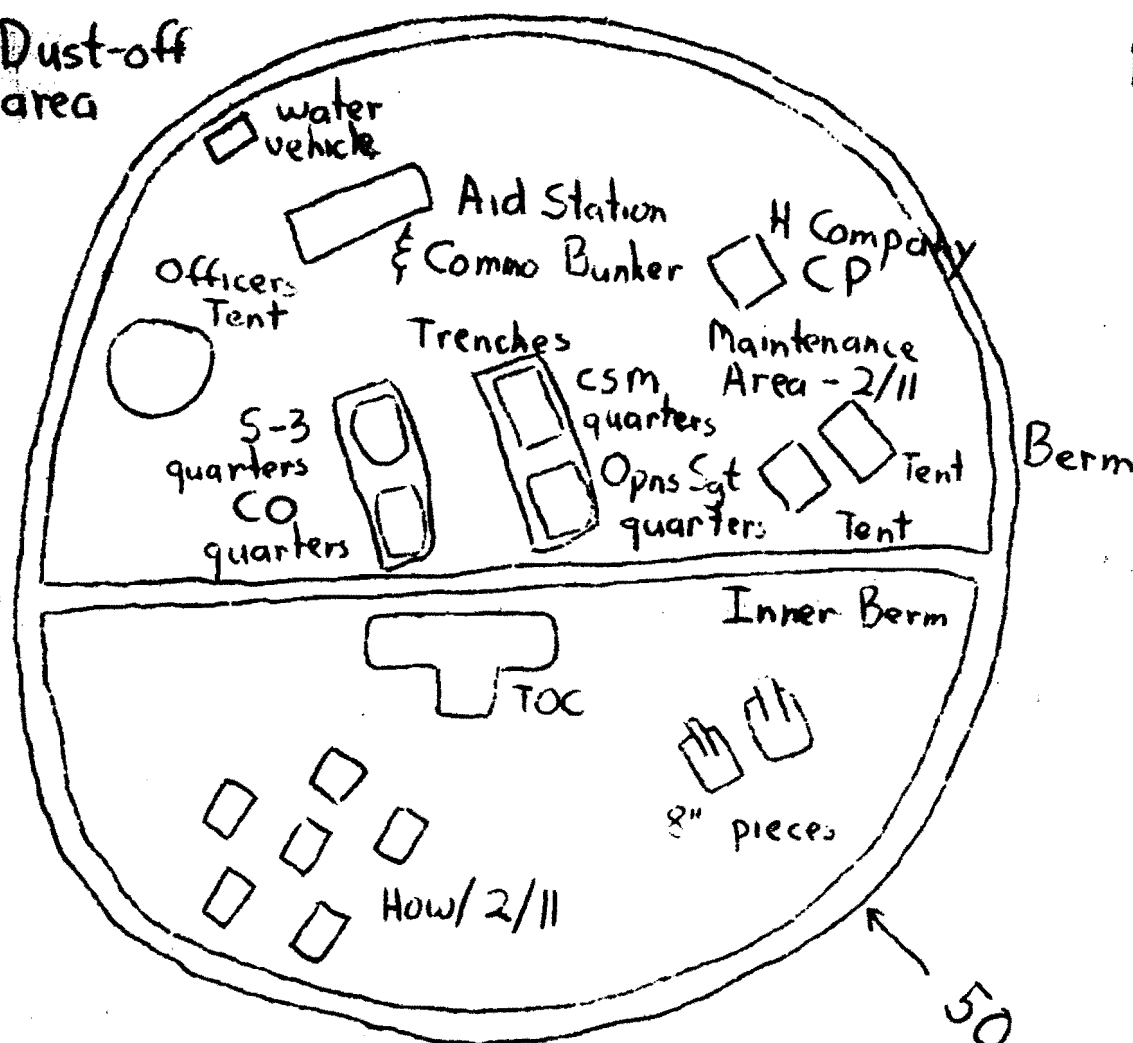
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Ach-Ft. Defiance (150 meters in diameter)

This sketch does not include the vehicles that ring the perimeter.

Dust-off area



Not to Scale

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