

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
AIR CAVALRY TROOP
11TH ARMORED CAVALRY REGIMENT
APO San Francisco 96257

AVIC-WC

15 April 1969

1. GENERAL: During the period 17 March 1969 to 22 March 1969 the Air Cavalry Troop, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, took part, along with various other elements, in Operation Atlas Wedge. The goal of the operation was to clear the Saigon River corridor, in the Michelin Rubber Plantation area, of large North Vietnamese enemy forces massing there for an attack on Saigon.
2. TERRAIN: The terrain in the Dau Tieng area was found to be characterized by thick jungle interdicted by several streams running generally north to south. The Michelin Plantation was a typical rubber tree area with low vegetation among the trees due to the long period in which the plantation had not been worked.
3. WEATHER: The weather was typical dry season weather with temperatures in the 90's with no precipitation for the entire period of the operation. Flying conditions remained excellent with almost unlimited visibility throughout the daylight hours.
4. OPERATIONS: 17 March 1969: Four LOH's and one command and control ship began the initial reconnaissance of the Regiment's area of operation on the afternoon of 17 March 1969. Upon arriving over the Michelin Plantation it soon became evident that the area was being occupied by a large enemy force. Large groups of North Vietnamese Army troops were seen in the rubber trees and clearance to fire was requested. While waiting for clearance every LOH, the command ship and even the FAC's flying at high altitude continued to sight large bodies of enemy troops. The enemy made little or no attempt to hide from the helicopters. After a 90 minute wait the Air Cavalry Troop was given clearance to engage the enemy and throughout the day the Troop Commander directed Tactical Air Strikes against the enemy. Two Cobras remained on station throughout the day and made repeated strikes against the enemy locations. One LOH was damaged by ground fire and flew to Lai Khe for repairs. The three remaining LOH's continued to fly low level reconnaissance missions and engaged groups of enemy soldiers on numerous occasions. Several conclusions may be drawn from the first day's contact.
 - a. A large body of enemy troops, wholly unprepared for air or ground attack, had been found by the Air Cavalry Troop in and around the Michelin Plantation.
 - b. Failure to exploit the situation with ground elements prevented a decisive victory which could have been gained.

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18 March 1969: The Air Cavalry Troop employed five LOH's, one command ship and two Cobras at first light in an attempt to re-establish contact with the enemy force. Early indications were that the majority of the main force units that were present the previous day had departed the area. Several squad sized elements were discovered by the LOH's and engaged by the Cobras. One Scout ship was damaged by ground fire and its observer wounded. Later in the day an antiaircraft position was located by the LOH's and neutralized by Tactical Air Strikes directed by the Troop Commander. Late in the afternoon two squadrons of ground troops were moved into the area and two white teams (2 LOH's each) were dispatched to aid in the control of the friendly elements. The remaining LOH directed air strikes to the west of the ground elements. The day ended with the ground elements setting up night defensive positions in the plantation. Several conclusions can be drawn from the day's activity:

- a. The main body of enemy troops had withdrawn from the area.
- b. The stay behind force was equipped with antiaircraft weapons which required the LOH pilots to alter their tactics somewhat to avoid serious losses.

19 March 1969: Nineteen March marked the first day in which ground troops operated extensively in the plantation area. Air Cavalry Troop provided a white team for each squadron and a Cobra fire team on station as well as the Troop Commander's own ship. Throughout the day the ground elements made sporadic contact with RPG teams and occasional platoon sized elements. The squadrons moved from base camp to base camp being guided from the air by the white teams. During the course of the day two LOH's were damaged by ground fire and one observer was slightly wounded. Numerous Tactical Air and Cobra strikes were used in support of the friendly troops. As the day ended several developments had become evident.

- a. Battle damage had greatly reduced the Air Cavalry Troop's ability to provide aerial scouts.
- b. The enemy's stay behind force was fighting a harassing action without allowing himself to become decisively engaged.
- c. The nature of the enemy's actions required speed and aggressiveness to be fully utilized by the ground troops if a large scale contact was to be initiated.

20 March 1969: During the evening of 19 March 1969 a B-52 strike was put in on the Northeast corner of the rubber plantation. At first light a Cobra team, one White team and the Aero Rifle Platoon began a bomb damage assessment of the strike area. Several large base camp complexes were discovered in the area and the Aero Rifle Platoon was soon in heavy contact. Third Squadron elements, guided by the white team, were guided into the area of contact. The LOH's provided medivac support and multiple air Cobra strikes were directed against the enemy by the Air Cavalry Troop Commander. The contact continued until dark when the

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Aero Rifle Platoon was extracted and the armored elements took up night defensive positions in the battle area. Observations on the day's contacts revealed:

- a. Better fire discipline is needed in the armored elements as they engaged friendly troops on several occasions during the contact.
- b. Fire and movement are the best tactics to employ against an entrenched enemy force. Heavy RPG casualties were sustained because fire power was not accompanied by a co-ordinated assault.

21 March 1969: Because of the heavy battle damage sustained, only three LOH's were available for operation. A Cobra fire team, the Troop Commander and the LOH's made a reconnaissance of the previous day's contact area and air strikes were directed against the enemy fortifications. The Third Squadron moved northwest of the previous day's contact area with a White team supporting and made small, scattered contacts throughout the day. During the afternoon all aircraft returned to Bien Hoa for a maintenance stand-down.

22 March 1969: At first light two LOH's were sent northeast of the rubber plantation to develop areas for B-52 strikes. Because of the lack of LOH aircraft available two UH-1H's were sent into the area to fly in a scouting capacity. One of the LOH's spotted what appeared to be a group of NVA litter cases being evacuated from the area. Ground troops were immediately moved into the area and a heavy contact ensued. The scouts provided medivac support for the ground elements and screened the flanks to prevent enemy exfiltration from the area. Two LOH's were damaged by ground fire as was one UH-1H resulting in one friendly KIA and three wounded.

NEW TECHNIQUES:

1. The LOH's added an M-60 machine gun to their armament to increase fire power. This addition greatly increased the LOH's fire power and was responsible for the scout's high kill rate.
2. Although not really a new technique, the use of the UH-1H as a scout ship pointed out the flexibility and skill of the Air Cavalry Troop pilots.

TACTICAL OBSERVATIONS:

1. A tremendous opportunity to win a decisive victory over an unprepared enemy force was lost when the intelligence gathered by the Air Cavalry Troop on 17 March was not exploited.
2. The 90 minutes required to gain initial clearance cost the Air Cavalry Troop numerous kills.

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AIR CAVALRY TROOP STATISTICS

	17	18	19	20	21	22	TOTAL
KILLS	60	26	20	8	4	13	131
BUNKERS DESTROYED	32	30	18	28	13	4	126
SORTIES	64	73	57	69	24	42	329
AIRCRAFT: ON HAND	22	22	22	22	22	22	
FLYING	11	12	11	11	10	10	

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3. Armored commanders of reaction forces must exercise control over the fire of their elements when reinforcing ground troops in contact. Whenever possible a complete briefing should be given the entering force so as to preclude casualties due to friendly fire.

4. There is no substitute for bold, aggressive tactics. Fire with no movement against an entrenched enemy force is useless. Fire power must be used to pin down RPG teams with co-ordinated movement to close with and destroy the enemy. When co-ordinating the attack the infantry elements must clear bunkers immediately after the armored elements have rolled over them to prevent an enemy attack from the rear.

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REF ID: A673541

NARA Date 11/10/01