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25th ID, G3, ORLL  
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Box 2

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
4TH BATTALION (MECH), 23D INFANTRY  
25TH INFANTRY DIVISION  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96385

AVDCFBC-CP

11 August 1969

SUBJECT: After Action Report (Operation Labrador Retriever)

THRU: Commanding Officer  
1st Bde, 25th Infantry Division  
APO 96385

TO: Commanding General  
25th Infantry Division  
APO 96225

1. Introduction: Operation Labrador Retriever was conducted on 8 August 1969, on the Northeast side of Nui Ba Den Mountain with a two fold mission:

a. Locate and recover the body of an American Soldier killed in action on 12 July 1969, during an operation conducted by the 2nd Bn (Mech), 2nd Inf then OPCON to the 25th Infantry Division.

b. Locate and destroy any enemy resistance in the immediate area.

2. Initial Planning: CO, 4th Bn (M), 23d Inf received the mission on 7 August 1969 and contacted Major James J. McDivett, XO, 2/2 Infantry, who had information on a possible location of the remains. A low level air recon was made by CO, 4/23d Inf (M) and XO, 2/2 Inf to locate possible LZs and approach routes. The area was at the base of a very rocky portion of Nui Ba Den Mountain. (KT277607) Later that afternoon the CO, 4/23d Inf (M) made air photos of the area to facilitate planning and briefing. Intelligence indicated a principal threat of accurate enemy snipers, RPG teams and possible mortars. The size of enemy forces was unknown.

3. Concept of Operations: The concept of operation envisioned by the CO, 4/23d Inf (M) was to form a six (6) man recovery team to make a single combat assault, screened by smoke, recover the body and link up with a ground support force of three APCs. Then RIF the area, supported by a strong base of fire.

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4. Final Planning and Coordination: (See Annex A) (Map)

a. Two Mechanized companies, B and C, 4/23d Inf (M), plus 2 RF Companies were placed in the area to support the operation and provide diversionary forces for the recovery phase of the operation. A base of fire was established, composed of one 8" Howitzer, a tank platoon, 4.2 mortar platoon and two 40mm Dusters. Artillery support was provided by batteries firing from FSBs St. Barbara, Grant, Bragg and Washington.

b. A Ground Support Force commanded by 1LT Nelson, was formed using; HQ 6, a M113 APC equipped with a borrowed US Navy Mark 20-40mm cannon plus battalion command communications, HQ 88 equipped with a 7.62 mini-gun and B12 equipped with a Cal 50 Machinegun plus eight infantrymen, each with M60 machineguns.

c. A six man volunteer Recovery Team was formed as follows:

- (1) Team Chief (w/Smoke Pot) - LTC Taylor, CO 4/23d Inf (M)
- (2) Deputy Team Chief (w/Radio & Smoke) - Major McDevitt, 2/2d Inf
- (3) RTO & Smoke Member (w/PRC 25 & Smoke) - CSM Gallagher, 4/23d Inf (M)
- (4) Graves Registration Member (w/Body Bag) - 1LT Fio Rio, 1st Inf Div
- (5) Mines and Booby Traps Member (w/Grappling Hook & special equipment) - SP4 Davis, A Co, 65th Engr. Bn.
- (6) Photographer and Smoke Member (w/Camera and Smoke) - PFC Dixon, 4/23d Inf (M)

This team was inspected and rehearsed several times while in the vicinity of FSB Rawlins before commitment (See Photos) and a air recon inspection conducted to determine visibility and wind direction. The air photos were used to identify and code name specific locations and were used by the various forces, teams and pilots. Also, the team photographer had an additional mission of providing photos if the remains proved to be other than expected.

5. Execution:

a. Phase I (Recovery) - On 8 August 1969 the fire base and maneuver units were in place prior to 1045 hrs. Mortar WP fire was placed between the objective area and suspected sniper locations which proved to be rather ineffective. At 1055 hrs the single ship combat assault was successfully completed. The body was located and screening smoke was placed between this location and the suspected sniper locations. (See Photos). The Ground Support Force arrived as the body was recovered and the three sub teams (Members 1 and 3, 2 and 6, 4 and 5) loaded the remains plus other equipment found in the area (helmets, RPG Screen, and ammunition). There was no evidence of booby traps in the area nor any evidence of enemy search and police. However, dud RPG rounds were found in the area. The body did not appear to be mutilated in any way. Identification tags and wallet were still on the remains. As the team linked up and began to withdraw from the objective area, enemy sniper fire was received from the base and sides of the mountain striking the APCs. CO, 4th Bn (M), 23d ordered the three APCs

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into line and engaged the area with all weapons. Tracer fire from a Car 15 proved effective in identifying enemy locations. One US Navy gunner on the Mark 20 - 40mm was wounded. Two snipers began to run and were killed. The mini-gun proved extremely effective. Smoke Pots were then placed between the sniper locations and the APCs. The infantry squad was deployed with its 8 M60 Machineguns, their APC with the body and team, less LTC Taylor and CSM Gallagher, was ordered back to the base of fire. LTC Mott, CO, 7/11 Arty on his own initiative brought up two 40mm Dusters which were immediately put to use. Company B, w/277 RF Co reinforced the Ground Support Force plus artillery fire and TAC Air.

b. Phase II (RIF) - The reinforced team composed of the Ground Support Force (less 1 APC), Company B, 4/23d Inf (M) and 277 RF Co, plus the two (2) 40mm Dusters moved back to the edge of the objective area. The force engaged suspected sniper and RPG locations with all available fire and received several secondary explosions. As this force began a careful withdrawal by bounds, with vehicles moving in reverse, RPG fire was received. The force was then ordered forward by the CO, 4/23d Inf (M). This action proved very effective when coupled with a high volume of fire. Again all available fire and air was used effectively. The force was withdrawn about 300 meters and a LOH was directed in for the CO, 4/23d Inf (M). Upon Landing, this aircraft received sniper fire. The south flank of Co B also received fire which was effectively returned. Two vehicles became mired in soft rice paddies and the recovery operation received sniper fire. The operation terminated at 1645 hours.

#### 6. Statistical Data:

Date: 8 August 1969

Location: XT 277 607

Duration: Contact sporadic between 1112 and 1605 hours.

Ammo Expenditures:

#### Artillery

8" at Base of Fire	89 rds
8" at FSB St Barbara	122 rds
155mm	586 rds
105mm	391 rds
Totals -	1183 rds

#### 4,2 Mortars

HE	277 rds
Smoke	52 rds
Total -	329 rds

#### 90mm Tank

HE	105 rds
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Air Assets

TAC Air Strikes	2 w/Bombs and Napalm
Light Fire Team	1 w/40mm Mini-gun (no 2/75 rockets were fired)
Tactical CS Drop	1 (Extremely good coverage)
One Flame Bath aborted	
Results: 9 Body Count (VC)	
1 US WIA (US Navy)	

## 7. Lessons Learned:

- a. Smoke pots are extremely effective however almost half were too wet from storage to make the match strikers function. An electrical firing method is being tried, also the wire carrying handles must be wrapped for easier hand carrying at the run.
- b. Commanders can effectively use tracer rounds in the M16 or CAR 15 for target marking.
- c. Small enemy forces watch carefully and engage only at times when either difficult maneuvers or obvious vulnerabilities exist, i.e.: withdrawals, mired vehicles reorganization or resupply or helicopter landings.
- d. Close control is essential at the instant of engagement and the choice of prompt devastating fire on area targets or careful, accurate, slower fire at point targets requires an immediate command decision. In this case the immediate forward movement under RPG attack proved to be effective.
- e. Once engaged the US Forces must act quickly to seize the initiative before receiving casualties causing organization structure to deteriorate.

## 8. VICTORY IS THE PRODUCT OF PROFESSIONALISM!

s/ G. E. Taylor  
 t/ G. E. TAYLOR  
 LTC, Armor  
 Commanding

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Annex A - Maps  
 Annex B - Photos

## A TRUE COPY:

*Michael D. Keating*  
 MICHAEL D. KEATING  
 Major, Armor  
 Division Historian

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By <u>N.C.</u> NARA Date <u>11-30-00</u>

