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AAO-CAB

After Action Report

Dep, AAO

SA, ACAD

20 May 72

1. PURPOSE: To inform the Chief of Army Advisory Group of the results obtained by the 20th Tank Regiment (ML8A3) against enemy armor during the current offensive.

2. DISCUSSION:

a. Report of activities of the 20th Tank Regiment is at Tab A.

b. Report of enemy tactics and training is at Tab B.

c. Information provided is based upon data obtained from spot reports and a few debriefings and after action reports from advisors and ARVN officers who were present during tank-to-tank engagements.

3. RECOMMENDATION: That the Chief of Army Advisory Group note Tab A and B. This document is of historical interest.

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a/s

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ACTIVITIES OF THE 20TH TANK REGIMENT (ML8A3)

1. (C) Introduction: The period of this report is from 31 March - 28 April. These dates are selected because the former is when the 20th Tank Regiment was declared "Combat Ready", and the latter is when daily reports ceased and the general encirclement of Quang Tri started. The tactical situation has not permitted extensive debriefing. Spot reports are generated through RVNAF channels and usually include only the number of enemy tanks destroyed or damaged with a general location. This report is centered around three known engagements between enemy tanks and the ML8A3s of the 20th Tank. The days between that included engagements but to which there is no substantiated data will be so indicated.
2. (C) 31 March: At 1500 hours a critique of the ATT was conducted by the Armor Command control group (testers) and the unit was declared "Combat Ready" (the ATT had been conducted within the guidelines of ATT 17-35). It was noted that the 20th Armor suffered from equipment shortages, only 2 of 5 M88s (the 3d M88 was issued during the ATT on 30 March), and equipment deadline; 10 ML8A3s, 7 M5488 and 1 M88 were left at the base location. It was also noted that only 80% of the units assigned personnel participated in the ATT. The major weak points were considered to be "during operations" maintenance and the unit's basic POL resupply procedures. In these areas the unit has made notable progress but improvement was needed. The unit's commander, LTC Ly, and his staff were complimented on their aggressiveness, flexibility, knowledge, and prompt reaction to orders. The overall tactics of the 20th Armor were considered excellent.
- X 3. (C) 1 April: At 1300 hours the 20th Armor was deployed under the control of the 3d Infantry Division, to the area between Dong Ha and Cam Lo. Their mission was to clear and occupy the high ground south of QL 9 and to keep the road open by disrupting enemy forces in their sector. The unit road-marched north from Quang Tri on QL 1 and left the road south of QL 9 moving west across country. Their first contact with enemy forces occurred at approximately 1630 hours when the unit surprised an ambush that was waiting for them on QL 9. From POWs taken during this action, it was learned that an entire NVA armor regiment, without their organic tanks and equipment, has been ordered into the area with the intention of capturing and manning ARVN tanks and APCs. Reports indicated that this enemy unit was the 202nd Armor Regiment; reliability of the source is not known. After this action the unit occupied its assigned sector and sporadically engaged small enemy ground elements through the night.
4. (C) 2 April: At approximately 0900 hours the unit was ordered to move to and occupy Dong Ha and was to be prepared to move north across the Qua Viet River and meet the enemy head-on in the vicinity of Firebase C-1. During its move to Dong Ha, which was difficult due to the congestion and southward flow of refugees and military units, the 20th Armor identified and engaged enemy tanks, PT-76s (at approximately 2300 meters), on the north side of the river moving south on QL 1 towards the Dong Ha bridge. The unit's mission was altered and LTC Ly, Commanding Officer, was ordered to stop the enemy from crossing the river. LTC Ly sent one

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troop (tank company) into Dong Ha to defend the bridge, one troop remained on the river bank west of Dong Ha, and the third troop was sent to cover the southeastern flank of the city. When the designated troop reached the bridge, enemy tanks were seen on the north side and were engaged at a range of 300 - 500 meters. LTC Ly was ordered to blow the bridge (1045 hours), but the best the unit could do was to fire main gun rounds (90mm HE) at the super structure, which was damaged and rendered impassable to vehicular traffic only. Later that day the job was completed, but exact details (who, how, and when) are unknown. At approximately 1100 hours, LTC Ly was given command of all forces in the Dong Ha area (this included the 57th Infantry Regiment, which had delayed from Firebase C-1 that morning and had taken up a blocking position astride QL 1, 5,000 meters south of Dong Ha) and was further ordered to hold the city at all costs. Prior to 1200 hours, the 20th Armor had destroyed nine enemy PT-76s and two T-54s; reports indicate that HEAT had been used on the PT-76s in the excitement of first contact. Field reports indicate that at 1600 hours two T-54s were engaged at a range of 3200 meters and destroyed with three rounds. During the late afternoon, the 1st Armored Brigade, commanded by COL Luat, was placed under the operational control of the 3d Infantry Division and given command of all units between Quang Tri and Dong Ha, this included the 20th Armor, the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, 2 troops of the 17th Armored Cavalry Regiment, the 57th Infantry Regiment, the 2d Infantry Regiment (-), and the 56th Infantry (-). The 20th Armor's mission was not changed and it continued to hold Dong Ha but relocated its positions to around the outskirts of the town. Sometime during the night of 2 April, enemy tanks crossed the Qua Viet River in the vicinity of Cam Lo. The details of skirmishes during that night are not known, but there were reports of some tank-to-tank engagements taking place.

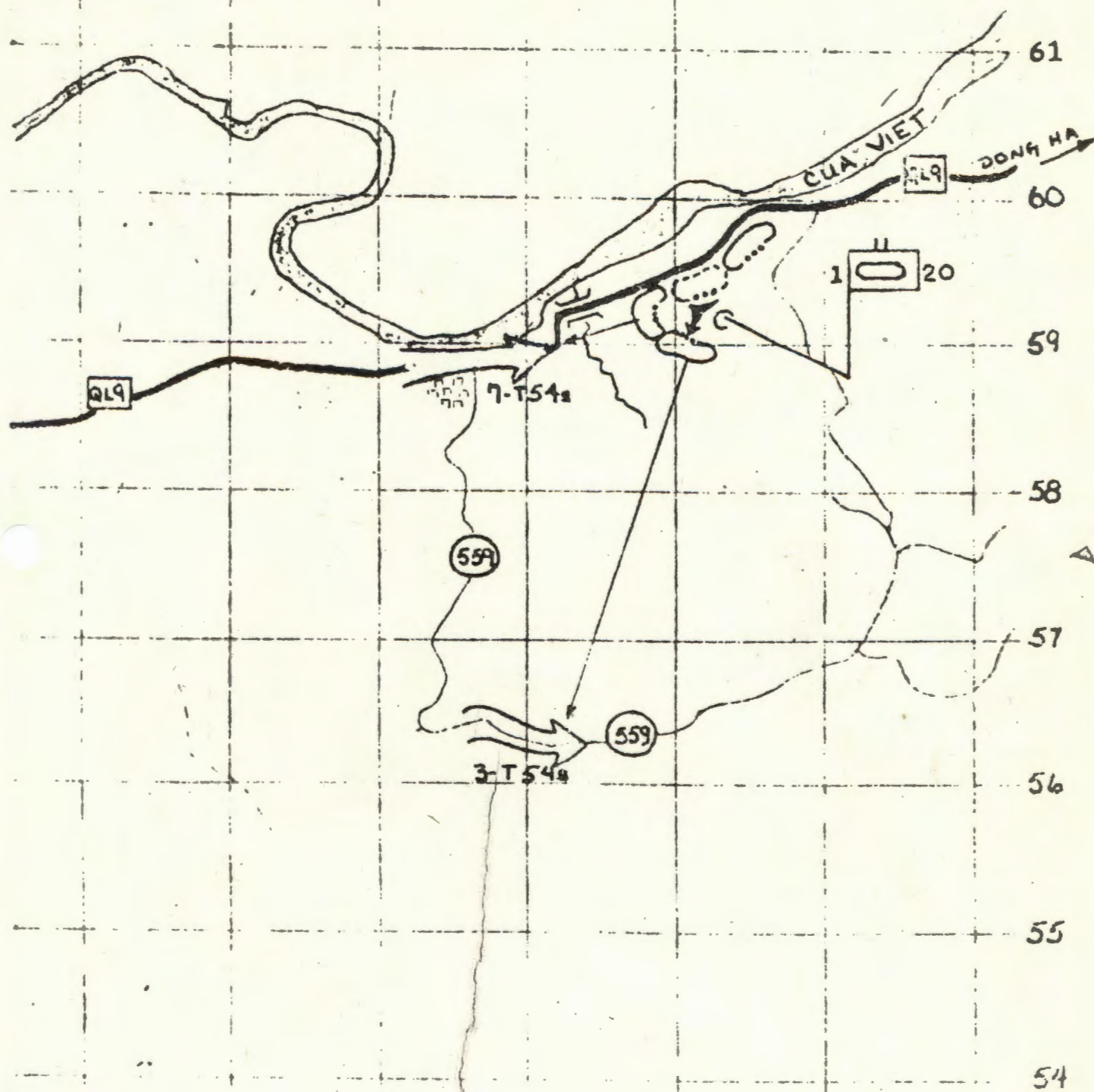
5. (C) 3 April: The only report of the day's activities comes from the hand-written report of the advisor to the 1/20th, a CPT Lynn, which states "...At 1500 4 tanks of the unit engaged, by HE fire, 3 enemy tanks (verbal interrogation revealed these to be T-54s) in the vicinity of 224515 (north of the Qua Viet River, 1500 meters northwest of Dong Ha) with an unknown number of infantry. No enemy tanks were destroyed and the results on (the) enemy infantry were not known. Artillery was processed (fired) in the area for about 45 minutes, again with unknown results."

6. (C) 4 April: The only spot report of this day states that one M48A3 was hit with a B-41 rocket in the right fuel tank. The fuel did not ignite, and the crew continued to fight the vehicle.

7. (C) 5 April: Spot reports state that six T-54s were destroyed. Ammo used was HEAT-T, but the ranges are unknown. The same report states that two M48A3s were damaged; one hit a mine and the other was hit on the gunshield, holing the guntube. Both reported as repairable.

8. (C) 6 April: Spot reports state that three M48A3s were damaged (but repairable); one was hit in the rear by a recoilless rifle (reported as 75mm), two were hit by B-41s causing only minor damage.

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MAP 1, 9 APRIL 1972

SCALE: 1" = 1,000 METERS

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9. (C) 7 April: Spot reports state that one M48A3 was hit by a B-41 in the rear, damaging the transmission.

10. (C) 8 April: No report.

11. (C) 9 April: Only an advisor's hand-written report covers the first reported tank-to-tank battle in which T-54s and M48A3s openly engaged each other. The entry for 9 April is as follows (see Map 1): In response to a warning by the platoon in position at 198592, CPT Xung moved with part of the reserve center platoon to 200590, starting at 0600 and getting in position at 0610, from where he joined the first platoon in engaging seven enemy T-54 tanks along QL 9 from 183587 to 194589, and three T-54s along Rt. 559 from 185565 to 194564. The platoon in position commenced firing before CPT Xung and I got in position, and by the time the second platoon opened fire, the T-54s had buttoned up and did not observe the second platoon coming into action.

Since the bridge at 194591 had been blown several days previously, it appears that the enemy armor meant to turn off QL 9 onto Rt. 559 at 186588 and missed the turn in the dark. Their actions were confused, with three of the seven turning off the road into rice paddies, where they bogged down, and all of them returning no more than a dozen rounds among them. All seven of the tanks on QL 9 were destroyed, one of the three on Rt. 559 was hit, the other two moving to terrain-masked positions. Those on QL 9 were stationary or moving in line with the direction of fire; those on Rt. 559, including the one hit, were moving at a good rate across the direction of fire.

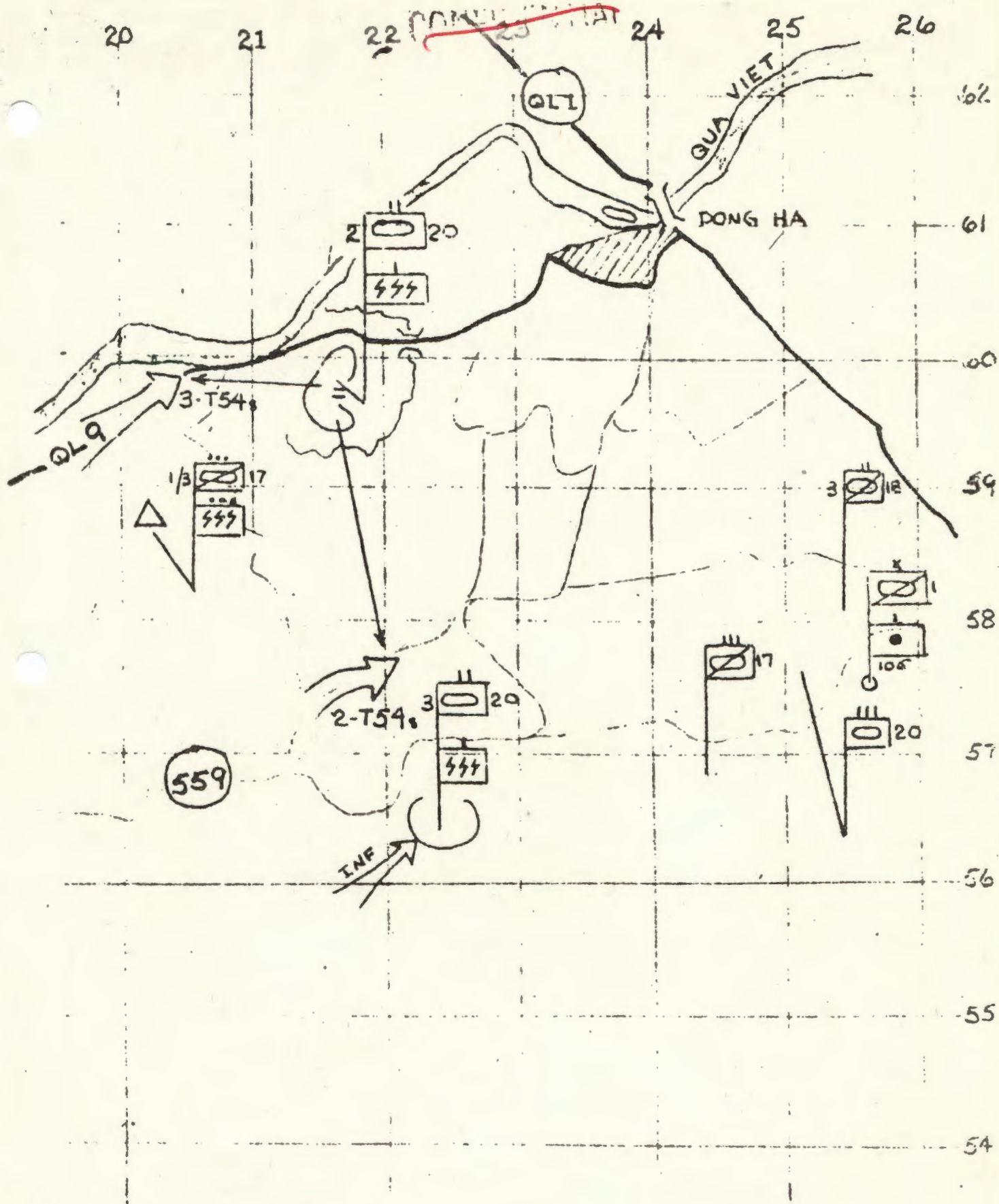
All the tanks of the 1st Trp were in good positions, being on higher ground than their targets and having at least hull defilade. Gunnery was fair to good, over a range of 600 to 1800 meters at the tanks on QL 9 and an average range of 2800 meters at the moving tanks on Rt. 559.

However, they did not, for the most part, back away behind cover when it became necessary to traverse the turret and get ammo from the racks by the driver's side. I saw four vehicles (including CPT Xung's) which failed in this respect, and only one that did back out.

✕ One M48 sustained two hits on the turret from a T-54, but without major damage. The T-54 may have been firing HE ammo, but this is just a guess. The hit M48 continued to fire at the enemy, and the TC was the only casualty, receiving a few minor cuts on the head (he was not evacuated).

† The engagement was over by 0700, however, following a special resupply of HEAT and SHOT ammo, CPT Xung and 2 other tanks expended about 40 rounds of AT ammo in "checking sights" and "reducing the enemy vehicles to scrap". Despite the fact that infantry had approached as far as the first enemy tank, CPT Xung was not receptive to the suggestion of saving tank ammo and having the infantry destroy the tanks with explosive charges. This wastage of ammo was repeated on the next day after another resupply of HEAT & SHOT ammo.

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MAP 2, 26 APRIL 1972

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SCALE: 1" = 1,000 METERS

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12. (C) 10 April: No reports indicating any tank-to-tank engagements. One M48A3 was hit with a 75mm recoilless rifle and burned, this was the first M48A3 to become a "combat loss". Another M48A3 was damaged by a B-41 that penetrated the right side of the turret and damaged the range finder.

13. (C) 11-13 April: No reports.

14. (C) 14 April: Field reports indicate that two M48A3s were hit by wire guided missiles and completely destroyed. This had a demoralizing effect on the tankers of the 20th Regiment; they became more careful in their actions and troop commanders started preparing fighting positions for the tanks.

15. (C) 15-22 April: Reports for this period indicate no tank-to-tank engagements. All the action was against enemy infantry with the 20th and the ARVN Marines working together. Two M48A3s were reported damaged by B-41s.

16. (C) 23 April: Reports give no details but state that seven T-54s were destroyed and one M48A3 damaged in a tank-to-tank battle SW of Dong Ha.

17. (C) 24 April: Reports give no details but state that three T-54s were destroyed by the M48A3s.

18. (C) 25 April: No reports.

19. (C) 26 April: Debriefing of CPT Khue, CO 2nd Troop/20th Tank, gave the details of the only reported tank-to-tank engagement of this date (Map 2).

1000 hrs: All friendly positions started receiving incoming rounds. Reports state that over 1,000 rounds of 130 and 122mm were received by 1100 hours.

1015: 1/3/17 ACR, occupying an OP with one marine platoon, reported three T-54s moving east on QL 9. 1/3/17 ACR lost two M113s to incoming arty.

1030: 1/3/17 ACR reported that the platoon of marines had sent anti-tank teams down to QL 9 to engage the T-54s. Marines had negative results and the T-54 continued their move east.

1045: 2/20 engaged the T-54s from 1500 meters, destroying the first two with 1st round hits of HEAT. The other escaped west on QL 9. Both tanks were hit in the right flank just below the turret, both burned.

1050: The escaping T-54 was destroyed by a marine anti-tank team using LAWs.

1100: 1/3/17 reported two T-54s to the south moving east. They disappeared before being engaged.

1105: 2/20 spotted and engaged the two reported T-54s with HEAT at a range of 1200 meters. A 1st round hit set the lead T-54 on fire. The lead tank backed up and ran into the second T-54, whose crew then dismounted and ran away. Both tanks burned.

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20. (C) During the period 28 April to 2 May, the 20th Tank Regiment was annihilated; only one M48A3, one M113, and one M577 returned to friendly lines approximately 35 kms north of Hue. There are not enough coherent reports to write the story of the Quang Tri fiasco yet. However, it is known that bridges south of Quang Tri had been damaged by the enemy and that the unit did not receive any resupply from 27 April on.

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ENEMY TACTICS AND TRAINING

1. (C) Reports and interviews indicate that the enemy tank units normally follow closely behind artillery preparations. They often travel in column formation and spread out when moving cross-country. They stay in groups of 8 to 10 and, although they are often employed with infantry, do not appear to be cross-attached. In general, the enemy's use of tanks has not been effective against the M48A3. One report indicated that the NVA tank crews would "button up" at the first engagement. Despite the fact that they have 360 degree vision when buttoned up, through vision blocks, some vehicle crews acted "blind", driving the vehicle off the road, backing into wire and other obstacles and in one case driving into a rice paddy where they bogged down. This may merely indicate a lack of training. Fragmentary reports indicated instances of enemy tank crews abandoning and fleeing from their vehicles. Unsubstantiated reports of crews, less the vehicle commander, being chained into their vehicles were also received. The T-54 and T-59 captured in Quang Tri Province by VN Marines on 7 April still had complete basic loads of ammunition for the 100mm guns (34 rds). This would indicate that neither tank had fired a main gun round. Vietnamese experience with the captured vehicles indicated that the 100mm round (approximately 40" long; 70 pounds) is extremely difficult for a small man to handle. This would tend to slow down the rate of fire and reduce the effectiveness of the tank. A report on an engagement by the 20th ARVN Tank Bn on 9 April, indicated that seven enemy T-54s, some moving and some stationary, were engaged at ranges of 600 to 1800 meters. ARVN M-48s were on higher ground and in hull defilade. All seven enemy tanks were destroyed. At the same time three moving T-54s were engaged at an average range of 2800 meters. One was destroyed and the other two withdrew. The ten enemy tanks reportedly fired no more than a dozen rounds in total. One M-48 received two hits in the turret but sustained no major damage and continued to fire. The T-54 may have been firing H2 ammo.

2. (C) Type enemy tanks reported: PT-76 (Soviet); PT-63 (Chicom, PT-76 hull, T-54 Turret with 85mm gun); T-34 (Soviet); T-54/55 (Soviet); T-59 (Chicom, copy of T-54, has no range finder); and M-41 (US).

3. (C) Modifications and paraphernalia. PT-76, T-34, T-54/55 and T-59 tanks all appear to have standard equipment. Some were observed going into combat with auxiliary fuel tanks still on the vehicles. One unsubstantiated report indicated that some of the PT-76 tanks had been modified to include a 90mm gun. This may have been an 85mm gun. No range finder was reported. Additionally, an undocumented report from ARVN sources suggested that the drums on the back of the vehicles may not be fuel pods. No further information was provided. A US advisor observed an enemy tank (T-54) emit a vapor cloud directly above it after being fired on, thereby giving the indication that it had been hit, but this T-54 then engaged and destroyed two M41A3s with 3 rounds.

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TAB B

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Comments of 1st Armored Brigade's Senior Advisor

GENERAL - Specific dates and circumstances of all actions of the 20th Tank Regiment are difficult to reconstruct because all logs and other records were lost during the withdrawal from Quang Tri 1 to 2 May 1972. The 20th Tank Regiment completed its qualification ATT on 29 March 1972. Because of the deteriorating tactical situation in northern Quang Tri Province, it was committed to combat on 1 April 1972 near Dong Ha, RVN. The 1st Armor Brigade was deployed to the Dong Ha area at 1410 hours, 2 April, to assume command of all units in that area. From that time until 28 April, the 20th Tank Regiment remained under the operational control of 1st Armored Brigade.

TACTICS - Throughout the entire period tactics were dictated by a reaction to enemy activities, rather than by aggressive offensive actions on the part of ARVN forces in the area. The 20th Tank was used almost exclusively in a static defensive role occupying strong points and providing a company sized reserve for the 3d ARVN Division. The tanks were generally employed with infantry and positioned on the reverse slope of hills in hull defilade positions where they could engage the enemy when he attacked. Where possible, engineer equipment was used to improve these tank positions. Principal successes of the 20th Tank can be largely attributed to poor tactics employed by the enemy, as well as to excellent gunnery of 20th Tank crews. It is significant to note that a major portion of the training time during formation of the regiment was devoted to gunnery. The NVA forces normally preceded their attacks by an artillery preparation utilizing 130mm guns, 122mm guns, 122mm rockets, and mortar fire. They failed to follow up these preparations quickly and there were sometimes pauses of 30 minutes or more before ground attacks were initiated. The enemy habitually failed to utilize his T-54 tanks in mass. They attacked in groups of two or three and often approached the friendly positions in columns. In one case, eight T-54s were destroyed, one after another, as they came down highway QL-9 in column. The enemy also had a tendency to move along ridgelines where they presented easy targets. NVA infantry followed their tanks and were usually not close enough to be mutually supporting. Enemy gunnery techniques were very poor and inaccurate. No M48A3 tank was even hit by a 100mm tank gun of the enemy. The 20th Tank claimed destroying 29 T-54 and 6 PT-76 tanks. I do not believe these claims are exaggerated based on personal observation of destroyed tanks. A majority of the enemy tanks were destroyed by HEAT-T ammunition at ranges varying from 800 to 1500 meters. The enemy's most effective weapons against the M48A3 were B-40 and B-41 rocket launchers, and AT-3 SASSER wire-guided missiles fired from ground mounts. Because of the positioning of M48A3s well forward in defensive positions, they were particularly vulnerable to small teams utilizing these weapons. Infantry providing local security could not be depended on to suppress this threat, particularly during artillery attacks. In spite of constant advice to move the M48A3s to different positions during enemy contact, the vehicles were normally kept in one fixed position. When wire-guided missiles were used on and after 23 April the crews seemed fascinated by their flight and would stare at them, rather than firing at the readily identifiable firing

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position or quickly moving the vehicle. This technique does work effectively. While accompanying another unit which was engaged by AT-3 SAGGERS no vehicle was hit, although I personally observed three fired. The missiles were avoided by rapidly moving the vehicles short distances and by firing at the source. The enemy usually fired the missiles at a range of about 1500 meters. When the 20th Tank was forced to abandon its defensive positions on 27 and 28 April, they did not delay in a coordinated manner and hence lost vehicles when it was unnecessary. During the final withdrawal on 1-2 May, when all vehicles were lost, little or no attempt was made to evacuate vehicles when they became stuck. A breakdown in leadership and complete panic has rendered the unit completely ineffective by this time.

LEADERSHIP - The troop commanders and platoon leaders of the 20th Tank were well trained when the operation began on 1 April. Unfortunately the troop commanders seemed to feel they were better qualified than the regimental commander and often failed to respond to his direction. The regimental commander failed to check his units, as any good commander should, and as a result rarely knew their true status. The executive officer of the regiment was habitually used as an operations assistant, rather than to supervise logistics, maintenance, and the other areas normally handled by an individual in his position. Leadership eventually broke down in the unit because of heavy losses among officers and NCOs. These losses were particularly heavy among officers and NCOs at the troop level. There were no replacements for these key individuals.

MAINTENANCE - This area was the greatest weakness of the 20th Tank throughout the period. The unit was short trained mechanics and normally did not even attempt to perform that maintenance of which they were capable. Except for very minor organizational maintenance functions, all vehicles requiring either organizational or higher level support were evacuated to the direct support ordnance company for repair. This placed an extremely heavy workload on the direct support company. In my opinion the direct support company performed an excellent job under the circumstances. Approximately one-third of the vehicles assigned to the unit were normally deadlined. I feel this rate would have been much higher if the vehicles had been running more instead of being kept in static positions. The principal cause of poor maintenance was a lack of emphasis in this critical area from the regimental commander down to platoon leaders. Constant prodding by advisors at all levels did elicit some interest in this area after several weeks of the operation had passed.

LESSONS LEARNED - The M48A3 tank is more than a match for the T-54 tank. The principal advantage is in the superior fire control of the M48A3. 20th Tank crews often achieved first or second round hits on T-54s at ranges up to 1500 meters, while the T-54s seemed to be trying to bracket the M48A3s. The rate of fire of the T-54s was very slow compared to that of the M48A3s which also contributed to success. The enemy tactics were very poor and rarely were their artillery, tank, and infantry units used in a coordinated manner. Leadership is the key to success in a unit and when it breaks down, even a well trained unit, such as the 20th Tank

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was initially, will falter. There must be a trained group of replacements immediately available when a unit suffers heavy casualties. There were no replacements for the 20th Tank and constant attrition eventually destroyed their leadership bare. A tank battalion should be used in an offensive role or mobile reserve role rather than primarily in a static defense role. The latter causes excessive losses to infantry anti-tank forces and eventually renders the unit incapable of performing the offensive role for which it is ideally suited. Fire and movement is still the key to success and must be utilized to gain maximum effectiveness from a tank battalion. In retrospect, the 20th Tank Regiment fought very well initially, although assigned a mission not suited to its mobile capability. The unit eventually was destroyed as a combat effective force because of a breakdown in leadership. The loss of small unit leaders from troop level down played a significant role in the breakdown.

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MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD - 16 May 72

SUBJECT: 20th Tank Squadron

1. The 20th Tank Squadron received its mission order (0800 1 April 72) to deploy to the northwest of Dong Ha and relieve pressure at Cam Lo District Headquarters. The 20th Tank Squadron's movement order was unclear and thus the movement along National Route QL #1 was very disorganized and confused. The unit crossed its "SP" at 1100 hours and then just north of Quang Tri Combat Base (Ai Tu), the entire column halted and remained in a static position for approximately 1½ hours. The lead elements finally arrived in Dong Ha and headed west along QL #9 toward Cam Lo District Headquarters. The entire movement was restricted to travel along the highway. Although a column movement could be considered the most desirable formation, under the conditions that speed was of essence, the 20th moved with extreme caution and at a very slow rate of speed. Very light small arms fire was received from the north bank of the river as the unit proceeded west toward Cam Lo. There was no threat, however the forward progression was delayed for about 2 hours. At one point along QL #9 an M48A3 threw a track which caused an unnecessary delay. The initial plan presented to the 20th Tank Squadron required that they move in and occupy the area surrounding Cam Lo District Headquarters by 1400 hours 1 April 72. As a result of the many delays in movement, the 20th's lead elements didn't reach its RP until approximately 1800 hours. At this time they reported that Cam Lo Village was burning so badly that passage through was impossible. The squadron commander then occupied an NDP about 2000 meters southeast of Cam Lo.

LESSONS LEARNED:

a. The operations order must be concise but not at the sacrifice of clarity. All personnel must be kept informed and be made aware of the changing situation.

b. When moving in column, the unit must move rapidly to take advantage of its mobility and thus provide the element of surprise.

c. Small arms fire should never halt a tank column. When receiving small arms resistance, the enemy should be engaged by the tanks while moving.

d. Unless speed is the primary factor of concern, alternate routes of march should be selected thus attempting to avoid the use of national routes when possible.

2. On the 2nd of April the NVA were observed moving tanks south along QL #1 toward Dong Ha. The 20th Tank Squadron immediately drew up a plan to establish a bridgehead on the north side of the Cua Viet River along QL #1 with one tank troop and one company of the 3d Battalion, 258th Marine Brigade RVN. Once the bridgehead was established, the next phase was to rapidly launch a counterattack to the north by passing a like size element through the bridgehead. Due to very poor

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communications, this plan was approved too late. The only alternative left at this time was for the tanks and marines to defend on the south bank of the river at the bridge. One troop of tanks and two companies of marines occupied Dong Ha City and established a defensive position. Another troop of tanks occupied the high ground southwest of Dong Ha where they could observe QL #1 north of the Cua Viet River and thus engage the enemy tanks at a range of 3200 meters. The remaining tank troop was placed in a reserve blocking position just south of Dong Ha Combat Base. These positions remained relatively static from 2-6 April 72.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- a. Communications are essential to the success of any given operation. The Vietnamese must establish a more sound communications net. Throughout the first 6 days most radio communication between the 20th Tank Squadron and higher headquarters was effected through the use of the advisor's radio.
- b. The initial plan for establishment of the bridgehead north of the river appeared to be quite sound fundamentally. Lack of aggressiveness prevented implementation of the plan.
- c. Once the front was stabilized and the NVA were stopped north of the river, the 20th Tank Squadron should have been relieved in Dong Ha. They should have been pulled to the rear where they could have performed crew maintenance and then assigned limited objective missions daily, sweeping areas to the west and north of Ai Tu.
- d. During the occupation of their static defensive position vicinity of Dong Ha, the troops morale steadily decreased. This position, furthermore, limited the use of armor's assets, i.e. firepower, mobility, and shock action.
- e. Additionally, lack of aggressive leadership and supervision by the commander increased the problems of troop morale and desertion. This statement was noted through the reluctance of the squadron commander to visit his troop locations. He further failed to keep the troops informed of the enemy ~~and~~ friendly situation. During the first 3 days, the only noted friendly situation was that all forces were withdrawing through the 20th positions. With this action and no information provided to the troops one might well assume that he has been left as the sole surviving element to defend that area. This will undoubtedly play an important role in the effectiveness of any organization.

JAMES SMOCK
MAJ, Armor

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Activities of 20th Tank Regiment, 8 April - 2 May (use map sheets 6242 IV, 6242 III, 6241 IV, 6242 II, 6241 I, all series L 7014).

The journal of day to day activities of the VN 20th Tank Regt was destroyed during the withdrawal from Quang Tri. The following comments are from memory and should not be considered to be exact.

8 Apr - I joined the 20th Tank Regt @ about 1700 hours, at the CP located @ YD 269534. The Regt had an AO bounded on east by QL 1, on the south by the Vinh Phuoc River, on the north by the Huen Giang River and on west by a line joining YD 195590 & YD 214542. 1st Troop was occupying a strong point from YD 195590 to 207598. The troop was deployed by platoons & was supported by a Bn (-) of Inf. The 2nd Trp was moved from Dong Ha (YD 2461) to Quang Tri Combat Base (Ai Tu) & was given the mission of Armor Bde reserve. The third troop was occupying a strong point vicinity YD 220565. The troop was supported by a Bn of Inf.

9 Apr - At dawn the NVA launched heavy ground attacks of tanks supported by inf & artillery. The 1st Troop destroyed 8 T-54s on the road from YD 192590 to 190588. The 2nd Troop was committed from reserve to support the 147th Marine Brigade vic YD 2952. It destroyed 5 T-54s and captured one (1). The third troop destroyed 3 T-54s and captured one (1). The 20th had 3 or 4 tanks hit by B-40s, one which was totally destroyed. Those not destroyed were evacuated to Regt maintenance area located vic Quang Tri Combat Base (Ai Tu). The NVA withdrew by late afternoon. The 2nd Troop remained opcon to the 147th Marine Bde.

10-15 Apr - During daylight hours the Regt's HQ tank section was positioned @ Dong Ha to provide the Inf Bn located there w/tank support. At dusk they returned to the Regt's CP for CP security. The 2nd Trp remained opcon to the 147th Marine Bde. It also provided 3 tanks to the Armor Bde HQ for security. The 1st & 3rd troops remained in these strong pts w/their inf support.

16 Apr - In the AM Armor Bde issued an attack order - the 17th Cav, 4th Ranger Group, & 5th Ranger Group were to clear zones extending west from QL 1. The 20th Tank Regt was given the mission of Armor Bde reserve. However, each troop was to remain in its strong point position until the attacking units passed through them. A Regt's size contact was made by 5th Ranger Grp/20th Tank CP security forces vic YD 2356 @0830 hrs. Additional friendly inf forces were committed as the intensity of the battle increased. The 3/20th Regt HQ section tanks were employed in a support by fire role. At dusk the enemy force broke contact.

17-18 Apr - Activity was much the same, in that contact was reinitiated each day & broken @ nite.

19 Apr - No further significant enemy contact made vic YD 2356. The 2nd Trp moved from opcon 147th Marine Bde to occupy strong pt held by 1st Trp. The 1st Trp goes opcon to 147th Marine Bde. The 3 tanks of 2nd Trp providing security for Armor Bde CP continue w/that mission.

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20-22 Apr - Enemy continues probing attacks - no significant enemy task activity - Troops continue to be sniped @ by B-40 teams.

23 Apr - 2nd Trp receives increased ground attacks. Enemy employs anti-tank wire-guided missile for first time against 20th Tank Regt. Two tanks receive minor damage (Missile subsequently identified as AT-3 SAGGER).

23-25 Apr - Ground probes increase in intensity. The employment of wire-guided missiles also increases. Enemy B-40 teams remain active. All strong pts remain occupied.

27 Apr - Regt CP & 3rd Troop received heavy incoming starting @ dawn. At 0900 hrs all officers of 3rd Troop had been killed or wounded. The troop withdraws back to QL 1 vic Regt'l CP. Three of its tanks were destroyed by enemy wire-guided missiles prior to withdrawal. The troop was subject to ground attack commencing shortly after dawn. At this pt of withdrawal, 3rd Troop had 6 tanks operational. Regt XO rallied 2 tanks of 3rd Trp & joined them w/3 tanks of regt tank section. He moved these 5 tanks back to pl of contact vic YD 270575. In the meantime, the Inf Bn located w/3rd Trp began to withdraw to QL 1. The 5 tanks under the control of the XO supported by some inf were able by midafternoon to cause the enemy to break contact. There were 5 T-54s destroyed. The 2nd Trp received artillery fire, wire-guided missiles, & light ground probes during the day. Because of the extensive enemy activity to the east & south of 2nd Trp, it was ordered to conduct a night movement to link up w/an Inf Bn located @ Dong Ha Combat Base (YD 245598). The troop lost 3 tanks to enemy fire during this night movement. Upon arriving at the combat base it was discovered the friendly forces had withdrawn & the base occupied by NVA elements. The 3rd Trp continued fighting through the base & terminated its movement @ Regt CP, vic YD 269584. The 1st Trp remained opcon to the 147th Marine Bde.

28 Apr - The Regt now had at least 18 tanks operational. The 2nd Trp was given the mission @ first lte to secure a bridge on QL 1 about 4-5 kilometers south of the Regt CP. The four tanks from 3rd Trp which did not move back to their position w/the XO on 27 Apr were now positioned in the Regt'l CP area. At 0830 the CP began to receive a tank/inf ground attack initiated from Dong Ha Combat Base. The Regt'l XO w/his five tanks returns to the CP location to assist in stopping this attack. 6 T-54s are destroyed. No friendly tanks are hit. Armor Bde CO who was located @ Regt CP orders Regt to withdraw south. In the late afternoon 20th Tank was made opcon to 147th Marine Bde. The 147th Bde was given defensive mission north of Quang Tri River. All other friendly units moved south of Quang Tri River. The three troops of 20th Tank were opcon to the three (3) bns of 147th Bde. Defensive positions were established along perimeter of combat base, center coordinate being YD 3154. The Regt'l mortar plt did not make it to this defensive position for a bridge along the route was blown. It was unable to ford the river. Evening of 28 April the enemy attempted to isolate unit by cutting final bridge into Quang Tri, but was repulsed.

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29 Apr - Enemy action limited to heavy arty attacks & light probing action.

30 Apr - In AM TAC AIR stops tank/inf attack from northwest. Order received @ 1500 to move south of Quang Tri River and establish defense of QT City. Both bridges across river had been destroyed. 16 of 18 tanks forded river 1 km north of bridges. One was destroyed by mine and the other by Art fire. The 3 troops remained opcon to the 3 bns of 147th Bde. At 2230, an inf ground attack penetrated the southern defenses of the city. By 2345 the attackers were repelled.

1 May - @ 1200 received order to evacuate Quang Tri City. 147th Bde & 20th Tank were to move cross-country east of old QL 1, cross the Nhung River @ bridge on old QL 1 (YD 3849), continue southeast between old & new QL 1 & pass through friendly troops holding the QL 1 bridge over the My Chanh River @ YD 4640. The trafficability of the cross-country route was extremely difficult for the M48s. Rice paddies, canals, & rivers all caused difficulties. Six M48s were lost in the vic YD 378493, four to enemy B-40/RT & two on unsuccessful attempt to ford the river. Four other tanks were not recovered from their unsuccessful effort to ford river @ YD 375511. The Regt closed into its night position (YD 407473) w/o tanks remaining.

2 May - The unit did not move out @ first lite as planned. @ 0715 the unit began receiving small arms fire from NW. Shortly after that, it began to receive a heavy volume of small arms fire from the vic of Hai Long to the east. One PT-76 also appeared from tree line to the east. This caused extreme confusion among all units located in the area. Most commanders were unable to control their units. The result was a large mass of vehicles & personnel moving independently to avoid enemy contact. The 20th Tank vehicle on which I was riding became separated from the Regt. Upon returning to friendly lines, I discovered that none of the 6 remaining M48s made it to the My Chanh. It is believed that all six were casualties of the terrain.

Additional Comments:

The D/L Rate averaged at least 16 vehicles any given day. 30-40% of these were due to combat damage. The Regt's Maintenance operation appeared to become less effective as time went on. The D.S. Ord Bn was handling almost all maintenance problems.

Officers from Regt's CO to plt ldrs in the field did not take an active role in checking or supervising maintenance in the field.

Frequently tanks & inf would be positioned together, but unity of command would not be established. The exception came when 20th Tank worked under 147th Marine Bde.

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The tanks were employed on strong pts, with infantry unable to provide adequate close-in protection. This lead to continuous sniping by B-40 & wire-guided missiles. Tanks should have been employed in the true mobile reserve role.

The offensive capabilities of the tanks were never utilized. Shock action was non-existent. Enemy armor offered no serious threat to the M48s. They generally attacked in piecemeal fashion, in groups of 2-3, and appeared to lack aggressiveness. 20th Regt tanks neglected to take action in response to wire-guided missiles. The target tanks should have taken evasive action by movement, with fellow tanks providing fire on the launching location. This location was easily discernable after the missile was fired.

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