

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS
3RD BATTALION 8TH INFANTRY
APO US Forces 96265

AVDDA-BRAD-1

21 April 1968

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report (RCS: MAC-V J-3 - J-2)

TO: Commanding General
4th Infantry Division
ATTN: AVDDH-CG
APO US Forces 96262

1. (U) TYPE OF OPERATION: Defense of the 3d Battalion 8th Infantry Fire Support Base and related offensive operations.
2. (U) DATES OF OPERATION: 21 March 1968 to 2 April 1968
3. (U) LOCATION: YA 939913 ;
4. (U) COMMAND AND CONTROL HEADQUARTERS: Headquarters, 3d Battalion 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division, under the operational control of the 173d Infantry Brigade, (Abn) (Separate) until 301900 March 1968 and subsequently under the operational control of Headquarters, 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division.
5. (U) REPORTING OFFICER: LTC D.M. MALONE, Commanding Officer, 3d Battalion 8th Infantry, 4th Infantry Division.
6. (U) TASK ORGANIZATION:
 - a. HQ, 3d Bn 8th Inf
 - b. Company "A", 3d Bn 8th Inf
 - c. Company "B", 3d Bn 8th Inf
 - d. Company "C", 3d Bn 8th Inf
 - e. Company "D", 3d Bn 8th Inf
 - f. Company "E", 3d Bn 8th Inf
 - g. 2d Platoon, Company "A", 4th Engr Bn
 - h. Btry "C", 6th Bn, 29th Arty (DS)
 - i. After 260815 March 1968 task organization included:
 - (1) Company "B", 1st Bn 8th Inf
 - (2) Company "D", 1st Bn 8th Inf
7. (U) SUPPORTING FORCES:
 - a. "C" Battery, 1st Bn 92nd Arty (GSR). This element is a 155 mm towed unit. "C" Battery expended approximately 2000 rounds of ammunition in support of 3/8 operations. 571 of the above total

(1)

were fired in defense of the Fire Support Base. The support rendered by this battery was excellent. Fires delivered during the defense of the Fire Support Base were extremely responsive, timely, and accurate. During the attack on the perimeter the battery provided close in defense fires. As the NVA began to break contact and withdraw, these fires were shifted to block withdrawal routes and interdict suspected rally points. In the later stages of the contact, 155mm COFRAM was also fired into the suspected NVA assembly areas northwest of the Fire Support Base.

b. "D" Btry, 5th Bn 22nd Arty (GS): This 8 inch Btry expended approximately 500 rounds of ammunition in support of operations. The principal use of these fires was against known enemy bunkered positions in a destruction role. During the NVA attack on the Fire Support Base, 46 rounds were expended on Hill 119⁰ North of the Fire Support Base as a suppressive measure.

c. "A" Btry, 3d Bn 319th Arty: Other than the direct support Btry of the 3/8 Infantry this Btry provided the only other 105mm fires for operations. "A" Btry expended approximately 500 rounds of ammunition in support of operations. This Btry departed the operational area on 30 April 1968 and was replaced by "A" Btry, 2nd Bn 9th Arty on 30 April 1968. The defensive fires provided by "A" Btry, 2nd Bn 319th Arty were delivered by the high angle technique and were along the northern edge of the perimeter. Gun-target line restrictions did hamper the use of the Btry.

d. "A" Btry, 2nd Bn 9th Arty: This Btry was not introduced into the area until 30 April 1968 when it replaced "A" Btry, 3d Bn 319th Arty. The Btry expended approximately 500 rounds in support of offensive operations and counter-mortar fires.

e. AC-47 Gun and Illumination Aircraft (Spooky): "Spooky" provided close in protective fires and illumination along the Northwest, West, and Southern sections of the perimeter. At times, airstrike headings and gun-target lines interfered with the release of flares to allow for constant illumination. The NVA elements took advantage of this problem and increased fire and maneuver during the darkness. To overcome this, organic 81mm mortars were used to fire the gaps between airborne released flares.

f. AC-47 Illumination Aircraft (Moonglow): This aircraft provided continuous illumination after the departure of "Spooky". Although the aircraft did not have 7.62 minigun capability, the illumination was adequate.

g. 7/13th Air Force: The total operation was supported by 43 airstrikes. 14 airstrikes were flown in support of the Fire Support Base defense and 5 of the 14 were flown under conditions of reduced visibility, using artificial illumination from "Spooky" and "Moonglow". The remaining strikes were flown in support of offensive operations and against known NVA occupied positions. The Bn requested 18 combat sky spots and received 8. These missions were flown against suspected NVA assembly and base areas. All air requests were immediate

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and reaction time varied considerably. The reaction to troops in contact was approximately 30 minutes. Strikes requested to properly prepare objectives were as much as 5 hours late. Of special note is the close and continuous support received during the defense of the Fire Support Base. The strikes were delivered 200-300 meters West of the perimeter under very marginal weather conditions. The forward air controllers and pilots deserve specific mention for the outstanding support rendered under extremely adverse conditions.

h. "C" Btry, 6th Bn 29th Arty: This Btry fired approximately 1500 rounds of ammunition. The majority of the ammunition was expended in support of offensive operations and took the form of offensive preparations and suppressive fires. In defense of the Fire Support Base the Btry fired approximately 30 rounds of "Beehive" ammunition. The Btry delivered point blank direct fire into the attacking NVA elements. One gun of the Btry was overrun by the NVA, but later retaken in a counterattack conducted by Pn HQ personnel and artillerymen. The Btry continued to deliver fire with at least two guns throughout the defense, even though firing was in progress within the gun parapets.

i. General comments, supporting forces: All supporting elements delivered outstanding support. Artillery fires were delivered effectively and were immediately responsive to the support units' needs. The marginal weather conditions and lack of sufficient illumination was seemingly ignored by pilots and forward air controllers as they delivered ordnance to within 200 meters of the perimeter. The three resupply and numerous dustoff sorties flown after first light were highly commendable. The resupply and medical evacuation were made under extremely intense small arms, mortar, and rocket fire. The helicopter pilots were patient and made every effort to meet every need of the troops in the contact.

8. (U) INTELLIGENCE:

a. The area of operations: Terrain in the area of operations was typical of the Central Highlands. Vegetation was dense, and double and triple canopy jungle was common. Water was abundant in gulleys and springs are found frequently. Weather was warm and humid with no rain. Early morning fog and haze reduced visibility to 1/2 to 2km and haze persisted throughout the period.

b. Intelligence prior to operations: The only intelligence available to this unit prior to the NVA attack on the Fire Support Base were SPAR and Radio Research Reports. The sources of information were the 173d Abn Bde and the Polie Klieng Special Forces Camp. Plots of this information revealed a West to East enemy movement pattern through the Battalion AO. No indications of attack were given; however, fresh trails, bunker complexes, and a net of communications wire were found within hours after the initial combat assault and indicated the presence of one NVA battalion North of the Fire Support Base and another NVA battalion South of the Fire Support Base.

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c. Intelligence during operations: The element participating in the attack was the 209th NVA Regt supported by unknown support and artillery elements. At least two of the three organic battalions of the 209th Regt directly participated. Document translations, intelligence reports and captured material indicate that attacking elements were reinforced by an additional heavy weapons element and cadre from the 32d, 312th, and 24th NVA Regts. Of particular note is the fact that the 209th is a newly introduced element into the theater. The unit was exceptionally well equipped. Flamethrowers, steel helmets, and sundry type items were found. Equipment appeared new and well maintained. Flamethrowers were used well forward to breach the perimeter bunkers and also supported the assault on the artillery position. The NVA troops appeared healthy and well fed.

d. Enemy use of communications wire: on 27 March, "B" Company conducted a sweep of the area North and West of the Fire Support Base, through which it was believed the main enemy force had withdrawn. In the course of the operation "B" Company killed one NVA soldier who was stringing communications wire in the draw 200 meters North of the Fire Support Base. The NVA soldier had in his possession wire, telephone, radio antenna, and a handset. Additional wire was found laid parallel to the front of the perimeter and leading North toward Hill 1198. Earlier on 22 March "E" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf also found wire laid East of the Fire Support Base which appeared to have been laid several days prior to the attack.

e. Chemical agents: A search of NVA KIA's on 26 March produced numerous NVA CS hand grenades. Each NVA soldier carried the typical two piece gas mask. On 27 March CS gas was received inside the perimeter and was reported by the DS artillery battery and "C" Company. The effects were those of CS; however, it could not be definitely established whether the CS was from incoming mortar rounds being received at that time, or from CS grenades outside the perimeter being set off by a brush fire burning at the time. On 29 April "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th Infantry and "A" Company captured an 82mm mortar base plate and 2 mortar rounds clearly marked CS. On 1 April, incoming mortar fire started an ammunition fire in the Fire Support Base. Mortar fire continued throughout the fire. Shortly after the fire began a considerable quantity of CS covered portions of the Fire Support Base. Again it is possible that this CS came from US munitions being set off by the fire; however, the ammunition dump contained no known CS munitions.

9. (U) MISSION: The mission of the 3d Bn 8th Inf was to establish a Fire Support Base at VA 930913 and seek out and block possible enemy units moving east towards Polie Klieng and Kontum City.

10. (U) CONCEPT OF THE OPERATION:

a. Phase I (20 March 1968): "A" and "D" Companies conducted a combat assault to coordinates VA 930913 to secure and prepare terrain for establishment of Fire Support Base 14.

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b. Phase II (21 March 1968) Fire Support Base displaced to coordinates YA 939913 units began patrolling to the North, West and South. "B" Company conducted an airlift to vic YA 939913 and assumed fire base security mission.

11. (U) EXECUTION: The order for movement to establish the Fire Support Base was received on 20 March 1968. At this time a visual reconnaissance was made of the prepared landing zone and the Fire Support Base location. Artillery was registered on the landing zone. The operation was delayed for three days due to heavy contact of the 3d Bn 503d Inf (Abn). Because of the warning provided the enemy by overflights and artillery registration, the 173d Infantry Brigade (Abn) (Separate) directed that the landing zone be changed from YA 915955 to YA 939913. As a deceptive measure landing zones were also prepared at YA 951909 and YA 951981.

a. 21 March 1968: "A" and "D" Companies, Engineer Platoon, Recon Platoon and Tactical Command Element made a combat assault into a landing zone located at YA 939913. Planning called for the entire battalion to close the new location on 20 March 1968 but non-availability of aircraft and contact on the landing zone precluded movement of the complete force. After closure of "A" Company, contact was made on the west side of the location with what was probably an LZ surveillance party. Movement was also reported 200 meters north of the location and "D" Company received small arms fire from the North. Friendly casualties due to contact were 1 US KIA and 1 US MIA. There were no known NVA casualties. A night location was established and preparations were made to receive the remainder of the battalion on 22 March 1968.

b. 22 March 1968: "B" Company moved to the Fire Support Base from their night location. "D" Company conducted operations to the North of the Fire Support Base and made contact with an estimated reinforced squad in bunkers - 3 US MIAs. Artillery was fired into the bunker area and "D" Company withdrew to night location approximately 300 meters to the Northwest of the Fire Support Base.

c. 23 March 1968: "C" and "D" Companies conducted an operation into area of contact on 22 March 1968. Contact was made at 230908 March 1968. NVA elements were occupying bunkers and employed automatic weapons, small arms, and flamethrowers. "D" Company casualties were 3 US MIA's. Two airstrikes were placed on the NVA bunker positions and artillery was fired in the form of a preparation for another attack on the position. "C" and "D" Companies attacked again at 231140 March 1968 and "D" Company suffered 1 US KIA and four US MIA. "C" and "D" Companies occupied positions in the contact area, but were forced to retire to their previous night location due to non-availability of aircraft for resupply operations.

d. 24 March 1968: Local reconnaissance patrolling continued from the Fire Support Base. "C" and "D" Companies were alerted to attack the NVA bunker positions upon completion of two airstrikes. "D" Company feinted headon into the bunker position and established a base of fire on the slight hill overlooking the "saddle position". (See inclosure 1, NVA saddle position). "C" Company maneuvered to flank the position from the West. No resistance was encountered as "C" Company moved around to the West flank of the bunker complex. "C" Company did discover

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3. NVA. KIA and miscellaneous items of NVA equipment scattered in the bunkers. At 1437 hours "C" Company observed one NVA and took him under fire with unknown results. "C" Company continued to sweep North until 1445 when they received small arms and automatic weapons fire and took 2 US WIA. An airstrike was placed on the enemy position and "D" Company moved to link up with "C" Company. As "D" Company began to move they received sporadic sniper fire from NVA North of their position implaced in spider holes. Both "C" and "D" Companies moved to eliminate this fire by fire and maneuver. "C" Company suffered 4 US WIA and accounted for 8 NVA KIA. "D" Company suffered no friendly casualties and killed 8 NVA by dropping grenades in spider holes. "C" Company occupied a night location vic YA 940917 and "D" Company occupied night location of vic YA 941915. Also

e. 25 March 1968: "B" Company moved from the Fire Support Base to relieve "C" Company in place and continue operations to the North. "C" Company returned to the Fire Support Base. 5 airstrikes were placed on enemy bunker positions vic YA 940916.

f. 26 March 1968: Enemy movement around the Fire Support Base perimeter began 260115 March 1968. The movement continued on a sporadic basis until 0320 hours when the attacking NVA exploded a bangalore torpedo and successfully breached the perimeter wire barrier. The initial NVA assault against the West and Northwest perimeter was characterized by swift coordinated movement, a high volume of fire and the use of flamethrowers to overcome the perimeter bunkers. Also the West and Northwest perimeter came under extremely intense small arms, mortar, and rocket fire. By 0400 "D" Company was extremely short of ammunition and, due to the NVA penetration and casualties, was forced to withdraw to the artillery parapets. At approximately 0400, the NVA launched a second main attack against the south perimeter. The engineer and recon platoons were sent to reinforce "D" Company. Headquarters personnel formed an ammunition carrying party to resupply "D" Company. At this point, the mortar fire against the west perimeter took the form of one continuous explosion. The NVA launched a second attack from the vicinity of the west bunker line which was directed against the westernmost artillery parapets. Flamethrowers were used and 105 ammunition and bunkers were set on fire.

The fighting in the artillery position became a parapet to parapet affair. Supporting artillery fires were called in the western portion of the bunker line while the DS battery fired beehive rounds due West across the perimeter. All available personnel from the Tactical Operations Center were formed into a counterattack force and dispatched to the artillery parapets to retake the one howitzer overrun by the NVA. "Spooky" arrived on station at approximately 0430 and began delivering suppressive fires and illumination on the Northwest, west and south perimeters. "A" Company attempted to enter the perimeter from the Northwest but was pinned down by a blocking force. On the fourth attempt, at 0615 "A" Company was successful. Airstrikes were delivered as close as possible to the West perimeter, using artificial illumination. Fighting in and around the perimeter continued until 0700 and incoming mortar, rocket and

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sniper fire continued to harass the Fire Support Base until 0800. Illumination resupply and medical evacuation began at 0630 hours. Police of the battle area and reconstruction of positions comprised the remainder of the days activities. Casualty figures for the day were 19 US KIA, 53 US MIA, 135 NVA KIA, 4 NVA captured (MIA). Weapons and equipment captured are discussed in paragraph 12. "E" and "D" Companies, 1st Bn 8th Inf arrived at the Fire Support Base at 0900 hours thru an LZ at Hill 006 YA 951909, secured by a Recon Team of the Recon Platoon. "D" Company, 3d Bn 8th Inf was moved to Dragon Mountain to refit and receive replacements. "A" Company remained in the Fire Support Base with "C" Company. "E" and "D" Companies, 1st Bn 8th Inf moved to a night location vic YA 940915.

g. 27 March 1968: Heavy movement was reported around the entire perimeter throughout the night. Hand grenades and M-79 fire was used to suppress and discourage the enemy movement. "E" Company conducted a sweep operation to the north and northwest of the Fire Support Base. Contact was made approximately 300 meters northwest of the perimeter. "B" Company killed one NVA who was stringing communications wire up the draw in the direction of the fire base. No further contact was made during the day, however reports of movement, relatively near positions, was reported frequently.

h. 28 March 1968: Again, heavy movement was reported around the perimeter throughout the night. Perimeter elements suppressed the movement through the use of hand grenades and M-79 fire. Sweep operations were conducted from the Fire Support Base. "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th made contact with an estimated 12 NVA 500 meters North of the Fire Support Base. "D" Company suffered 1 US KIA. "D" Company retired to "A" Company's position 300 meters North of the Fire Support Base to evacuate the 1 US KIA. "D" Company again moved North and was successful in reaching their objective at YA 937924. "A" Company closed with "D" Company to establish a night location. In the process of moving, "D" Company discovered one NVA KIA in the earlier contact. At 1730 hours, the NVA conducted a disorganized attack against the night location of "A" Company and "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf. Small arms fire was received from the North and West and indirect fire in the form of rifle grenades and mortars. Direct 105mm and 106 recoilless rifle fire was employed from the Fire Support Base and one airstrike was placed on attacking NVA elements just prior to darkness. The NVA elements withdrew to the Southwest and were subjected to all available indirect fires. At 1940 hours "E" Company came under attack by 75 RR fire from the North. Direct 105mm fire was placed on the NVA firing position and secondary explosions were observed. "A" Company received 2 US MIA, "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf received 8 MIA for total casualties for the day.

i. 29 March 1968: Heavy movement was reported around the perimeter throughout the night. Once again M-79 fire and hand grenades served to suppress the enemy movement. "A" Company and "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf also reported movement to the North and West of their night location. "E" and "C" Companies conducted local patrol operations from the

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Fire Support Base. Local patrol operations and security sweeps near "A" Company and "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf disclosed 2 NVA KIA in the previous day's contact. Hasty trails with blood signs were also located by "A" Company. At 0900 the Fire Support Base received incoming 82mm mortar fire. The incoming fire continued intermittently throughout the day. There were a total of 18 US WIA's due to mortar attacks. The battalion was supported by elements of the 7th Squadron, 17th Cavalry during the day. Cavalry elements were unsuccessful in silencing the mortars that harrassed the Fire Support Base. The mortar was generally located at YA 926917 and defied all efforts to neutralize its fire. All elements remained at their previous night locations.

j. 30 March 1968: Heavy movement was reported around the Fire Support Base and night locations. M-79 fire and hand grenades served to suppress enemy movement. Incoming mortar fire was received all during the day and accounted for 9 US WIA. At 1005 hours the battalion was directed to assault Hill 1198 vic YA 937931, to arrive at the objective area by 1700 hours. NVA were observed by "A" Company and "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf near their perimeter. The NVA were taken under fire with unknown results. Local patrolling was conducted near the Fire Support Base by "B" Company and "C" Company. A patrol from "B" Company made contact with an estimated NVA platoon with two 50 caliber machineguns 100 meters west of the perimeter. The patrol suffered 1 US WIA and 1 US KIA. Simultaneously the Fire Support Base came under sniper fire from the West. The patrol was recovered and direct and indirect fire was placed on the NVA platoon. At 1420 hours "A" Company moved North toward Hill 1198 and immediately began receiving NVA sniper fire taking 1 US WIA. "A" Company continued to move towards Hill 1198 and made contact with an estimated NVA company dug in in foxholes and bunkers. "A" Company immediately suffered 4 US WIA and were mortared in the rear of their position. "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf immediately South of "A" Company and securing the LZ began receiving small arms and mortar fire simultaneously with the two contacts to the North. "B" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf located at YA 940915 began receiving small arms fire from all sides. "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf moved one platoon North to secure the withdrawal route of "A" Company and "A" Company effected link-up with "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf at the former night location. As a result of this action "A" Company suffered 8 US KIA and 27 US WIA. "D" Company, 1st Bn 8th Inf suffered 4 US WIA. Six personnel from "A" Company, initially cut off in the initial firefight, successfully evaded and returned to friendly lines. Total casualties for the day's operations were 8 US KIA and 30 US WIA. Casualties inflicted upon NVA forces were unknown.

k. 31 March 1968: Once again all elements reported heavy movement around the perimeters. Hand grenades, M-79 fire and selected sniper activity suppressed the movement. Artillery defensive concentrations were also fired. Incoming mortar fire began at 0715 and continued throughout the day. All elements conducted local reconnaissance patrolling adjacent to their positions. One airstrike was delivered against the NVA

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mortar position shelling the Fire Support Base. Two airstrikes were delivered against enemy bunker positions North of Hill 1198. Upon completion of the airstrikes, two companies of the 1st Bn 35th Inf assaulted to seize Hill 1198. Slight resistance, in the form of one burst of sniper fire, was the only enemy activity. Total casualties for the operation was 1 US MIA. Total casualties of the day's mortar attacks were 16 US MIA.

l. 01 April 1968: Heavy movement around perimeters continued throughout the night. "Spooky", 81mm mortars, and defensive concentrations were employed to suppress the movement. Units conducted local sweep operations within 200 meters of their positions. Incoming mortar fire and ground fire against aircraft persisted throughout the day. Two airstrikes were directed on the ridge North of Hill 1198. Incoming mortar fire ignited a sling load of 106mm recoilless rifle ammunition and the fire spread throughout the Fire Support Base ammunition stockpile and communications bunkers. Incoming mortar fire also prevented an early effective fire fighting program. The fire was extinguished by 1920 hours. The NVA launched a recoilless rifle attack at 1910 hours and succeeded in scoring direct hits against 3 perimeter bunkers. The recoilless rifle was neutralized by direct 105mm howitzer fire and machinegun fire.

m. 02 April 1968: Heavy movement around the perimeter was reported throughout the night. Again, the combined fires of "Spooky", 81mm mortars, defensive concentrations, hand grenades, and M-79 fire effectively suppressed the movement. "P" and "D" Companies, 1st Bn 8th Inf initiated sweep operations to the Southwest of Hill 1198 in an effort to locate enemy mortar positions. Artillery elements of the Fire Support Base began movement to Kontum. Elements of the 7th Squadron 17th Cavalry screened the area Northwest of the Fire Support Base and successfully suppressed the NVA mortar fire. The remainder of the Fire Support Base minus heavy equipment displaced to Folie Kleng at 1600 hours and was co-located with the 2nd Bn 35th Inf.

12. (U) RESULTS:

a. Friendly casualties:

(1) Killed in Action.....	32
(2) Wounded in Action.....	165
(3) Missing in Action.....	1
(4) Captured in Action.....	0

b. Enemy casualties:

(1) Killed in Action.....	174
(2) Killed by Air.....	10
(3) Prisoner of War.....	4

c. Estimated enemy casualties: The following estimates are based on approved computation constants of 1.5 for estimated enemy killed in action and 3 for estimated enemy wounded in action:

(1) Killed in action.....	276
(2) Wounded in action.....	552

- d. NVA material losses were as follows:
- (1) Weapons captured.....119
 - (2) 82mm mortar rounds HE.....60
 - (3) 82mm mortar rounds CS.....18
 - (4) E-40 rocket rounds.....100
 - (5) 60mm mortars.....2
 - (6) Documents.....15 lbs
 - (7) Misc equipment.....2000 lbs
 - (8) 82mm mortar baseplate.....1
 - (9) Communications wire.....1.4 miles
 - (10) AK-47 ammunition.....7500 rounds
 - (11) Machinegun ammunition.....5000 rounds
 - (12) NVA frag grenades.....200
 - (13) NVA CS grenades.....75

Not all airstrike areas were reached by this unit. No US equipment was lost to NVA elements.

13. (U) ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

a. Supply: All resupply was conducted by air. Sufficient assets were made available for resupply. However the 1700 release time did cause some rearrangement in timing. The basic load of ammunition held in the Fire Support Base should be twice the number of companies manning the Fire Support Base perimeter. This technique allows for more responsive resupply of committed maneuvering elements and still allows for sufficient reserve for the Fire Support Base itself.

b. Maintenance: All items received in the Fire Support Base were acceptably maintained. However, constant supervision must be conducted to insure elements properly maintain those items of equipment not normally assigned in the field (106mm RR, 50 Cal MG, 90mm PR).

c. Medical: Treatment of casualties should be centrally controlled. The Battalion Surgeon should remain at a designated location to treat the most serious casualties. Unit medical personnel should remain with their respective element and be available should the need arise. A ten to fifteen patient medical facility should be included in Fire Support Base construction plans.

d. Transportation: Omitted.

e. Communications: Communications were good throughout the operation. The AN/PRC-25 and AN/PRC-16 were adequate and reliable.

f. Medical evaluation: Medical service in the field was adequate. In most cases dustoff support was outstanding.

g. Ammunition malfunctions: The only serious malfunction occurred with the 155mm fuze delay ammunition. The 155mm fuze delay shell was used against NVA bunker positions; however, the dud rate (7 out of 10 rounds) precluded effective use of these fires. Shell HE was substituted for the delay fuze ammunition but at a considerable loss of effectiveness. Concrete piercing 8" fire was also substituted for the 155mm fuze delay ammunition.

14. (U) SPECIAL EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES:

a. Recoilless rifles: The 106 recoilless rifle was used extensively throughout the period of operations, both as a direct support weapon for attacking elements and to fire suppressive fires against enemy direct and indirect fire positions. The weapon was far more responsive than

artillery and is particularly well suited to operations in hilly terrain with targets located at relatively close range. The greatest disadvantage of the weapon when compared to artillery was the lack of fuze options and limited volume of fire.

b. Reconnaissance Teams: A five man stay behind team from the Recon Platoon was positioned on Hill 906 during periods when other elements were not positioned there. This team provided surveillance over the Eastern and Southeastern approaches to the Fire Support Base and provided early warning of enemy movement. In effect, the positioning of this team accomplished the mission equivalent to a rifle company. The value of the Recon Team was realized on the morning of the attack against the Fire Support Base, when reinforcements were airlifted on to Hill 906. The stay behind team secured the landing zone and was available to provide accurate, on the spot information to the elements as they prepared to move to the Fire Support Base.

c. Ammunition fires: It was found that the most effective means of counteracting an ammunition fire is to immediately establish watch personnel in protected or seminprotected areas between bunkers. It is not possible with normally available firefighting equipment, to effectively suppress the fire; however, watch personnel can see that it is contained. Should the fire start to spread, it is necessary for the watch personnel to expose themselves long enough to prevent the spread of the fire. Chemical type fire extinguishers were the only item that produced effective results in fighting ammunition fires. This type of extinguisher should be available in the Fire Support Base.

d. Positioning of reserves: One rifle company was kept in a position approximately 200 meters Northeast of the Fire Support Base during most of the period of operation. This positioning provided an element capable of reacting to either the Fire Support Base or the maneuvering units. It precluded unacceptable density in the Fire Support Base, with the attendant risk of enemy mortar fire, while still providing a reserve element close at hand. The location of this company and its ability to move into the perimeter, was instrumental in repulsing the enemy attack and reestablishing the Fire Support Base perimeter.

e. Harrassing and interdicting fires: The terrain North of the Fire Support Base offers several excellent locations from which to attack the Fire Support Base with recoilless rifle fire. There are also numerous possible mortar locations in the area. In order to place effective suppressive fire upon likely weapons and still avoid excessive expenditures of any one type of ammunition, a plan was evolved whereby several types of weapons would fire on a rotating schedule throughout the night. A typical program would be the firing of two rounds of 155mm HE, followed within several minutes by two bursts of .50 caliber HMC fire, followed in turn by 81mm mortar fire. The schedule was sufficiently flexible that the enemy could not pick up an established pattern. At the same time it allowed for a widespread H and I program without seriously depleting stocks of any one type of ammunition.

a. Artillery support: The operation was conducted with the minimum of supporting artillery. The delivery of fires from those elements supporting this battalion was timely and effective but not of sufficient volume to make maximum use of time on target and destruction mission techniques. The location of the supporting batteries did not allow for adequate coverage of all the approaches into friendly positions. The firing rule of not firing over friendly troops maneuvering into the last one-third of the trajectory was a permanent problem due to the location of the Fire Support Base and the location of the primary fire support at Polie Klieng. An additional gun-target line either from the North or South into the operational area would have eliminated almost all of the "dead space" areas not covered by artillery fires.

b. Air support: Some difficulty was experienced in getting air strikes at the requested time. Airstrikes arriving late in the day were responsible for one attack being delayed one day, and another operation commencing at a time less than desirable. Air support requested to support attacks on fortified positions should arrive sufficiently early in the morning to permit attack of the positions, a thorough search of the position, and ample time for resupply and construction of a strong night location.

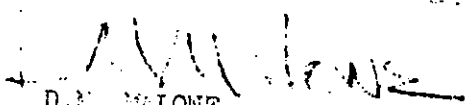
c. Communications: There is a definite tendency of junior leaders to move to the scene of the most intense enemy activity. Although their personal courage is commendable this practice often results in a loss of communications with sub-elements and insufficient or incomplete information being passed to the Command and Control Headquarters. Proper maintenance of communications and correct reporting procedures is a subject requiring continual emphasis at all levels.

d. Enemy movement near perimeter: In the course of the operation it was noted that the enemy movement near the friendly perimeter was related directly to H and I fires and the use of "Spooky" aircraft. As the intensity of the H and I fires was increased, enemy movement near the perimeter was also increased. The same situation developed when "Spooky" delivered his fire six to eight hundred meters from the perimeter. It appeared that the NVA were hugging the friendly perimeter in an effort to avoid the friendly fires. As this occurred defensive concentrations were fired. Results of these fires are not known. No NVA bodies were found; however, the NVA had sufficient time to clear and police the battle area. This method of fire did bring about a definite decrease in enemy activity near the perimeter.

16. (U) RECOMMENDATIONS: None.

6 Incls (Limited Dist)

1. NVA Saddle Position
2. Sketch, Attack on FSB
3. Sketch, NVA Penetration
4. Map, NVA Routes and Airstrike Locations
5. Map, A Company Attack and Airstrike Locations
6. Sketch, Defensive Fires


D.N. MALONE
LTC, Infantry
Commanding

21 April 1968

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report
Inclosure 1

NVA SADDLE POSITION

In a previous study of the correlation between types of NVA battle positions and types of terrain features, (Pattern Analysis of NVA Positions, Dak To Battlefield, HQ, 3d Bn 8th Inf, 29 Jan 68) it was shown that the NVA quite frequently construct unit positions in a saddle connecting two higher pieces of ground.

During the period covered by this report, attacking elements of the 3rd Battalion 8th Infantry operating West of Polie Klong came up against three separate "saddle positions" in three separate locations. The positions, each of which would accommodate an estimated NVA company, were all laid out in a similar fashion; furthermore, the tactics and techniques used by the NVA at each position were almost identical.

The "saddle position" and the NVA tactics associated herewith could be a unit characteristic, however, discussion with the Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion 12th Infantry indicates that his elements also encountered a "saddle position" some two months earlier when they were fighting a different NVA regiment North of Ten Het. Both the positions and tactics were similar to those encountered by the 3rd Battalion 8th Infantry. There is, therefore, a good indication that a particular NVA tactic has been identified and further, that this tactic is generalized, that is, it is used by more than one NVA regiment. A discussion of the position and the tactics used is included below in the hopes that it can be studied further at a level where a larger data basis is available.

The presentation is derived from patrol reports, aerial-visual reconnaissance, and discussion with those who fought in the positions. A graphic representation of the "saddle position" is attached as sketch #1. Post combat study and discussion of both the positions and the NVA tactics suggest strongly that the "saddle position" is evolutionary, developed from an NVA analysis which apparently assumes that:

1. US units habitually move along ridges or saddles which connects two pieces of high ground, rather than approaching by contour or swinging down across draws and fingers.

2. In moving from one piece of high ground to another when NVA are known to be defending in the area, US units will hold on one hill and prepare the next with intensive air and artillery preparation, directing the preparation primarily against the objective hill mass. Secondary emphasis or perhaps reconnaissance fire will be directed to the ridge or saddle connecting the high ground. The siting of the saddle position and the manner in which the NVA fight from the position both suggest that the saddle position was designed to take advantage of the two US "characteristics" noted above. The position is not sited on the objective hill mass, but is located so as to control the most

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likely approach, as well as limited (200-300 meter) flanking attempts. The majority of the fighting positions are not located on the top of the ridge or saddle (the probable US line of march), but rather on the sides. The position thereby possibly escapes one or more gun target lines. The position is sited so that it can be fought as either perimeter defense or ambush; in either case, good withdrawal routes and delay positions are available. Further, the siting of the individual positions permits the NVA to deliver heavy fire toward the center of their own position without masking each other's fires. Finally, the protective bunkers located some distance away in well protected draws on each flank provide protection during air and artillery preparations as well as a covered attack position for reinforcing units.

Elements of the 3rd Battalion 8th Infantry fought these positions on at least five occasions. These times the NVA used the saddle position as a defensive perimeter, and twice they employed it as an ambush position. The contact made by Co A, 3/8 on 30 March 1968 was the major contact with the saddle position, and is the best example of the tactics employed by the NVA when fighting from the position.

In this particular contact, Co A, 3/8 moved to contact down the ridge line leading to Hill 1198. The hill itself had received air and artillery preparation, and the company moved behind artillery reconnaissance by fire. After 400-500 meters of movement along the ridge, the company made contact with AF's and MG's, dug in at the base of the hill. As the company attempted to recover its wounded and pull back for more artillery preparation, the NVA attacked from both flanks and from the rear. A mortar was moved into position in the rear of the company and began to fire into the forward elements of Co D, 1/8 which had been given the mission of securing the high ground from which Co A, 3/8 had jumped off. Co A, 3/8 at this point fought to both flanks and the front, and was able to withdraw back to the jump off position moving through the "channel" held open by Co D, 3/8.

Discussion with company officers and NCO's strongly suggests that Co A, 3/8, following the preparation, had moved well into a saddle position and made contact on the far side of the perimeter. NVA troops at about the same time moved up from their protective bunkers in the draws to the flanks and into fighting positions on Co A, 3/8's flanks and rear. Two members of a squad who were cut off in the initial contact confirmed the presence of protective bunkers 300-400 meters downhill from the saddle position, with well used trails leading up into the position. The fighting was heavy up on the saddle as the two men came upon the protective bunkers, but the bunkers were not occupied.

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In the five saddle position contacts made by 3/8, two techniques worked exceptionally well. On one occasion, after the position had been located and fairly well defined, one company was moved forward to make contact with the near edge of the perimeter. The other attacking company swung well to the flank, down into the draw and back up on to the saddle on the far right side of the perimeter. At this point, the NVA apparently became confused and began running back and forth within the position. The first company then moved forward, cleaning out each individual NVA position and eventually securing the entire saddle position.

Stealth was employed on another occasion. A recon patrol located and sketched an unoccupied saddle position along a route of march to be used in a two company attack the following day. An air and artillery preparation was fired into the position and into the hill beyond it on the next day, however, when the lead company reached the position, the NVA had occupied it and took it under fire. The unit extracted its point squad then pulled back to work the position more with air and artillery. The artillery was started, however, the requested airstrikes were diverted to other missions. The artillery was continued, at a reduced rate, while the unit awaited sufficient air support. Late in the afternoon (approximately 1500 hours), a technique was devised which was derived directly from experience with a saddle position on the two previous days. As the artillery on the saddle position continued, a recon patrol was readied and the two companies which were to move to the high ground beyond the position were alerted for immediate movement. The artillery was shifted 700 meters beyond the position and the recon patrol moved out immediately to check the position. The patrol reported the position unoccupied. The companies were then directed to begin movement toward the position, and the recon patrol was moved uphill from the position to a point where they could observe NVA attempts to occupy the position. Under cover of the recon patrol's surveillance, the two rifle companies slipped through the position moving by bounds, covering each other's movement, and securing the hill beyond, which was the day's objective.

As the two companies closed to the top of the objective hill, the NVA mounted an uncoordinated and piecemeal attack, taking heavy casualties both small arms fire and direct fire artillery. In this case, it appeared that the NVA, upon leaving the protective bunkers below the saddle position, found that the US companies had already cleared the position. They then attempted to change their tactics but lacked the flexibility to do this successfully.

A third technique proved effective against the saddle position. Following the Co A, 3/8 contact mentioned previously, relieving units of the 1/35 walked through the saddle position and on to their objective with no resistance whatsoever. This ease of movement was the result of intensive artillery and air preparation (8-10 strikes were made available), directed

and adjusted by personnel who knew the location and the extent of the saddle position.

Still another technique for use against the saddle position was planned, but never executed because of insufficient time. The plan called for bringing artillery fires directly on the position, then continuing these fires while patrols on each flank located the feeder trails leading to the position and prepared claymore ambush positions on the trails. The artillery then would be shifted, and a company would feint along the saddle toward the position in the hopes of drawing the NVA out of their protective bunkers, on to the feeder trails, and into the ambushes.

The "saddle position" appears to be a near-standard NVA tactic. There are a variety of ways to fight the position successfully, depending upon the situation and the support available. Further and more extensive tactical analysis is recommended.