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173D AIRBORNE BRIGADE
OPERATIONAL REPORT LESSONS LEARNED
1 MAY 1968 - 31 JULY 1968



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SUBJECT: Operational Report Lessons Learned

15 August 1968

MAY

c. Operation Bolling II: In May the 173d Airborne Brigade (-), Task Force 4th Bn 503d Inf, continued Operation Bolling II in Phu Yen Province, with the continuing mission of locating and destroying the 95th NVA Regiment, providing security for the continuance of the all-important Vietnamese rice harvest (in conjunction with the 28th ROK Regiment and the 47th ARVN Regiment), providing security for the 577th Engineer Battalion and 173d Engineer Company for their mission of construction and mine-sweeping along Highway 436 and Routes 68 and 2D, and constantly providing AO Bolling with an infantry rapid-reaction company. The 4th Bn 503d Inf, in conjunction with elements of D Company 16th Armor, continued to conduct reconnaissance in force and search and destroy operations west of TUY HOA in efforts to locate and destroy enemy forces.

But the enemy forces, after taking heavy casualties from US, ROK and ARVN combat operations in middle and late April, were not easily located. As noted, the primary enemy organization in AO Bolling continued to be elements of the 95th NVA Regiment. On 2 May C Company 4th Bn 503d Inf, at 1005 hours at ~~BQ006496~~, engaged a small size enemy reconnaissance patrol. Using SA, AW and claymores, Charley Company accounted for 7 VC KIA (BC), captured 4 AK-47 and 3 SKS rifles, and had no friendly casualties. D Company 16th Armor and the 577th Engineer Battalion, while continuing construction of a roadbed for Operation REBUILD, on 8 May found 16 60mm mortar rounds in a canal in the vicinity of BQ955414, and destroyed the rounds in place.

On 13 May, B Company, Task Force 4th Bn 503d Inf, at 1430 hours at ~~BQ965555~~, spotted 2 VC/NVA moving in a westerly direction, engaged them with SA and M-79 fire, killing 1 VC (BC) and capturing an AK-47 and a Mauser. Again on 15 May, B Company made contact with six or seven NVA in khaki uniforms at BQ933544 at 1230 hours. One NVA was killed (BC), one NVA captured (POW), 12 pair of khakis, 25 pajama shirts, 45 pajama pants, 20 pounds of rice and one hand grenade were also captured, with two US wounded in action. Later on the 15th, at BQ889444 at 1845 hours, A Company, Task Force 4th Bn 503d Inf spotted and engaged 1 VC, killed the VC (BC) and captured 1 M-2 carbine. Through the remainder of the month of May, Operation Bolling II, Task Force 4th Bn 503d Inf continued reconnaissance and force and search and destroy operations, finding enemy bunkers, both fresh and well-used, several enemy rice caches and signs of recent movement, but the enemy was not to be found.

June

In June the enemy force was again evading contact. The largest sighting proved to be by LRP Team 15 at 0815 hours on 15 June, when, at ~~BQ014462~~, they sighted 30 individuals with weapons and rucksacks. Airstrikes were called in, but with undetermined results. Other than this sighting, no contact was made with enemy elements comprised of more than five individuals. The enemy continued to avoid any contact, and was again engulfed in attempting to re-form and re-supply his forces.

In Operation Bolling II the month of July paralleled June's activities until the end of the month, when the enemy made use of sapper units in an attack on Tuy Hoa Air Force Base. On the 2d and 3d of July, LRP team 16 observed 25 and 23 individuals moving in the open at BQ836783 and BQ849772. On both sightings artillery was immediately called in, and on the 2 July sighting, at 1500 hours, 4 VC/NVA were killed (BC). On 3 July, at 0715 hours, 5 VC/NVA were killed (Poss). The next day, 4 July, at 1830 hours, LRP Team 16, in an overnight observation post at ~~BQ567754~~, again made contact with a small but unknown size enemy force; this contact resulting in 1 VC/NVA KIA (BC).

From the period of 5 July until 26 July, little significant activity took place in Operation Bolling II. Task Force 4th Bn 503d Inf, under the command of LTC David L. Buckner, who had assumed command on 1 February 1968, continued to perform its mission of finding, fixing and destroying the enemy forces, but later in-

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telligence data revealed that the 95th NVA Regiment had been unable to rebuild its fighting strength after its heavy losses in the month of April and, due to steady and successful allied pressure on the regiment, had also been unable to re-develop a workable supply and logistics system.

Primarily for these reasons, the 95th NVA Regiment, in early and middle July, began to withdraw out of the TUY HOA City and the Bolling area of operations, moving westward toward and presumed into the Tri-Border Area, thus hoping to be able to re-equip itself with greater ease with new replacement personnel and supplies prior to returning to the Bolling area of operation. The 95th NVA Regiment left one of its three infantry line battalions, the 6th Bn 95th NVA Regiment, in the area to serve as a blocking force if needed.

On 29 July at 0150 hours, at Tuy Hoa Air Force Base, an enemy sapper team was successful in infiltrating the Air Force portion of the base perimeter defensive network and placing an estimated six demolition charges at various strategic areas inside TUY HOA Air Force Base itself. On exploding, these charges damaged two C-130 aircraft and one F-100 aircraft. In the ensuing action following the explosion, 6 VC were killed (BC) inside the defensive perimeter of the Air Force Base, and two AK-47's, two B-40 rockets, one 9mm pistol and an assortment of hand grenades and explosives were captured. Helicopter gunships, immediately in the air upon the explosions, accounted for another 3 VC kills (BC) at coordinates BQ495408.

This attack emphasized again the increased emphasis that the enemy is placing on sapper-type activity as a prelude or part of the expected third general offensive. For a description of sapper units operational methods, see sub-paragraph E, Section III, Intelligence.

Thus, for the months of May, June and July, Task Force 4th Bn 503d Inf continuously carried out reconnaissance and force and search and destroy operations in AO Bolling, but were faced with the task of locating and sustaining contact with an enemy who had no desire for either being located or entering contact. In addition to its continuing field operations, the 4th Battalion and D Company, 16th Armor continued to provide security for the omnipotent Vietnamese rice harvest, provided for the security of the 577th Engineer Battalion and the 173d Engineer Company for their construction and mine-sweeping missions along Highway 436 and Routes 68 and 2D as a part of Operation Rebuild, assisted the Air Force in defending the perimeter of Tuy Hoa Air Force Base and provided at all times an infantry line company for a ready-reaction force as needed.

From 16 to 27 July, Task Force 4th Bn 503d Infantry conducted operations in AO Black, with negligible enemy contact. For significant contacts in the months of May, June and July in AO Bolling, see Section III, Intelligence: Operation Bolling II.

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d. Operation Walker: In May the 1st Bn 503d Inf continued to secure the Camp Radcliff/An Khe complex, secure and maintain for vehicular traffic Highway 19 in the Tactical Area of Responsibility, conduct search and destroy, reconnaissance in force and cordon and search operations within AO Walker and to continue to support revolutionary development projects.

The continued presence of Task Force 1st Bn 503d Inf in AO Walker reflected a change in policy and desires by the Brigade, as previously infantry battalions had been rotated to Camp Radcliff and AO Walker monthly, but this policy was replaced by the thought that each infantry battalion could better fulfill its mission by remaining in a particular area of operations for a longer period of time, thus

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a. Combined Operations: The 173d Airborne Brigade has continued to increase its use of the combined ARVN - US combat operation, the purpose being to further assist the ARVN and their territorial forces to attain a higher level of combat effectiveness, to increase the Government of South Vietnam's continued progress in rural pacification, revolutionary development, to continue the defeat of VC/NVA forces, to increase the security of various Government of Vietnam programs and to make more available to ARVN Forces US equipment and logistics support. In the area of combined operations, a total of 23 were conducted. During one, the US and ARVN CP's were co-located. This combining of CP's proved to be most effective and enlightening for both ARVN and US personnel, as each was afforded the opportunity to observe, question and benefit from this combination. Thus, in future operations, more such combined CP's are to be established. The following combined operations are reported, by battalion, for the month of July 1968:

(1) 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry: In AO Walker, Task Force 1st Bn 503d Inf conducted nine combined operations totaling twenty-two operational days ranging from combined squad level ambush operations through platoon level, with multi-platoon operations consisting of one US platoon, one PF platoon and one US tank platoon. In addition, on 27 July 1968 the 108th RF Company, with one squad from D Company 1st Bn 503d Inf and the scout section of 1st Bn 69th Armor, conducted combined operations southwest of LZ Schuller.

(2) 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry: The 2d Bn, operating in AO Cochise, conducted twelve days of combined training with elements of the 40th ARVN Regiment. Subjects included in instruction were: First aid, ambush and counter-ambush techniques. Also, Task Force 2d Bn 503d Inf, with assistance from the 173d Engineers, improved the firing range at LZ Dog, facilitating the combined classes held there.

(3) 4th Battalion, 503d Infantry: Operations in AO Bolling, the 4th Bn conducted combined operations with the 47th Infantry Regiment and Phu Yen RF units. From 19 July and continuing as this reporting period ended a tri-country combined operation was being conducted with Task Force 4th Bn 503d Inf, 3d Bn 47th ARVN, and elements of the 9th ROK Infantry Division. D Company, 16th Armor also conducted combined training and operations with elements of the 47th ARVN Regiment. Task Force 4th Bn 503d Inf has integrated their Long Range Patrols, utilizing two ARVN and four US personnel per team, with good results forthcoming. SITREP, INSTUM and daily liaison has been effected between the 47th ARVN Regiment, Task Force 4th Bn 503d Inf and the 173d Airborne Brigade. This continues to prove to be mutually advantageous for all concerned elements.

(4) 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 50th Infantry: Operating in AO Cochise, Task Force 1st Bn (Mech) 50th Inf held six combined operations with elements of the 40th and 41st Infantry Regiments. From 3 to 7 and from 26 to 31 July the 1st Bn 41st Infantry and 1st Bn (Mech) 50th Inf conducted operations in the upper Soui Co Valley. One-day operations were conducted on 13, 15, 17 and 19 July. During the 26 to 31 operation the CP's of the two battalions were co-located with favorable results, as previously mentioned.

(5) 1st Battalion, 69th Armor: Operating in AO Cochise and AO Walker the 1st Bn 69th Armor conducted six combined reconnaissance in force operations and one combined cordon and search operation. One operation, on 8 July, with two RF platoons, two PF platoons, and Task Force 1st Bn 69th Armor, resulted in two VC KIA (BC) and 1VC CIA. On 22 July, in Phu My District, a combined operation with two Task Force 1st Bn 69th Armor companies, one 1st (Mech) 50th Inf rifle company and one rifle company from the 40th ARVN Regiment was conducted. The RF/PF platoons and ARVN platoons were found to be compatible to these combined operations. To

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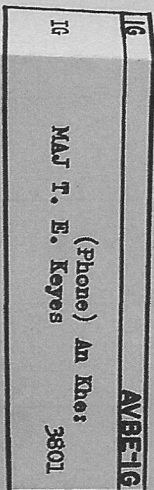
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