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AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES

23 Apr 68

3 RAR
NUI DAT

S-42-68

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21 Mar 68

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COMBAT OPERATIONS AFTER ACTION REPORT
BARIA AND LONG DIEN 7-9 FEB 68

Reference: A. Map VUNG TAU NORTH EAST 1:25,000 Series L1805, 6429 IV.

Type of Operation

1. Assistance to sector authorities in securing approaches to BARIA and clearing LONG DIEN village.

Dates of Operation

2. 071030H - 090930H Feb 68.

Location

3. Area BARIA YS 3760, 3761 and LONG DIEN 4358, 4359.

Command Headquarters

4. HQ 3 RAR - operational control. Tasks as requested by Senior Advisor Sector HQ VAN KIEP.

Task Organisation

5. B Coy 3 RAR with:

a. Under Command from 071030H - 090930H Feb 68

(1) Sect Aslt Pnr Pl 3 RAR.

(2) 2 X 106mm RCL Anti Tk Pl 3 RAR.

b. Remaining in direct support - FO Party 161 Fd Bty RNZA.

c. In support from 090830H - 090930H Feb 68 - Tp A Sqn 3 Cav Regt.

Intelligence

6. No estimate of VC strength or locations was available for the initial task of securing the WESTERN approach to BARIA. OC B Coy was flown into Sector HQ VAN KIEP for a briefing on the current situation at 070730H.

7. At 080700H information was received that a VC force of possible platoon strength was operating in LONG DIEN village and that an attempt by ARVN forces to clear the day previous had met with heavy SA fire coming from the SOUTH side of the paddy at YS 431584.

8. Subsequent contact later in the day and interrogation of a PW identified C25 Coy and the LONG DIEN Village Guerilla Unit operating in YS 4358.

9. The terrain in LONG DIEN Village was flat with excellent cover and concealment afforded by numerous trees, hedge rows, and small banana crops. The greater percentage of the houses were of brick construction.

Mission

10. a. To secure the approaches to BARIA on the WEST side of the SONG-DINH and prevent infiltration to the bridge at YS 375610.

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- b. To assist ARVN forces in clearing VC from LONG DIEN Village.

Execution

11. OC B Coy was briefed by Senior Advisor Sector HQ VAN KIEP at 070800H Feb 68 and the task confirmed by CO 3 RAR at 070930H Feb 68. The company was moved at 071039H without incident by TCV with APC escort to YS 376609 arriving at 071128H.

12. Subsequent deployment was carried out on foot with one platoon securing SOUTH and two platoons NORTH of Route 15 at YS 372610.

13. The remainder of the day was spent in preparing defensive positions and the Ni 7/8 Feb 68 passed without incident.

14. At 080700H OC B Coy attended a briefing at Sector Compound BARIA given by the Province Chief. It was requested that B Coy establish a blocking position in LONG DIEN Village astride the road from YS 435595 to YS 440592 and prevent VC movement NORTH out of the village. B/52 Inf Bn (ARVN) were to clear SOUTH from Sub Sector Compound YS 432596 and Coy 52 Rangers (ARVN) to clear EAST from YS 425589.

15. At 080815H details of the requested task were passed to CP 3 RAR and approval given by CO 3 RAR. At 080850H the company moved by TCV (ARVN) to Sub Sector Compound LONG DIEN YS 432596 and deployed on foot.

16. At 080945H 3/52 Inf Bn met with heavy SA fire in the vicinity of YS 432590 and withdrew. Supporting fire was called in on the area using both artillery and LFT's.

17. At this stage the company was deployed as follows:

4 pl, CHQ - Area YS 435591
5 pl, - Area YS 438589
6 pl. - Area YS 440593

18. At 081215H 5pl were fired on from the school at YS 435589. The platoon assaulted and 5 VC were seen to withdraw NORTH WEST during the assault. A search was then conducted of the area and resulted in 1 VC PW being captured at 081305H. This VC was found hiding in a rice barrel inside a house at YS 443590 and was in possession of an M1 Carbine, 2 X M26 Grenades and basic webbing.

19. At 081410H the PW was evacuated to 1 ATF by RAAF Iroquois from an LP at YS 435595.

20. At 081505H at YS 434594 Coy HQ came under mortar fire and three trees were engaged. 1 VC was seen to leave one of the trees and run into a house. The house was destroyed by 2 rounds of 84 mm Anti Tk gun fire.

21. At 081515H in the area of YS 435593 heavy friendly 155mm fire apparently called in by ARVN forces was falling uncomfortably close to the company locations. No ground clearance had been requested off OC 'B' Coy for this fire and some difficulty ensued in getting it stopped through Sector Artillery. This fire finally ceased at 081524H.

22. At 081631H a request was received to assist in finding the CO 3/52 Inf Bn and one of the US advisors who had possibly been wounded and left behind in the vicinity of YS 431589 when the unit withdrew earlier in the day.

23. At this time constant artillery fire was falling in the village SOUTH of Route 23 and two airstrikes were put in to the same area. The latter of the airstrikes concluded at 081815H and the company commenced the search

24. 4 pl moved SOUTH astride the road from YS 435595 to YS 431589 without incident.

25. At 081830H 5 pl came into heavy contact as they moved SOUTH to secure the LEFT flank at YS 434587.
26. At 081840H OC 5 pl called for assistance and 4 pl less one section were ordered to assault through to the SOUTH EAST. 6 pl at this stage were holding at YS 434593 and were ordered to move EAST to a position behind 5 pl and be prepared to assist. See After Action Report at Annex A.
27. At 081920H the coy had consolidated in 5 pls location and treatment of wounded was continuing.
28. At 081926H two of the wounded from 5 pl were evacuated by helicopter from YS 435595. At this time sniper fire was being directed at the helicopter from SOUTH of the LP.
29. Between 082000H and 082007H two further DUSTOFFs were effected at YS 434587 for evacuation of dead and wounded.
30. At 082015H the coy moved back to Sub Sector Compound LONG DIEN and were complete inside the compound at 08210CH.
31. At 082145H orders were received from CO 3 RAR to return to BARIA.
32. Route 23 between Sub Sector Compound and LONG DIEN Market was secured by Coy 52 Rangers (ARVN) and B Coy departed Sub Sector compound on foot at 082215H for RV at YS 413595 with TCV's provided by Senior Advisor Sector HQ VAN KIEP.
33. At 082325H the coy met up with the TCV's and APC escort at YS 408597 and returned to BARIA. The company then reoccupied the original positions WEST of the bridge.
34. At 090830H the company returned to NUI DAT by 1 Tp. A. Sqn 3 Cav Regt arriving at 090940H.

Results

35. a. Own Troops
 - (1) 2 Aust KIA
 - (2) 5 Aust WIA (1 DOW)
3 X M16, 1 X SLR, 1 X 25 Set less handset lost.
- b. Enemy
 - (1) 9 KIA (BC)
 - (2) 6 KIA (Poss)
 - (3) 1 PW
1 M1 Carbine, 1 9mm Pistol, qty SAA, 2 Grenades, 1 Set webbing and Notebook recovered.

Administrative Matters

36. B Coy moved to BARIA initially with additional water and ammunition and resupply was not required during the operation.
37. Excellent results were obtained from the M79 in clearing VC from Houses during the assault by 4 pl.
38. The DUSTOFF aircraft operated under extremely hazardous conditions. The only light available at YS 434587 was from two burning haystacks and both pilots (RAAF) exhibited extreme professional skill.

Lessons Learnt

39. Information received during the day of 8 Feb 68 from US Advisors with both ARVN units was extremely limited even after troops had been withdrawn from contact. OC B Coy found it necessary to visit Sub Sector Compound LONG DIEN at 081615H and after detailed questioning managed to obtain some idea of the situation.

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40. The company was untrained in village fighting. The more important lessons learnt were:

- a. The requirement to search "house by house" rather than sweeping an area.
- b. When VC are known to be in an area the requirement to put SA fire into likely looking trees.
- c. The need for speedy movement when in contact and to practice the old drill of "Down, crawl, observe, sight, fire", with emphasis on cover from fire as distinct from cover from view.
- d. Never assume the enemy is ineffective in an area which has been subjected to both heavy artillery fire or airstrikes.

(H.W. IRWIN)
Maj
OC B Coy

41. CO's Analysis

- a. The remarks of OC 'B' Coy are supported.
- b. The basic infantry tactics of "fire and movement" and the old fire drill quoted above by Maj Irwin, cannot be stressed too much. This was a difficult operation, which B Coy handled very well, due to good leadership and a sound knowledge of basic infantry tactics.
- c. A subsequent report from Sector HQ spoke highly of the ability of the company commander and the soldiers involved in this operation.

J.J. Shelton
(J.J. SHELTON)
Lt Col
CO

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ANNEX A TO
3 RAR AFTER ACTION REPORT
DATED 22 MAR 68

CONTACT AFTER ACTION REPORT No 1

PART 1 - Pl Sgts Report

1. Operation - LONG DIEN Sub Sector 8 Feb 68.
2. Report by - 61818 Sgt B.L. Young
3. 5 pl B Coy 3 RAR
4. Strength of pl in contact - 1 Offr 24 OR's.
5. Date/Duration: 081830H - 1920H Feb 68.
6. Location: YS 434587
7. Pl Task: To secure the LEFT flank at YS 433587 while 4 pl searched in the Area YS 431589.
8. Description of Action. The platoon was moving SOUTH WEST astride the road with two sections up. Approximately 40 metres to the front a figure dressed in greens was seen to run across the road from RIGHT to LEFT. All sections were informed and the platoon commander ran forward with his signaller. Both forward sections were then engaged by heavy automatic fire from the front. This fire was immediately returned and voices were then heard calling "UC DA LOI, Don't shoot, Don't shoot, ARVN." The platoon stopped momentarily and the platoon commander stood up and was shot through the leg. At the same time 15 VC moved across the road from LEFT to RIGHT and deployed in front of the RIGHT forward section. This group of enemy was engaged. The rear section had deployed facing outward on the LEFT flank and further VC were heard close to their location. The platoon was now under fire from the front and both flanks. The RIGHT forward section commander advised the platoon commander that two of his section were wounded and was then ordered to pull back. The LEFT forward section were then ordered to pull back and in doing so received three casualties. At this time the platoon commander was killed and his signaller seriously shot through the head. Both the LEFT forward section and the rear section pulled back and deployed in rear of a large house. The RIGHT forward sections withdrew and met up with 6 pl who had closed up in rear. The wounded were then treated and shortly afterwards the Company Commander and 4 pl arrived.
9. Terrain. Built up area with brick houses. Hedges divided each house and ran from the roadway for a depth of 30 - 40 metres. The extreme LEFT flank was overgrown and vision restricted to 10 metres. Vision on the LEFT of the road was restricted to 20 metres and on the RIGHT 30 to 40 metres.
10. Distance to enemy when sighted. Initial sighting 40 metres. Contact occurred at 30 metres on the RIGHT flank and 25 metres on the LEFT.
11. Which soldier first saw enemy. 2lt L.A. Taylor.
12. What was the soldier doing. Advancing off side of road.
13. What caused enemy to be noticed. 1 VC ran across road.
14. VC Strength and type. By weapon sound and sightings, estimated platoon plus.
15. Who fired first. VC.
16. What section weapons fired. All.
17. Enemy Reaction. The immediate reaction of the enemy was to redeploy troops on the RIGHT side of the road, counter attack and attempt to outflank the platoon.

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18. Sections immediate action: Both forward sections went to ground and returned fire.

19. In Casualties.

9 KIA (BC)
6 KIA (Poss)

20. Caused by:

2 by GPMG M60
3 by SLR
4 by M16

21. Friendly Casualties

2 KIA
5 WIA (1 DOW)

22. Caused by: LMG fire.

23. Approximate ammunition expenditure:

1200 X 7.62mm Link
420 X 5.56 Ball
170 X 7.62 Ball

24. Documents and Weapons Captured

1 X 9mm Browning Pistol

25. Lessons Learnt: The importance of using cover from fire to a maximum, coupled with fire and movement. Three of the friendly casualties occurred during the withdrawal of the LEFT forward section.

26. Other Points: The enemy had obviously prepared the position in advance and had calculated our reactions. He was bold in his immediate reaction to contact and reposition troops in order to out flank the platoon.

PART 2 Coy Comd's Comments: When the size of the contact became apparent 6 pl were closed up in rear of the contact area and a RIGHT flanking attack carried out by 4 pl. Limited fire from VC remaining in the contact area was still occurring. The attacks proved successful and the remaining VC withdrew. 6 pl on closing up came under fire and observed a group of VC moving NORTH EAST dragging two bodies.

(B.R. YOUNG)
Sgt

Signed

(H.W. IRWIN)
Maj

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