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CG 1ST MAR DIV

1ST FORCE RECONNAISSANCE COMPANY  
1st Reconnaissance Battalion (Rein)  
1st Marine Division (Rein), FMF  
FPO San Francisco, California 96602

WSO/jdr  
3100  
13 January 1966

022 67

From: Commanding Officer, 1st Force Reconnaissance Company  
Commanding General, 3rd Marine Division

Subject: Combat Operation After Action Report

- (a) 1st Force Reconnaissance Company Operation Order 4-66
- (b) Command Chronology August 1966 - November 1966

S & C FILES  
HEADQUARTERS  
1ST MARINE DIVISION, FMF

67 0183

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CODE NAME - Operation Prairie - Reconnaissance in Force

DATES OF OPERATION - 03 Aug. 66 To 30 Sept. 66 (OPCON 4th Marines)  
01 Oct. 66 To 17 Nov. 66 (OPCON 3rd Mar Div Fwd)

LOCATION - Quang Tri Province, RVN

COMMAND OF 1ST FORCE RECONNAISSANCE COMPANY (REIN) -  
03 Aug 66 to 07 Sept 66 - Major D. A. COLBY  
07 Sept 66 to 17 Nov 66 - Major B. G. LOWREY

1ST RECON BN S&C FILES

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1ST MAR DIV. CAM PEN.

TASK ORGANIZATION -

- a. 1st Force Reconnaissance Company 1st thru 6th Plts.
- b. 2nd Plt., Company "D", 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion (detached 1 Sept 66)
- c. 2nd Plt., Company "A", 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion
- d. 1st Plt., 3rd Force Reconnaissance Company (20 - 25 Sept 66)
- e. 1st Flt., Company "A", 5th Reconnaissance Battalion (20 - 25 Sept 66)
- f. 5th Plt., 3rd Force Reconnaissance Company (detached 17 Oct 66)

SUPPORTING FORCES -

- a. 12th Marines
- b. MAG 16 Forward
- c. Fixed wing aircraft from 1st Marine Air Wing and USAF

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DECLASSIFIED AT 3 YEAR INTERVALS;  
DECLASSIFIED AFTER 12 YEARS.  
DOD DIR 5200.10

d. U. S. Army Aviation detachment Gunships

e. See paragraph # 11 for results of support.

7. INTELLIGENCE - NVA 324-B Division infiltrated Northern Quang Tri Province and located generally between Route # 9 and DMZ.

8. MISSION - Determine size, disposition and location of VC/NVA units and infiltration routes. Engage targets of opportunity with supporting arms.

9. CONCEPT OF OPERATION - To insert small patrols, (5 man optimum size) by UH-1E aircraft to conduct ground reconnaissance and surveillance for 3-6 day periods.

EXECUTION -

a. From 03 Aug 66 to 30 Sept 66 99 patrols were conducted.

b. From 01 Oct 66 to 17 Nov 66 71 patrols were conducted.

c. Due to the clandestine nature of reconnaissance patrolling, contacts were made at close quarters. S/A contacts were usually initiated at 10 meters or less. Supporting arms of course were employed to the limits of visibility. The UH-1E Gunship was proved to be the most effective means of supporting a patrol in contact. It is the only supporting weapon that can deliver fire safely within 10 meters of the patrols location. The gunship is most useful when the patrol has been compromised and is in contact with the enemy. Artillery was most beneficially used when the VC/NVA were unaware of the patrols location and not in contact. This is due in part to the VC/NVA tactic of staying as close as possible to negate the force of our supporting fires.

d. The nature of this units work, coupled with the extreme vulnerability of a compromised team necessitated the development of a tactic whereby our small units could break contact with a numerically superior force. Our patrols gained fire superiority through the use of M-14 Modifieds, firing fully automatic and the M-79, then depended upon mobility and supporting arms for breakaway. In the later stages of our participation in Operation Prairie, each individual patrol member carried 2 CS grenades (M7A2) with protective mask; the concept being to use this system both to capture prisoners, exploit ambushes and break contact. It is believed that in at least one ambush the CS was instrumental in the proper and safe exploitation by our patrol. Subsequent to Operation Prairie the system has been successfully used in breaking contact and exploiting ambushes.

11. RESULTS: The results of the 170 patrols conducted are as follows:

	03 Aug 66 to 30 Sept 66	01 Oct 66 to 17 Nov 66	TOTAL
Number of Sightings	99	71	170
Number of VC/NVA Sighted	1,413	610	2,023
Number of Contacts	28	13	41
VC/NVA KIA Conf. S/A	55	18	73
VC/NVA KIA Prob. S/A	18	39	57
VC/NVA KIA Conf. S/A	9	4	13
VC/NVA KIA Prob. S/A	12	0	12
VC/NVA KIA Artillery Conf.	6	8	14
VC/NVA KIA Artillery Prob.	117	51	168
VC/NVA KIA Artillery Conf.	5	0	5
VC/NVA KIA Air	20	6	26
VC/NVA Captured	1	1	2
Weapons Captured	4	0	4
USMC KIA	0	0	0
USMC WIA	5	4	9
Number Artillery Missions	69	75	144
Number Air Strikes	19	8	27

2. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS -

a. Each patrol was a self sustaining unit, carrying all its needs for the expected period of operation plus 2 days. There was no resupply of units in the field. An individual patrol member carried 6 days rations, 6 canteens of water in addition to other needed items of patrol equipment. Each 5 man patrol carried 2 AN/PRC-25 radios. The M-14 modified was the basic weapon carried by each man, with an average of 250 rds.; also, 4 M-26 grenades, 1 smoke grenade, 1 or 2 CS grenades. One patrol member carried the M-79 grenade launcher with 24 rounds as an additional weapon.

It is to be noted that at the present time the Marine Corps does not possess a pack or harness system sufficient to efficiently and comfortably carry the equipment necessary for reconnaissance patrolling. This deficiency was overcome only through the use of U. S. Army web equipment i.e. belt suspender harness, hip packs and jungle mucksack. It would have been extremely difficult for our patrols to carry adequate supplies without this borrowed equipment.

b. Evacuation of Casualties: Med-evacs were rapidly accomplished by UH-1E helicopter. The small landing zone capability of this aircraft facilitated this rapid evacuation of wounded. The UH-1E was able to land in the craters created by 2000 lb. bombs, along with many other marginal zones in emergency situations.

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Airborne Artillery Missions	69	75	144
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12. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS -

a. Each patrol was a self sustaining unit, carrying all its needs for the expected period of operation plus 2 days. There was no resupply of units in the field. An individual patrol member carried 6 days rations, 6 canteens of water in addition to other needed items of patrol equipment. Each 5 man patrol carried 2 AN/PRC-25 radios. The M-14 modified was the basic weapon carried by each man, with an average of 250 rds.; also, 4 M-26 grenades, 1 smoke grenade, 1 or 2 CS grenades. One patrol member carried the M-79 grenade launcher with 24 rounds as an additional weapon.

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- c. Communications: Each patrol was equipped with 2 AN/PRC-25 radios. The arrangement in conjunction with four fixed radio relay sites was satisfactory. A patrol made hourly check-ins along with immediate reports of sightings and contacts. If a patrol was out of communications for more than 2 hours an aircraft was sent to the patrol's general location to reestablish contact. This was always successful. If this method had not worked the patrol would have reacted as per instructions in reference (a). The usual reason for losing communications was due to the patrol being masked by terrain features.

7. SPECIAL EQUIPMENT AND TECHNIQUES -

- a. U. S. Army harness type suspenders and packs: as stated in paragraph 12-a.
- b. M7A2 - CS grenades and protective masks: the uses envisioned for this equipment were:
- (1) To capture prisoners by taking advantage of the confused state the riot agent would create on the enemy.
  - (2) To break contact with an enemy unit of superior force.
  - (3) To enable the search personnel to safely enter the killing zone after the patrol had ambushed the enemy. This was proven to be a sound concept.
- c. The EI-58 and EI-59 CS Capsules: which are air delivered by helicopters and disperse into separate modules while falling toward the target, were kept on strip alert for a 10 day period. The NBC team of 1st Marine Air Wing was on hand to handle the delivery of these systems if a suitable target was found. The plan was to find a large concentration of VC/NVA and deliver the riot control agent in their midst. Prisoners would then be snatched by the patrol. A suitable target was not found for the employment of the EI-58 or EI-59 during the strip alert period.
- d. Scout dogs were employed on one patrol with inconclusive results.
4. COMMANDERS ANALYSIS - Operation Prairie was extremely beneficial to the 1st Force Reconnaissance Company. This operation in conjunction with Operation Hastings represented the first time in Force Recon history that a Force Recon Company conducted an extensive reconnaissance operation with company headquarters and all platoons present. Unfortunately no parachute entry was conducted therefore it is still not known how effective is the units parachute entry capability. Limited parachute training was conducted concurrently during the operation and did not interfere with the day to day operations. As borne out by the statistical summary in paragraph 11, the employment of the small recon-

naissance team proved successful and in keeping with the theories developed by this unit during ten years of training. It is felt that one of the most significant advances made in patrolling techniques was the attempt to employ CS gas as a standard defensive and offensive weapon of the small patrol. Subsequent to Operation Prairie the unit has continued to explore this technique with continuing good results.

Recommendations: None.

REFERENCES:

Commanding General, 1st Marine Division  
Commanding Officer, 4th Marine Regiment  
Commanding Officer, 12th Marine Regiment  
Commanding Officer, Marine Aircraft Group 16

*B.G. Lowrey*  
B.G. LOWREY

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*Copy New Castle*

1ST FORCE RECONNAISSANCE COMPANY  
1st Reconnaissance Battalion  
1st Marine Division (Rein), FMF  
FPO San Francisco 96602

1ST FORCE RECONNAISSANCE  
1ST MARINE DIVISION, FMF

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Ser: 038  
28 Mar 1967

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From: Commanding Officer  
To: Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division (Rein), FMF  
Via: Commanding Officer, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion

Subj: Combat Operation After Action Report; submission of

Ref: (a) 2dBn, 5thMar OpO 6-67

Encl: (1) Sketch of River Crossing Operation

1ST FORCE RECON CO  
S & C NO 02967  
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1. Code Name: Operation NEW CASTLE
2. Dates of Operation: 1stForReconCo involved 211900H-212400 March 1967, (D-1).
3. Location: Song Thu Bon River, vicinity AT 855436.
4. Central or Command Headquarters: 1st Force Reconnaissance Command Group located with 2dBn, 5thMar Command Group at AN HOA Airfield, vicinity AT 8747.
5. Task Organization: 1st Force Recon Co (-), (Rein), 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, Major Bill G. LOWREY

10 coxswains/scout swimmers, 1st Force Recon Co  
5 coxswains/scout swimmers, 1st Recon Bn  
1st Team, 3d Plat, 1stForReconCo, Lt DANKO

6. Supporting Forces:
  - a. Elements, 11th Marines (Rein) located An Hoa.
  - b. Helicopters of MAG-16.
  - c. One reinforced squad CoG, 2dBn, 5thMar.

7. Intelligence: See Reference (a).

8. Mission: To move CoE, 2dBn, 5thMar by rubber boat, in a clandestine manner, from the E bank to W bank of Song Thu Bon River vicinity AT 855436.

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~9. Concept of Operation

a. See Reference (a)

b. CO, coxswains and swimmers of 1stForReconCo (-) (Rein), eight four man crews supplied by H&SCo and CoE, 2dBn, 5thMar and CoE, 2dBn, 5thMar rendezvoused during hours of darkness at predesignated embark point on Song Thu Bon. Scout swimmers secured objective bank and CoE was boated across.

10. Execution

a. Boats, coxswains and scout swimmers were transported by helicopter to 2dBn, 5thMar CP on D-2. Boats were deflated and tightly rolled for this move. Immediately upon arrival at 2dBn, 5thMar CP boats were moved inside a GP Tent and inflated. All other amphibious equipment, ie. paddles, life vests, swim fins, etc., were similarly wrapped or disguised and kept inside the same GP Tent.

b. On D-1, eight four man crews, four from H&SCo and four from CoE were assembled and administered dry land rubber boat training in the GP Tent. Of the 32 men trained, only 3 had had prior rubber boat training. This training lasted  $3\frac{1}{2}$  hours.

c. At 211930 (D-1) the inflated boats, equipment and recon personnel were loaded aboard three trucks. They proceeded slowly and under black out conditions over the road from vicinity AT 874464 south to embark point AT 856436. At this point, they rendezvoused with CoE and crews. The embark point selected had a cleared area approximately 150 meters wide running to the edge of the river. A reinforced squad of CoG secured the point prior to the arrival of CoE and Recon.

d. At 212030 the five man scout/swimmers team, under cover of CoE 60mm mortars, swam to the west bank. Boats were unloaded, crews assembled and CoE organized into 3 man passenger teams. At 212100, the scout swimmers radioed "all clear" and the crossing operation commenced.

e. Between 212100 and 212233, 178 personnel in seven waves were moved across the river. The method of movement and control are as diagrammed in enclosure (1).

f. The 1st Team, 3d Plat, 1st Force Reconnaissance Company attached to CoE for the river crossing moved across the river as a part of CoE, then detached in order to proceed to vicinity AT 8142. In that area, they established an OP overlooking CoE blocking positions AT 820470.

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g. At the conclusion of river crossing operation all boats, reconnaissance personnel, security squad and H&SCo crews returned by truck to An Hoa. The trucks returned under black out conditions and all amphibious equipment was placed in the GP Tent. No amphibious equipment was ever viewed during daylight hours by any person other than Marines directly involved in the operation.

11. Result: CoE was transported across the Song Thu Bon by rubber boats as directed by reference (a). The enemy, to the best of our knowledge, was totally unaware of the maneuver.

12. Special Equipment and Techniques: A starlight scope was carried in the lead boat to aid in navigation and give added security.

13. Commander's Analysis: The clandestine river crossing operation was excellent. All phases went exactly on schedule and all units concerned operated with admirable precision. The enthusiasm of the individual Marines assigned to boat crews was the key factor in the success of the operation. By the third wave, they were well trained crewmen. We played the enemy's own game as well, if not better than him.

*B. G. Lowrey*  
B. G. LOWREY

DNM:tdg  
3000  
28 Mar 1967

FIRST ENDORSEMENT on CO 1stForReconCo ltr BGL:tdg over 3000 Ser: 038  
dtd 28Mar67

From: Commanding Officer, 1st Reconnaissance Battalion  
To: Commanding Officer, 2d Battalion, 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division  
(Rein), FMF

Subj: Combat Operation After Action Report; submission of

1. Forwarded.

*D. N. McKeon*  
D. N. MCKEON

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ENCLOSURE (1)

M  B CONTROL  
 MAINTAINED BY MEDIC  
 SCOUT SWIMMERS  
  
 ALL CONTROL  
 RADIOS ON Co TAC

NOTE: ALL RECON CONTROL  
 STATIONS WERE ON E CO  
 TAC NET. AFTER CROSSING  
 OPERATION, RECON CAME UP  
 ON BN TAC NET.

WEST BANK

1-2 K  
 CURRENT →

200 METERS

EAST BANK

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