

ORIGINAL  
BN After Action Rpt  
OP Gibraltar

18-23 Sep 65

2/327 BN<sup>+</sup> After Action Rpt

The Bde CO believed both reports were unsatisfactory + directed Bde S-3 to revise it so as "to present a true picture of this very complex operation." See file "OP Gibraltar - Revised draft rpt"

HEADQUARTERS  
2d Bn (Abn) 502d Inf  
APO San Francisco, Calif 96347

AVI-C

SUBJECT: After Action Report, Operation GIBALTAR.

8 October 1965

TO: Commanding Officer  
1st Bde, 101st Abn Div  
APO US FORCES, 96347

2/502 Rpt

1. References:

- a. 1st Bde OPOD 74-65 (GIBALTAR).
- b. 2d Bn (Abn), 502d Inf, OPOD 21-65 (GIBALTAR).
- c. Map Sheets, SOUTH VIETNAM, 1:50,000, 6752I and 6753II.

2. Background:

a. Late in August, the 2d Bn (Abn), 502d Inf (STRIKE FORCE) moved from the CAM RANH BAY area to an assembly area on Hwy 19 about thirty (30) km northwest of QUI NHON (BR7339). From this assembly area, the STRIKE FORCE conducted a heliborne assault to seize and secure AN KHE PASS. The mission of the battalion during subsequent weeks was to provide security along Hwy 19 in a sector which included AN KHE PASS. During this period, extensive daylight reconnaissance and night ambush patrolling, and four (4) battalion (-) size operations prevented enemy activity in sector.

b. Intelligence gathered by patrols and operations in the SONG CON RIVER VALLEY, east of AN KHE PASS, and north of Hwy 19, indicated a PAVN Battalion was located in the mountains east of the SONG CON RIVER and about fourteen (14) km north of Hwy 19 (BR6858).

c. The mission of the STRIKE FORCE on 18 September was to conduct a heliborne assault just to the east of the mountains and the suspected enemy location, near the village of AN MINH, and then move west into the mountains and destroy the PAVN Battalion. Another task force was designated to enter the mountains from the west.

d. The battalion was tailored for combat in the mountains. The force consisted of three (3) rifle companies and an attached ARVN Ranger Company. Approximately six hundred and twenty (620) men were included in the force. Mortars and recoilless rifles were not included because it was felt they could not be carried and effectively employed in the jungle covered mountains.

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SUBJECT: After Action Report, Operation GIBRALTAR. (Cont'd)

e. The 52d Avn Bn was designated to support the operation. Eleven (11) UH1B helicopters of the 117th Avn Co, eight (8) UH1B helicopters of A Co, 502d Avn, and seven (7) CH-54 helicopters attached from the 2d EMT, 7th Marines were provided for troop lift. Nine armed UH1B helicopters also supported the operation. The troop lift capability was one hundred and forty (140) men per lift. Four (4) lifts were required to transport the battalion to the landing zone at AN MINH. The flight time required for one (1) complete cycle was fifteen (15) minutes.

3. Operations:

a. The battalion departed an assembly area at the east end of AN KHE PASS (BR6347) at 180430 September and moved by convoy to the loading zone which was north of Hwy 19 near KHU PHO (BR745390). The Ranger Company joined the battalion at the loading zone. The battalion was organized and positioned for helicopter loading and the first helicopters arrived at 0630 hrs.

b. Two (2) A1E Skyraiders provided a ten (10) minute preparation on the assault landing zone immediately prior to the helicopter assault. The first lift, carrying one hundred and thirty eight (138) men from C Company, commanded by Capt Robert E Rawls, and a two (2) man air control team, conducted the initial assault landing at 0715 hrs. Company C, which was assigned the mission of securing the landing zone, encountered light enemy small arms fire and assembled with little difficulty (Inclosure 1 shows the initial positions occupied by C Company). The first platoon, commanded by 2d Lt James A Neilsen, moved into position without contact. Three (3) enemy personnel approached the platoon position on the trail from the north and withdrew rapidly. The second platoon, led by 2d Lt Dean R Anderson, followed a trail off the northwest corner of the landing zone and discovered an enemy campsite on the east bank of the nearby stream. As the platoon approached the camp, seven (7) personnel were observed fleeing across the stream. The camp had been hastily abandoned. The enemy left behind, four (4) bodies, seven (7) weapons, (2) rifle grenade launchers, eleven (11) hand grenades, twenty five (25) rifle grenades, four (4) 60mm mortar rounds, one hundred and eighty (180) rounds of 7.62 caliber ammunition, four hundred (400) rounds of 30 caliber ammunition, seventeen (17) one-quarter (1/4) lb blocks of TNT, a small bottle of nitroglycerine, and four (4) medical kits. The third platoon, commanded by 2d Lt George R Carter, moved to the southeastern edge of the landing zone and began receiving light enemy fire after the first five minutes. The weapons platoon, commanded by 1st Lt Gerald N Nakashima, secured the southwestern corner of the landing zone.

c. The battalion departed an assembly area at the east end of AN KHE PASS (BR6347) Capt Rawls led the company command group off the east edge of the landing zone and then moved south along the trail. He ordered the third platoon and weapons platoon to extend south. Second Lieutenant Carter left one (1) squad and a machinegun on the hill and followed Capt Rawls south with the remainder of the platoon. The weapons platoon probed down the trail to the southwest with one (1) fire team. The first and second platoons remained in position and 2d Lt Anderson maintained contact with 2d Lt Neilsen by stretching one (1) fire team across the northern edge of the landing zone.

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SUBJECT: After Action Report, Operation GIBRALTAR (Cont'd)

d. The second lift, which included the remainder of C Company, two (2) platoons of B Company, and the tactical CP landed at 0730 hours. During the landing, intense enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire was received. One platoon of B Company failed to land when the Marine CH-34 helicopters diverted because of the enemy fire and returned to the vicinity of the loading zone. The B Company Commander, Captain Wilford E. Roe, was wounded in a helicopter and was evacuated immediately. Second Lieutenant Howard R. Reeves assumed command of the elements of B Company. As a result of the enemy fire, all the CH-34 helicopters and five (5) of the UH1D helicopters were no longer able to fly. The lift capability was reduced to less than half, or about sixty (60) men. The armed helicopters were required to return to AN KHE and QUI NHON for rearming before the third lift could move.

e. During the period between 0730 hours and 0900 hours, Lieutenant Colonel Wilfrid K. G. Smith, the battalion commander, commanded a group of two hundred and twenty-four (224) men, surrounded by the enemy, without artillery or air support. Initial estimates were that the battalion had landed within the defense perimeter of a PAVN Battalion. It was later concluded that two Main Force Viet Cong Battalions were located in the area. The enemy was surprised by the air strikes and the first lift, but within fifteen (15) minutes they had begun to reorganize their defenses. The initiative of the individual soldier and his prior airborne training (the conventional airborne concept of assaulting and organizing an airhead in enemy territory) saved the unit during this critical period.

f. At 0750 hours, Captain Rawls was killed by a burst of machinegun fire as he was directing Second Lieutenant Carter to deploy his platoon (-) in the rice paddy at (A) (Inclosure 1). Elements of B Company which had organized under fire at the Northwest corner of the landing zone, began to organize a defensive perimeter with C Company, attempting to fill major gaps in the defense. The tactical CP organized and began to operate at (B) (Inclosure 1). The third platoon of B Company, led by Second Lieutenant Edward C. Schillo, organized on the landing zone, followed the trail off the Northwest corner, moved through Second Lieutenant Anderson's platoon, crossed the stream and occupied an evacuated enemy campsite at (C) (Inclosure 1) without resistance. The platoon searched the camp and discovered rice and boiling water still in permanently constructed ovens, pistol belts with ammunition lying on benches, one (1) carbine, one (1) .45 caliber pistol, parts of uniforms scattered about, large stores of rice, bottles of explosives, twelve (12) sixty (60) mm mortar rounds, wooden dummy sixty (60) mm mortar rounds, an M-4 mortar sight, grenades, medical equipment, and a Communist Party flag. Communications wire extended the entire length of the campsite.

g. At 0805 hours the battalion (-) began to receive intensive sixty (60) mm and eighty-two (82) mm mortar fire, and the first platoon of C Company was forced to pull further back down the eastern hill in order to gain more cover. At 0830 hours, Second Lieutenant Schillo, in the campsite across the stream, began to receive an increased volume of enemy fire from the North, and East across the stream. He returned his platoon back across the stream and through Second Lieutenant Anderson's platoon. As he was in the process of returning,

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his platoon was strafed the stream and on the West bank by armed helicopters. No casualties were sustained. While Second Lieutenant Semallo was returning to the airhead, the first platoon of C Company, now on the side of eastern hill at (Inclosure 1), heard whistles and verbal enemy commands. The enemy had moved to a position at the top of the hill, only fifteen (15) meters beyond the platoon position, and began intense automatic weapons, machinegun, and mortar fire. The platoon withdrew thirty (30) meters to better cover at a paddy dike at the base of the hill.

h. Tactical air support was received for the first time at 0904 hrs. Until this time the defense of the airhead had consisted solely of small arms and automatic weapons carried in the heliborne assault. No artillery was within range. The air strikes were immediately effective and continued to be very effective as approximately forty-seven (47) sorties followed through the day. The air support was unquestionably an important factor which added to the success of the unit during the critical period, because it prevented the enemy from leaving their positions long enough to reorganize and launch a concentrated attack. Air strikes were requested within one hundred (100) meters of friendly positions through most of the day because of the close contact situation. Two (2) men of B Company were killed by close air strikes during the afternoon.

i. The armed helicopters returned from AN KHE and QUI NHON, and the third lift attempted a landing at 0920 hrs on an alternate landing zone eight hundred (800) meters south of the airhead. The lift carried sixty (60) men -- elements of A and B Companies, commanded by the A Company Commander, Capt Gerard Landry. Extremely heavy enemy fire was received during the landing attempt. The 117th Avn Co helicopters landed eight (8) men from A Company and twenty-eight (28) men from B Company at two (2) separate locations. The remainder of the helicopters diverted because of the intense enemy fire and returned the troops to the loading zone. Capt Landry had been wounded in a helicopter during the assault, and was evacuated immediately upon arrival at the loading zone. At this time all three (3) rifle company commanders were out of action. First Lieutenant Charlie Y. Talbott assumed command of A Company at the loading zone. First Lieutenant Phillip W. Mock assumed command of all elements which remained on the loading zone, which included A Company, one (1) platoon of B Company, and the ARVN Ranger Company. The commander of the 52d Avn Battalion, Lt Col Cody, reported all twenty-six (26) of the troop lift helicopters were out of action because of mechanical difficulties caused by enemy fire received. Three (3) helicopters had not been able to return to the loading zone, but all crews had been rescued. Five (5) armed helicopters remained in action and continued to support as often as possible, with frequent runs for refueling and rearmament. A fuel truck was dispatched from AN KHE to the loading zone.

j. While the third lift was attempting to land, elements of C Company at the southern edge of the airhead were pinned down by heavy enemy resistance. Second Lieutenant Carter attempted to return his platoon (-) up the trail at the Southeast corner of the landing zone. He became separated with the remainder of the company command group from the platoon, by the machinegun which had killed Capt Rawls and by enemy small arms fire from both East and West. Lieutenant Carter continued north and turned the C Company command group over to 1st Lt Nakashima, who assumed command of the company. Lieutenant Carter joined the squad he had left tied in on the hill with the right flank of the first platoon. Sergeant First Class Michael Rivera assumed command of the remainder of the third platoon, which was cut off by enemy fire. At the same time, the weapons platoon of C Company was halted near the trail at the Southwestern corner of the landing zone. The platoon launched an attack across the hill at (Inclosure 1) against the enemy mortar and

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 Authority NND 873541

SUBJECT: After Action Report, Operation GIPRALTAR (cont'd)

machinegun position. One (1) man was killed, and the attack was halted by enemy fire. The platoon withdrew back up the trail and moved East across the Southern edge of the landing zone to assist in the extraction of SFC Rivera from (A) (Inclosure 1). SFC Rivera had managed to break through, and he met the weapons platoon, led by PSG Joseph Rounsaville, at this time. Both elements returned to defensive positions on the South West corner of the landing zone and filled the gap between the second platoon of C Company and a squad of B Company.

k. At 0940 hrs, Maj Herbert J Dexter, Battalion S-3, moved to the base of the hill to the east, and ordered 2d Lt Neilson to conduct an immediate attack to seize the hill. Heavy enemy resistance was encountered, but the objective was taken. Several casualties were sustained and Maj Dexter was killed near (C) (Inclosure 1). Second Lieutenant Neilson was ordered to withdraw his platoon a short time later and move to the opposite corner of the landing zone. He was stopped enroute and ordered to occupy a position at (D) (Inclosure 1) to serve as a reserve element. Second Lieutenant Schillo was ordered to move the third platoon of B Company across the landing zone to seize the hill. He did this without sustaining a casualty. As the platoon consolidated the objective, they observed what appeared to be bushes moving down the far side of the hill. The enemy used camouflage with maximum effect throughout the battle.

l. During the late morning hours, Lt Col Smith continued to organize the airhead. He learned that ammunition was being used at a rapid rate and requested resupply. The Brigade Commander, Colonel James S. Timothy, informed Lt Col Smith that TF MARK was moving across the mountains from the west, and that every effort was being made to obtain additional helicopters for resupply, medevac, and to lift the remainder of the battalion to an alternate landing zone nearby. The Vietnamese Ranger Battalion Commander, who was aware of the apparently critical situation, offered to provide a second company, if the Brigade would make a request to the 22d ARVN Division. Major Bliss W. Wilder, Battalion Executive Officer, arrived at the landing zone at 1030 hrs and assumed command of the remaining elements. Plans were prepared for the movement and employment of the remainder of the battalion. A new landing zone was organized because the initial landing zone was covered with helicopters under repair and filled the gap between the second platoon of C Company and a squad of B Company.

m. At the alternate landing zone to the south of the airhead, the eight (8) men of A Company, led by PSG Robert L. Jack, and the twenty eight (28) men of B Company, led by PSG Robert Wightman, fought independantly until they were able to link up at about noon. Communications were established with the airhead, but this element remained cut-off and was unable to move to the airhead or withdraw to the south. A machinegun, machinegun ammunition, and a case of M79 grenade launcher ammunition were recovered from a downed helicopter and used to maximum effect. The helicopter was prepared for destruction and the element remained in a tight perimeter through the day and night. Three (3) enemy mass attacks were repelled by this element. He did this without sustaining a casualty. As the platoon consolidated the objective, they observed: At noon the battalion (-) continued to defend with only air support. Artillery was not yet in a position to support. Helicopters were not available for resupply or medevac.

n. During the late morning hours, Lt Col Smith continued to organize the airhead. He learned that ammunition was being used at a rapid rate and requested resupply. The Brigade Commander, Colonel James S. Timothy, informed Lt Col Smith that TF MARK was moving across the mountains from the west, and that every effort was being made to obtain additional helicopters for resupply,

SUBJECT: After Action Report, Operation GIBALTAR (cont'd)

o. At 1330 hrs two (2) helicopters of the 1st Air Cav Div arrived with a sling load of ammunition, and an eighty-one (81) mm mortar with eighty (80) mortar rounds. Five (5) MIA were evacuated, but one (1) crew chief remained on the landing zone when the helicopters were forced to depart rapidly because of intense enemy fire. The mortar sight was not removed from the helicopter and the weapons platoon of C Company utilized the captured M-4 sight to employ the weapon. At 1410 hrs, a CH-47 (Chinook) of the 1st Air Cav Division, attempted to land for medevac. During the attempt, the Crew Chief was killed and the co-pilot was wounded, and the helicopter was forced to depart quickly without accomplishing the medevac mission.

p. During the afternoon, the battalion (-) defended against periodic enemy probes and occasionally intense enemy fire was received, particularly when helicopters attempted to land. At this time the casualty estimate was 12-15 KIA and 25-30 MIA. At 1600 hrs a UH1B evacuated 2 MIA from the thirty six (36) man element to the south, and at 1630 hrs, three (3) medivac helicopters made an unsuccessful attempt to evacuate wounded personnel. Lt Col Smith reported that three (3) companies would be required to make the situation tenable.

q. At about 1600 hrs, an element of the 1st Air Cav Division arrived at the landing zone with nineteen (19) UH1D helicopters, seven (7) UH1B helicopters and one (1) CH-47 Chinook for troop lift. One company of the 2d Bn (Abn), 327th Infantry was already aboard the helicopters. Beginning at 1630 hrs, the task force, commanded at this time by Lt Col Edward J. Collins, the commander of the 2d Bn (Abn), 327th Infantry, began a heliborne assault on an alternate landing zone three thousand (3,000) meters east of the airhead. The task force included the remainder of the 2d Bn (Abn), 502d Inf; one (1) company of the 2d Bn (Abn), 327th Inf; and two (2) ARVN Ranger Companies from the 23d Ranger Battalion. Two (2) full lifts were required and the Chinook made two (2) additional lifts to move the last remaining Vietnamese elements to the landing zone.

r. The relief force began to move west immediately. Artillery support moved into position at dusk. By darkness the airhead was organized (Inlosure 2), but one (1) enemy platoon remained between the major element and the small force on the alternate landing zone. Both relief forces stopped moving during the night and waited until morning before continuing. Flareships provided continuous illumination all night. Until about 0300 hrs the enemy moved about the perimeter policing bodies and equipment. The enemy probed six times, generally when a new flareship was adjusting its pattern.

s. By morning, Lt Col Smith estimated that only two (2) enemy platoons remained in contact. At 1010 hrs, TF COLLINS linked up with the force on the alternate landing zone and continued north to relieve Lt Col Smith.

t. At 1315 hrs, the battalion (-) was extracted from the area by helicopters of the 1st Air Cav Division. TF COLLINS remained to search the area and TF MARK continued to move across the mountains to link-up with TF COLLINS.

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4. Results:

a. Friendly:

(1) Personnel: Thirteen (13) KIA and twenty eight (28) WIA.

(2) Equipment:

(a) Combat losses include four (4) .45 cal pistols, two (2) M16 rifles, two (2) binoculars (6x30), and one (1) surgical and instrument supply set. The total value of these items is \$613.82.

(b) Some weapons and items of equipment have already been recovered during the processing of wounded personnel. The above items may also be recovered during further processing.

b. Enemy:

(1) Intelligence information:

(a) The evaluation of captured documents has indicated that the enemy force was the 95th Bn and elements of the 94th Bn, of the 2d Main Force Viet Cong Regiment.

(b) The area was being used as a training center and base camp. Captured mortar mockups, straw silhouette targets, propaganda leaflets, and weapons manuals support this conclusion.

(c) The enemy was well trained. Enemy tactics included assault line formations and coordinated attacks. Whistles and bugles were used for signal and control during enemy assaults. Enemy command control and discipline were excellent. On several occasions, the enemy advanced aggressively in the open, under the control of small unit leaders.

(d) The enemy was well equipped with a variety of weapons, as indicated by the large amount of enemy ammunition expended, and by the number of weapons observed and captured (see paragraph 4C(2)). The enemy wore tan and camouflaged fatigues, steel helmets, and web gear with metal or plastic canteens. Opium, in small quantities, and medical aid kits were captured.

(e) The enemy was not prepared for the heliborne assault. On the contrary, because of the element of surprise, the first lift received little opposition. The enemy was not able to establish automatic weapons positions until after the first lift was organized on the landing zone. The abandoned boiling water, warm food, weapons and equipment discovered in the camps near the stream was an early indication that the enemy had been surprised.

(f) Intelligence data obtained from captured documents is now being evaluated and the results have not been received.



(g) The 2d Bn (Abn), 502d Infantry, was opposed by a well organized, highly trained, experienced, and well equipped enemy. The enemy unit displayed a high degree of morale and discipline. It appeared to possess the capability for sustained combat operations.

(h) The enemy assigns approximately five (5) personnel to a crew served weapon. The extra personnel carry ammunition, act as pointers, and are prepared to relieve the gunner as required. The crew attempts to point significant and easily distinguishable targets such as leaders, communications personnel, and medics. This enables the gunner to engage the important targets rapidly.

(2) Casualties: The enemy body count was two hundred and fifty seven (257) KIA. The number of enemy WIA is unknown. Five (5) enemy personnel were captured.

(3) Weapons captured:

(a) United States Weapons:

4 Thompson sub-machineguns, .45 cal  
1 Carbine, M-1  
2 BARs, M1918A1  
4 M-1 Rifles  
2 M-26 grenades  
1 White Phosphorus grenade

(b) Foreign Weapons:

1 German MG 34 machinegun, .30 Cal  
3 Russian PPSH sub-machineguns  
5 stick grenades  
1 Chinese Communist 40mm rocket launcher  
2 Rounds Chinese 82mm mortar ammunition

(4) Ammunition, demolitions and explosives captured:

(a) Approximately 2,000 rounds of various caliber small arms ammunition.

(b) Three (3) one quarter ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ) lbs blocks of Chinese Communist TNT.

(c) One (1) twenty (20) lb satchel charge.

(d) A small quantity (one (1) to two (2) lbs) of nitroglycerine.

(5) Conclusion: The enemy included more than one (1) Main Force Viet Cong Battalion. It was evidently surprised and dispersed. Some regrouping was effected by enemy platoon and squad sized elements operating to the North, South, and East of the landing zone. After the intense battle during the day,

the enemy attempted to inflict as many casualties as possible during the night with periodic harassing attacks and probes of the perimeter, while they simultaneously policed the battlefield and conducted a night withdrawal.

#### 5. Lessons Learned:

a. When support (aviation, artillery, etc) planned for a combat operation is considerably reduced during the final stages of planning, the situation must be re-evaluated to determine whether the operation is still tactically sound.

b. A unit must be given at least one day between operations so that personnel may rest, receive instructions, and prepare for the next operation.

c. During the planning phase of a combat operation, all sources of intelligence must be tapped to determine the latest information pertaining to enemy capabilities in the objective area. Timely dissemination of this information is vital to the unit conducting the operation.

d. Artillery support must be available to infantry units during all phases of an operation.

e. Aerial photographs of the province indicated that field fortifications were to be found in and around most of the villages in the AN NINH area as well as in the Song Con River Valley. The indication of the presence or absence of such fortifications should not be considered as conclusive evidence of the recent presence or absence of the enemy.

f. The prestrike of the landing zone by two (2) A1E (Skyraider) aircraft was not sufficient preparation for the heliborne assault. Despite the loss of the element of surprise, a thorough preparation of the landing zone by artillery and Tactical Air is essential to prevent the enemy from exploiting the weakness of a unit when it is reorganizing during the initial stages of a heliborne assault.

g. An alternate landing zone should be selected for all heliborne assault operations. If the conditions on the selected landing zone are not suitable during the assault, the unit may quickly and simply switch to the alternate landing zone. This alternate landing zone should be at least 1000 meters from the planned landing zone, so that it is improbable that it can be defended by the same enemy unit which is resisting on the planned landing zone.

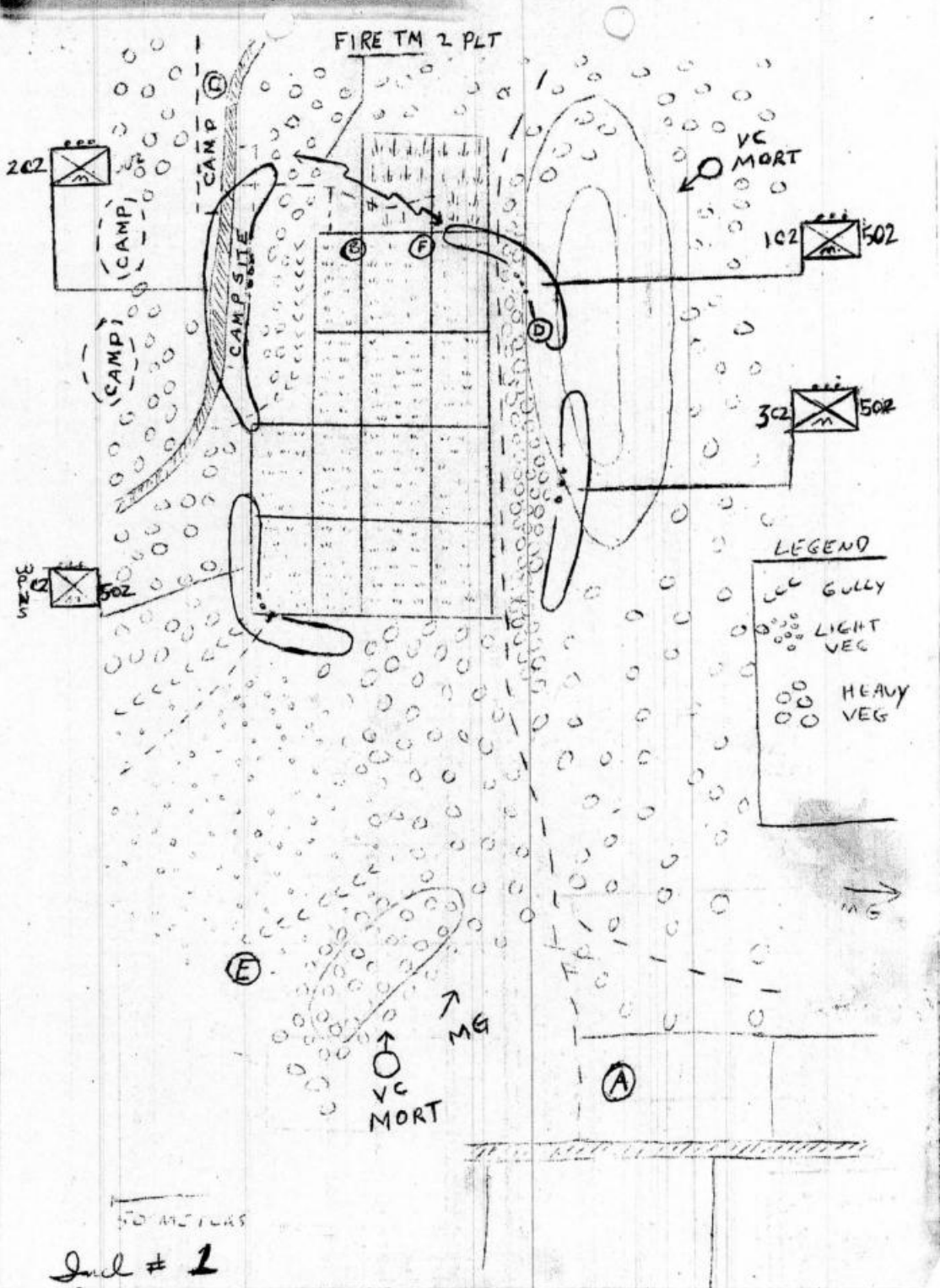
h. When landing zone security elements discover prepared positions during the initial assault, they must leave an element to occupy and secure the position until the entire unit has landed and is organized.

i. The landing zone security element must immediately seize and secure all critical terrain in the vicinity of the landing zone.

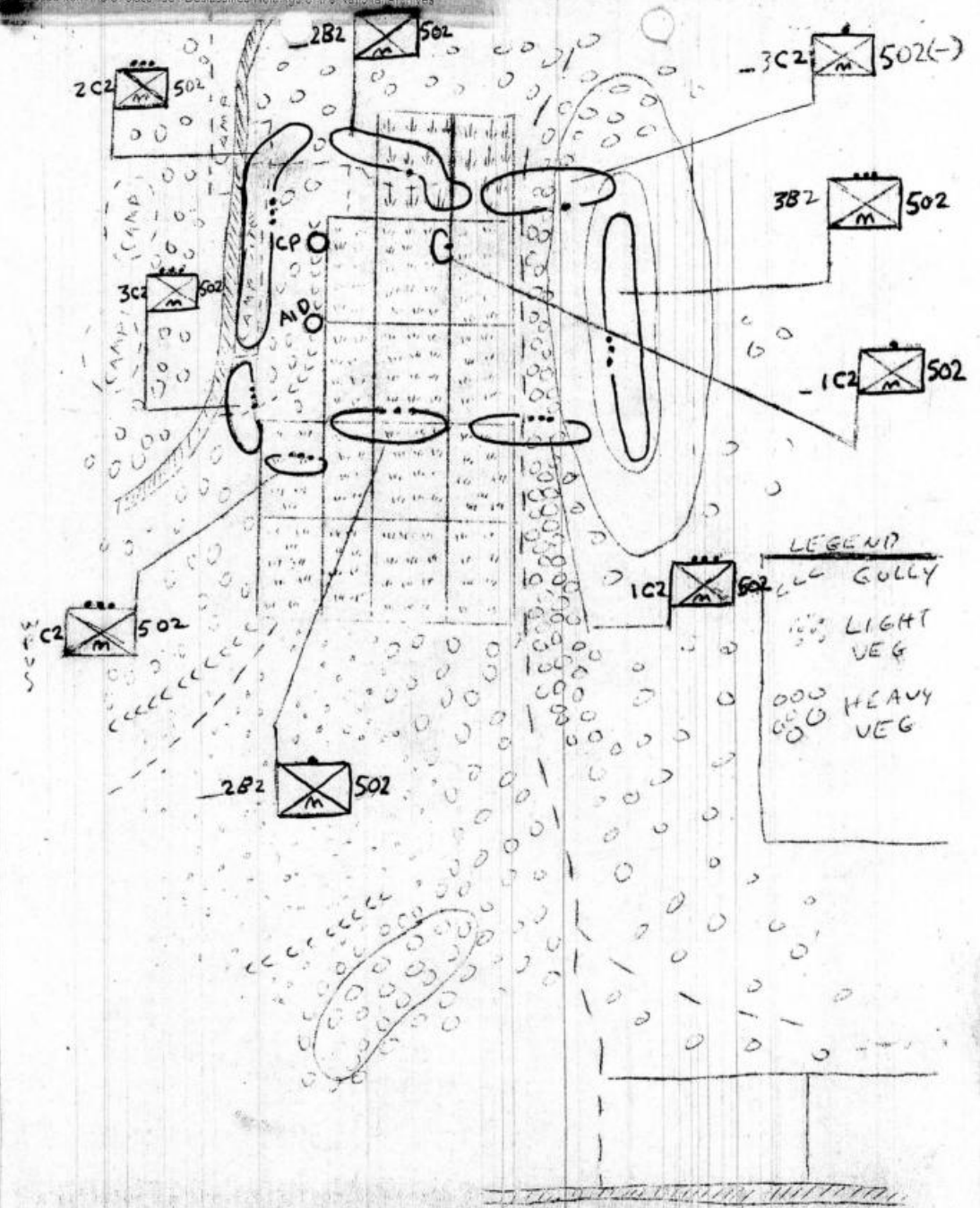
j. The time allotted for the distance to be travelled in a heavily vegetated and/or mountainous area, must be sufficient to permit adequate security during movement.

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HEADQUARTERS  
 2nd Battalion (Airborne)  
 327th Infantry  
 APO SF 96347

*FILE*

AVLB-C

04 October 1965

SUBJ:

*after action Report Gibraltar*

*2/327 Rpt*

TO: Commanding Officer  
 1st Brigade Task Force, 101st Airborne Division  
 APO SF 96347

1. References:

- a. OPOD 74-65 (Operation GIBALTAR), Headquarters 1st Brigade Task Force, 101st Airborne Division, dated 161800H September 1965.
- b. Maps, South Vietnam, 1:50,000, Sheets 6853 III, 6852 II, 6852 III, 6757 II, and 6752 I.
- c. Verbal orders issued to CO, 2d Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry, referenced in paragraph 3 below.

2. Background:

a. 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry was tasked by paragraph 3 f. OPOD 74-65, referenced above, to provide one (1) rifle company to TF MARK (Task Organization), to provide a one (1) rifle company reserve force to be deployed within two (2) hours of notification, and to continue defense of assigned sector, AN KHE. E Company, Commanded by Capt James W Price, was selected for attachment to TF MARK in that A and C Companies had completed Operation PUSHER at 172350H September 1965. The third (3rd) Platoon, of B Company, led by Lt Carl Johnson, had been attached to A Co for Operation PUSHER, and had been released at 172350H September 1965 from that mission.

b. C Company was selected as the reserve unit. There was no planned attachment of additional forces to the battalion to enable it to continue defense of the assigned sector in the event the reserve company was committed. Tentative arrangements were then made with Captain R F Keating, S-3, Detachment-22, US Special Forces, AN KHE, for the attachment of two (2) platoons of CIDG personnel if needed. It was known that it was not possible to adequately defend the sector with one Company.

c. The initial time given for the attachment of B Company to TF MARK was 171700H September 1965. This was not possible because of the time schedule for Operation PUSHER, which had been submitted to S-3, 1st Brigade Task Force, and approved. The new time was set at 180330H September 1965, with a departure time from AN KHE of 180245H September 1965.

3. Operation:

a. Receipt of Warning Order, Preparation and Movement:

(1) At 181000H September 1965, Captain McClain, Brigade Assistant S-3, informed this battalion that the reserve company may be deployed.

(2) At 181010H September 1965, Lt Col Wilson, Brigade DCO, informed the battalion that there was a possibility of the battalion (-) consisting of the two (2) remaining rifle companies and a TAG CP being employed and that movement would be by truck or helicopter. Report was rendered to Brigade at 181050H September 1965.

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ber 1965 that each rifle company would require 27 each UH-1D or 36 UH-1B helicopters for movement in one (1) lift and that the TAC CP would require two (2) UH-1D helicopters. If trucks were used, 9 each 2 1/2 trucks per company would be required (18 personnel per truck).

(3) At 181105H September 1965, Brigade DCO notified the 2d Battalion (Airborne), 327th Infantry that the commitment of a force was firm. At 181112H September 1965, the force was fixed as a two (2) company force, with TAC CP. Battalion LNO was dispatched to Brigade at 181107H September 1965.

(4) The Battalion Commander, Lt Col Edward J Collins, reported to the Brigade Commander at the Brigade TAC CP (Forward) vicinity coordinates BR 636514 at 181205H September 1965. Upon arrival, the Battalion Commander was given a briefing on the operation. Col Timothy, Brigade CO, then issued a verbal order to move two (2) rifle companies (A and C) by helicopter to an LZ vicinity coordinates BR 642515 and upon closure, to assume command of TF MARK elements, to seize Objective F, vicinity coordinates BR 703528 and, on order, to seize Objective B (Hill 232) vic coordinates 728534 and effect link-up with TF SMITH. In the meantime, in accordance with instructions issued by the Battalion Commander prior to his departure, the Battalion Executive Officer, Major Burton J Walrath, was reorganizing and reconstituting the defense of the battalion assigned sector of the AN KHE perimeter while the Battalion S3, Major Charles W Dyke, was assembling A and C Companies and the Battalion TAC CP at the airfield, AN KHE. Major Walrath contacted Captain RJ Keating, S-3 of the Special Forces Camp, and received a total of three (3) CIDG Platoons. Special Forces Captain Bass was the coordinator. Major Walrath also requested and was to receive one (1) rifle company from the 2d Battalion 5th Cav, 1st Cav Div (Air). Instead, 2/327 was relieved of its defensive mission at approx 181315H September 1965 and this mission was assumed by 2/5th Cav. A and C Companies, and the Battalion TAC CP, were assembled at the airfield ready for loading at 181240H September 1965, less one (1) platoon from each rifle company. These platoons required helicopter lift from hilltop outposts on the AN KHE perimeter. The Battalion Commander contacted the Battalion TOC at AN KHE and alerted the 4.2" Mortar Platoon for movement by motor to Grid Square BR 6450, for initial attachment to TF MARK. It was planned that the platoon would revert to Battalion control upon arrival of the Battalion (-) in the area. The platoon was dispatched at approximately 181300H September 1965 and closed into new location at approximately 181430H September 1965.

(5) By 181240H September 1965 all personnel of A and C Companies and the Battalion TAC CP were ready for loading at the airfield except one platoon each from A and C Companies on the hilltops on the defensive perimeter. Lt Miller, Brigade S3 Air, was unable to give any information as to how many aircraft and what type would be available. No parking plan or loading plan had been established. At 181320H September 1965 the Battalion S3 met with Col Burdett, CO, Air Transport Brigade, 1st Cav Div (Air) to coordinate the movement. Initial coordination effected enabled hill top elements of Companies A and C to be moved to the airfield at AN KHE. Movement was completed by 181450H September 1965.

(6) At 181420H September 1965 Lt Col Collins issued verbal order to Companies A and C, giving them the LZ and tentative plan of action upon arrival. Coordination with the aviation element commanders (Col Burdett, and Lt Col's Kellar, Russell and Cranford) continued. At 181450H September 1965, Lt Col Kollar, the Lift Commander, informed Lt Col Collins that engine time was 181510H September 1965 and take-off at 181515H September 1965. By 181505H September 1965 C Company plus six (6) personnel, En TAC CP, were loaded.

(7) At 181510H September 1965 the Battalion Commander received a FRAG ORDER to divert the first lift to an LZ vicinity coordinates BR 747387. TF COLLINS would consist of one (1) rifle company 2/327, one (1) rifle company 2/502 and two (2) ARVN Ranger Companies. The first lift arrived at the LZ vicinity coordinates BR 747387 at 181540H September 1965. Lt Col Collins was then issued a verbal FRAG-ORD and given the following mission by Col Timothy, Brigade CO: TF COLLINS, con-

DECLASSIFIED  
 Authority **AND 873541**

AVLB-C

0 October 1965

SUBJECT: After Action Report, Operation GIBRALTAR

sisting of C 2/327, A 2/502 (plus one (1) platoon B 2/502) and two (2) Companies of the 23rd ARVN Ranger Battalion, moves by helicopter to LZ vicinity coordinates BR 790538, link-up with elements, TF SMITH vic coordinates BR 744538, and assist in evacuation of casualties. On order, TF COLLINS was to conduct a coordinated attack with TF SMITH (-) to seize Objective B vicinity coordinates BR 728533.

b. Movement From LZ To Link-Up Points:

(1) CO, 2/327th Inf issued verbal order at 181615H September 1965 to Captain Williams S Martin, CO C 2/327th Inf, Lt Talbot, CO A 2/502 and to first and fourth Companies, 23rd ARVN Ranger Battalion (through Captain Duanno E Messer, USA Senior Advisor). This order outlined a plan whereby the first lift, using all available aircraft, would move C 2/327th Inf with Bn TAG CP into LZ. LZ would be secured by this unit until A 2/502nd Inf under Lt Talbot landed. C 2/327th Inf and A 2/502 would then begin movement to link-up point, moving generally West. The Ranger's were to land in the third and fourth lifts and follow C 2/327th Inf. Bn S3 coordinated TAG Air availability, frequencies and call signs to be used.

(2) The first lift (C 2/327th Inf) landed at 181657H September 1965 at LZ vicinity coordinates BR 785537. The second lift (A 2/502 Inf) landed at 181815H September 1965 and began movement immediately, following C 2/327th Inf.

(3) Movement was slow, but without incident, with the exception of the accidental discharge of an M-79 Grenade Launcher by a member of A 2/502 Inf, wounding another member of that unit. The wounded man was given first aid and continued to move with the column. At 182130H September 1965, TF COLLINS was moving in two separated elements. The TF then halted for the night, "buttoning up" in two close defensive perimeters at coordinates BR 764531 (C 2/327th Inf and A 2/502 (-) and at coordinates BR 766531 (first and fourth Companies ARVN Ranger Battalion, plus two (2) platoons A 2/502). During the night (18-19 September 1965), the US Platoons with the ARVN Rangers captured five (5) VC personnel and the Rangers killed one additional one. Confusion developed, that was never fully clarified as to whether or not these personnel were armed.

(4) At 190615H September 1965 TF COLLINS moved out and effected link-up with TF SMITH at 191055H September 1965. Enroute, the soldier who was wounded by the accidental discharge of the M-79 was evacuated by Medical Evacuation Helicopter. A 2/502, which had landed with only one (1) meal C-rations, was also resupplied enroute.

c. Actions from Link-Up With TF SMITH Until Extraction:

(1) After effecting link-up with TF SMITH at 191055H September 1965, plans were made to begin the evacuation of the wounded and the dead. Those plans were altered by a decision to withdraw the 2/502 and by a FRAGORD issued by Headquarters, 1st Brigade to TF COLLINS at 191130H September 1965. This order, in six (6) parts, required TF COLLINS to:

- (a) Extend TF SMITH airhead.
- (b) Report positions of all elements with respect to Point Of Origin A (BR 7260).
- (c) Secure extraction of TF SMITH (-) and downed helicopters in area.
- (d) Screen TF SMITH area for US MIA.
- (e) Seize Objective B after a-d above were executed.
- (f) Report location of TAG CP ASAP.

(2) Extraction of TF SMITH began with evacuation of wounded personnel and VC captives at 191300H September 1965. By 191410H September 1965 extraction of all elements of TF SMITH, including all US dead and all captured weapons and equipment then assembled was complete. To accomplish this, the airhead had been expanded by 400-600 meters and the immediate extraction area had been secured. Only one (1) disabled UH-1D helicopter had been located within this expanded airhead. Beginning at 191230H September 1965, TF COLLINS requested the total number and the location by

DECLASSIFIED

Authority

AND 873541

04 October 1965

SUBJECT: After Action Report, Operation GIBRALTAR

coordinates of all helicopters to be evacuated. No firm answer was given and the requirement to furnish continuous security in the immediate area of the downed helicopters was not clearly stated. Therefore, with a mission to seize Objective B, without the assistance of TF SMITH (-) as originally planned, a decision was made to attack Objective B at 191500H September 1965 following an air strike from 191430-191445H September 1965 and an intensive artillery preparation from 191445 - 191500H September 1965. At 191530H September 1965 Brigade S3 ordered a halt to movement. Lead elements of TF COLLINS were then approximately 300 meters West of LD in dense brush. At 191630H September 1965, TF COLLINS was ordered to secure helicopters until they could be evacuated. The entire TF then returned to a defensive perimeter around the one (1) known helicopter and, by help from the Artillery NO overhead in an OF-1, a second helicopter, a USMC H-34, was located, marked, and secured by one Ranger Company accompanied by 1st Lt Bode, US Advisor. All elements of TF COLLINS were in position to secure these two (2) downed helicopters by 191600H September 1965. Aerial resupply, which had been requested earlier for delivery prior to darkness in vicinity of Objective B, was called for and diverted to an LZ vicinity coordinates BR 745534 at approximately 191845H September 1965.

(3) At approximately 191850H September 1965, machine gun fire was received in the resupply LZ area from a small knoll approximately 500 meters NE of that location. Simultaneously 60mm Mortar fire began landing vicinity Ranger's CP, approximately 150 meters from the resupply LZ, and 81 or 82mm Mort fire was landing SW of the LZ. Shortly after this fire began, the Ranger element was hit by a VC squad patrol. The Ranger's killed five of these personnel and captured one (1) wounded VC who later died. At 191900H September 1965, the Dn CP, vicinity coordinates BR 743536 was hit by friendly artillery fire which resulted in eleven (11) casualties. Six (6) of these personnel were evacuated by air at 192100H September 1965. The aircraft, from the 227th Helicopter Utility Battalion, Air Transport Brigade, 1st Cav Div (Air), did an outstanding job of locating and landing at the improvised LZ. Sporadic mortar fire was received throughout the night. A large percentage of the rounds were duds.

(4) TF COLLINS had been instructed at 191630H September 1965 that rigging personnel, to prepare the downed helicopters for evacuation, would arrive in the area at 200645H September 1965 and that extraction of these aircraft would begin at approximately 200645H September 1965. Consequently, the area was swept at first light, with all security in position to receive the helicopter rigging crews at 200645H September 1965. An LD time of 0830 hours was established for Objective B, based on the planned helicopter extraction time. The rigging crews did not arrive until 200745H September 1965. Extraction was completed at 200826H September 1965. TF COLLINS crossed the LD for Objective B at 200930H September 1965, following an air strike from 200900H - 200930H September 1965 and an intensive artillery preparation from 200915H - 200930H September 1965.

(5) Movement to Objective B was slow and tedious due to the dense vegetation and terrain, made worse by heavy rain and slippery footing. Objective B was secured at 201317H September 1965. Radio and visual contact was made with A Company 2/327th Inf, commanded by Captain Michael T Plummer, then attached to TF MARK. Movement to the link-up point began at 201415H September 1965. Lead elements of TF COLLINS linked up with TF MARK at 201615H September 1965 and all elements closed at 201910H September 1965.

(6) Upon arrival at TF MARK CP, Lt Col Collins assumed command of all forces in the area in accordance with instructions from CO, 1st Brigade. The first and fourth Ranger Companies and A 2/502 were detached and continued to move to a pick-up point on the SONG CON River vicinity coordinates BR 640515, where they reverted to parent unit control. By 201910H September 1965, TF COLLINS consisted of A, B and C Companies and Mortar Platoon 2/327th Inf; A 2/17th Cav and one (1) CIDG Company size force from the BINH KHE Special Forces Camp. These forces were deployed in a defensive posture vicinity coordinates BR 703528 during the night of 20-21 September 1965. There were no incidents during the night. Water and rations were stockpiled, ready for issue by TF MARK, upon arrival of TF COLLINS in area.

(7) 1st Brigade S3 issued instructions to begin movement 210515H September 1965 from TF MARK CP (Objective F) area to helicopters landing area vicinity coordinates BR 642513. Permission to change movement time to 210630H September 1965 was requested and granted. One (1) soldier from C Company 2/327th Inf had broken his foot the previous day. Due to heavy fog, a Medical Evacuation Helicopter could



DECLASSIFIED

AV

Authority

NND 873541

04 October 1965

SUBJECT: After Action Report, Operation GIBRALTAR

not land. The man therefore was carried out by members of B Company 2/327th Inf, the trail element in column. All elements closed at the helicopter landing area at 211000H September 1965. The CIDG Force and A 2/17th Cav reverted to parent unit control upon arrival at the extraction point. Extraction was completed by 211430H September 1965 and by 211430H September 1965 all elements had returned to assigned defensive positions vicinity AN KHE.

d. Support Operations: The Battalion Executive Officer, Major Durton J Walrath, moved a forward CP to vicinity coordinates DR 645448 and co-located with 1st Brigade forward CP at that location. This proved to be very beneficial in that this forward CP was able to monitor closely the needs of TF COLLINS and was directly responsible for the timely resupply in the face of changing times and locations on the night of 19 September 1965. This CP element was also instrumental in requesting and coordinating the Medical Evacuation Helicopters that picked up the six (6) seriously wounded personnel at 192100H September 1965. The movement of Lt Robert H Vaughn, Executive Officer, C Company, Master Sergeant William S Eblin, Dn Operations Sergeant and an interpreter into the operational area by the helicopters that went into extract TF SMITH proved to be of great help to TF COLLINS.

e. Employment of A Company: As stated previously, B Company was attached to TF MARK effective 180330H September 1965; C Company remained with TF COLLINS. A Company was initially left on the airfield at AN KHE when C Company departed at 181515H September 1965, expecting the helicopters to return for the movement of A Company on the second lift. A Company was instead attached to TF MARK, moved by truck and joined TF MARK at 181730H September 1965 vicinity coordinates DR 637513.

4. Lessons Learned:

a. Adequate helicopter lift must be available to quickly mass a battalion size force in the area of operations. Piecemealing forces into an area can lead to defeat in detail.

b. Adequate fire support in position, is essential for helicopter operations. A thorough artillery and fire plan is essential. TF COLLINS called for and received more than 7,000 rounds of artillery fire and for 104 air sorties during the operation.

c. The hasty formation of a TF from units unaccustomed to working together reduces the potential combat efficiency of those units. Whenever possible, it is desirable to keep the basic combat unit, the battalion, intact.

d. The soldiers of the 23rd ARVN Ranger Battalion performed in an outstanding manner. This is attributed to their good leadership and to the patience, understanding and professional competence of their Senior Advisor, Capt Duanne E Messer, and his capable assistants.

e. Those operations which are based on sound intelligence, planned in detail, simple to execute and which have a reliable plan for reinforcement have the best chance for success. The initial commitment of all available forces, relying for reserve from a unit already committed to an assigned sector, is not adequate. The reserve must be physically available and adequate to influence the action. This is particularly true when faced with a duplicity of mission (i.e. defense of sector plus offensive operations).

f. A firm mission statement is needed by all forces involved in an operation of this type. This particularly applies to a relief force in that a number of implied missions or tasks are obvious on the ground and priorities must be established. This was applicable to this unit in reference to the priority assigned to the security of the downed helicopters which detracted from and delayed ground tactical operations.

g. Flares must be judiciously used when in a perimeter defense. They can expose friendly positions as well as enemy.

h. A medic should habitually move with a dismounted TAC CP element in that it is often removed from any other medical support.

i. Folding litters for medics are needed. Improvised poncho litters are not adequate for back injuries.

