

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, 2D BATTALION (AIRBORNE) 502D INFANTRY
APO SF 96347

AVBD-C

4 September 1967

SUBJECT: After Action Report, Operation STRIKE FORCE

TO: Commanding General
1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division
ATTN: AVAD-C
APO U.S. Forces 96347

1. General:

a. Name of Operation: STRIKE FORCE

b. Date of Operation: 31 August - 1 September 1967

c. Location: QUANG NGAI Province

d. Control Headquarters: 2nd Battalion, 502d Infantry (Airborne),
1st Bde, 101st Abn Div.

e. Reporting Officer: LTC Ralph Puckett Jr.

2. Task Organization: Ref OPORD 32-67, 2-502 Bn, dated 31 August 1967.

3. Supporting Forces:

a. Army Aviation provided the STRIKE FORCE with the most flexible, efficient large scale air-lift support ever experienced by this unit. In a 36 hour period (310700-011900) the 2-502 Battalion conducted four battalion size moves, consisting of movements to and from a staging area, an air assault and final extractions. The assault was made on multiple unscheduled LZ's due to last-minute changes in the tactical plan, and final extractions were made from multiple PZ's. Adaptability to these late changes was out-standing. A total of 50 lift slicks, 4 CH-47's, 12 gunships, 2 Dust-offs, 3 C&C ships, 1 repair ship, and 1 smoke ship- from 4 Aviation Companies (Minutemen, Pelicans, Dolphins, Rattlers) were coordinated in a unified and superbly conducted effort.

b. The 7th Air Force supported the operation initially with photo-reconnaissance, upon which the planning phase depended heavily. During the execution, Tac Air was on call and a continuous Air Cap covered the assaults. This was particularly important due to the complete lack of Artillery coverage. A loudspeaker plane broadcasted messages urging PW's at work in the fields to come in. An airborne radio relay was on duty continuously. The FAC's performed not only as fire coordinators, but as air observers and radio relays when necessary. Air Force support was well-planned and coordinated.

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c. Combat Engineers from the 3rd Platoon, A Co 326 Eng Bn were attached to the assault elements for LZ improvement, and carried chain saws for this purpose. The engineers also carried bolt cutters to free the reported chained PW's, and prepared explosives to destroy enemy structures.

c. The 181st MI Detachment provided Language interpreters, photo-interpreters and CI Teams for Operation STRIKE FORCE.

4. Intelligence:

a. The intelligence furnished for Operation STRIKE FORCE was provided mainly by a former popular force soldier from SON HA District, Quang Ngai Province. The source (name: Dang Long, Age: 46) was captured by the Viet Cong in January 1967. At that time he was imprisoned in LANG DI Prison Camp (coord BS 123513). He was also used to carry supplies and food stuffs from QUYET THANG Prison Camp (coord BS 314535) back to LANG DI Camp. Thus he had intimate knowledge of both camps.

b. On 1 Aug 67, while returning from QUYET THANG, Mr. Long managed to escape. He arrived in U.S. channels on 23 Aug 67 (this time gap - 22 days - is quite significant) and gave U.S. intelligence personnel the following information:

1) QUYET THANG camp contained 7 US and 50 Vietnamese PWs. The camp consisted of 10 huts, 7 of which were enclosed by a bamboo fence which was surrounded by punji stakes 1 ft. long. The camp had one guard on duty at all times and a total guard strength of 12. The guards rotated every hour. Some of the guards were also used to control work parties in the nearby fields of rice, potatoes, and corn. However, no US PWs were allowed to work outside of the camp. The guards were Viet Cong who were recovering from wounds or sickness; they were obtained from main force units which operated in the area.

2) LANG DI camp contained 19 U.S. and 120 Vietnamese PWs. The camp consisted of 13 huts, 10 of which were enclosed by a bamboo fence surrounded with 1 ft punji stakes. The guard system for LANG DI camp was exactly the same as QUYET THANG except the guards were changed every two hours.

c. When Mr. Long arrived at this unit, he was asked to identify the camps from aerial photography of the areas. At this time, there was some confusion, and Mr. Long never did positively identify the areas. This also was the cause of some confusion when the units were conducting heliborne assaults into the area. Though he knew he was in the general area, he had difficulty relating himself on photographs to what he had seen on the ground. Adding to this problem was the fact that the source required reading glasses - this fact not being known initially.

d. As Co A arrived on the landing zone for LANG DI camp, Mr. Long indicated the camp was still at least 3 Km north. He knew where he was on the ground, however. Therefore, A Co extracted and reinserted at coord BS 120535 (see sketch #1). Upon landing Mr. Long immediately showed A Co the food storage area. He then led them down a trail for a distance of 1 Km. Along the trail were approximately 15 cooking fires that were still smoldering. Also many ~~r~~ ^{of} ~~rad~~ ^{of} size and smaller sleeping p ~~tions~~ ^{tions} were found.

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All showed signs of use within two hours prior to the arrival of A Co. Two of the large fields in the area were laced with vines and 6 foot poles. Their design was definitely tactical (anti-helicopter) rather than agricultural. As the unit swept through the area, many trails were noticed that indicated a high degree of recent activity. A conservative estimate would be that the area was used for at least a one night bivouac for a battalion size unit. As A Co approached the camp, Mr. Long pointed it out. The unit entered unopposed; the guards had apparently fled. Four Vietnamese PWs were found inside. Three others surrendered shortly after a psychological warfare plane began broadcasting overhead. On-the-spot interrogation revealed that 3 more VN PWs were on a work party, but their location was unknown. All three PWs said there were no additional camps in the area (this was later proved false). They also said that 10 US PWs had been removed 15 days prior, and that they did not know their new location.

e. Mr. Long was transferred to B Co which had the mission to raid QUYET THANG camp. He was flown over the area initially and after a positive identification was made, the raid force was inserted, at a different location from that planned. After the raid force had progressed a short distance, it was approached by an 8 year old Vietnamese boy who said the camp had been moved within the last month. He led the way to the old camp which was empty. It was very deteriorated but somewhat as described in paragraph b1 above. The young boy guided the raid force further down the trail to the new camp. The new camp had no bamboo fence but was enclosed with barbed wire. Portions of the camp had not been completed and some of the huts lacked roofs. The first elements entering the camp found a group of 5 male VN PWs. On the spot interrogation revealed that the US PWs (number unknown) had been removed prior to building the new camp. A man with a mauser was seen at a tunnel entrance. He was "talked" into surrendering by the interpreter. One other man, two women and two children were also hiding in the tunnel. One additional male was found outside the camp. The camp itself consisted of three buildings (see sketch #2) one which was enclosed by barbed wire. The installation was destroyed and all Vietnamese were extracted.

f. Further interrogation of the Lang Di PWs revealed the following:

1) An NVA battalion was located close to the camp. The exact location was unknown, but it was believed to be 1-3 kms south of LANG DI on the east side of the river.

2) There were three additional camps that were part of the LANG DI complex: all were east of the liberated camps. One contained US PWs who were also moved two weeks prior to a location unknown. The camp populations and locations are as follows:

(1)	BS 128537	110 VN PW
(2)	BS 127538	38 VN PW
(3)	BS 130537	38 VN PW

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5. MISSION: 2-502d Inf conducts airmobile raid on D-Day, H-Hour to liberate US and Vietnamese PWs held captive at LANG DI (BS 123513) and QUYET THANG (BS 316535) PW camps.

6. CONCEPT OF THE OPERATION:

a. LANG DI (Camp #2): At H-Hour (010840H September) Co A lifts off HA THANH Staging Area, conducts airmobile raid on LANG DI PW Camp, liberates US and VN prisoners, and extracts to HA THANH.

b. QUYET THANG (Camp #1): On order, Co B lifts off HA THANH Staging Area, conducts airmobile raid on QUYET THANG PW Camp, liberates US and Vietnamese prisoners, and extracts to HA THANH. Co C provides security force and blocks entrance and egress routes to the north, south and east. Following extraction of Co B, Co C will extract to CARENTAN Base.

c. One platoon Reconcos will provide Eagle Flight, and reinforce A, B, or C Co as necessary. The remainder of the element will be on ground alert at HA THANH.

7. EXECUTION:

On 31 August at 0700 the STRIKE FORCE airlifted from CARENTAN Base to HA THANH airstrip to stage for the following day's operation. The battalion had come in from Operation BENTON on the evening of the 29th, and was sent out again on Operation STRIKE FORCE with very little warning, in the middle of its 4 day stand-down.

On 1 September, at 0840, A Co lifted off HA THANH airstrip for its assault on LANG DI PW Camp. The entire company was moved in one lift, and arrived over the reported location of the camp at 0900. The assault element set down, and immediately the source (Dong Lang, a former PW) indicated that this was the wrong place: the PW camp was 3 kilometers upstream (north). While the rest of the company remained aloft, the commander and his element were extracted and a second assault was made in the location chosen by the source as the true site of the camp. LZs were chosen on the spot, and the insertion completed. The source led the company down a trail, through a recently occupied battalion size bivouac, and finally to the PW camp, which was almost deserted. Four prisoners remained, but all guards had fled. Later three more prisoners came in but it was learned that the US had been removed earlier. A Co was extracted to HA THANH.

B Co, supported by C Co, now lifted from HA THANH to assault Camp #1. In order to avoid the same mistake made by A Co, the B Co commander decided to overfly the target area so the source could positively identify it. This the source failed to, but again he indicated that the camp (QUYET THANG), was a short distance away, and he could guide them right to it. Continuing north, he picked out what he said to be the correct location, and LZs were immediately chosen nearby. On landing, B Co

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moved a short distance, then was guided to the camp by an indigenous youth met on the trail. The camp was empty and deteriorated, but the boy said a new camp was being built down the trail. B Co soon located the new camp, which was also almost empty, 5 prisoners remaining. Interrogation revealed that all US personnel had been moved during the last month. One VC with Mauser was spotted and apprehended, and 5 more people picked up in a tunnel near the camp. During this time two platoons of C Co were inserted in the vicinity. When the camp had been destroyed, all elements moved to PZs and were extracted back to CARENTAN Base Camp. When B Co and D Co (-) had been safely extracted, the rest of the Battalion began airlifting from HA THANH to CARENTAN, and closed by 1900, ending Operation STRIKE FORCE.

8. RESULTS OF OPERATION STRIKE FORCE:

a. Liberated Vietnamese:

- 1 RF
- 1 CIDG
- 1 Village Chief
- 2 Hamlet Chiefs
- 2 GVN Agents
- 1 Province Security Agent
- 6 Civilians
- 2 Children

b. POWs:

- 1 VCC
- 1 CD
- 4 VCS

c. Weapons: 1 Mauser SN 201741

d. Equipment Captured:

- 1 ruck sack
- 1 uniform, green, (possible NVA-red dot over left breast pocket)
- 1 NVA gas mask

e. Material destroyed:

- 2 POW compounds
- 1 storage area
- 500 lbs rice
- 100 lbs potatoes
- 400 lbs miscellaneous food items

9. LOGISTICS:

a. Class I: 3 C-ration meals were issued to each man prior to move from CARENTAN Base. Rations were drawn from company basic load due to short lead time. Companies have reordered to stock basic load. Adequate

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additional rations were not drawn for attached personnel. Water was issued to companies in 5 gallon cans.

b. Class II and IV: The only items needed were radio batteries and enough were on hand.

c. Class III: 10 gallons of gas were taken for commo platoon.

d. Class V: Companies carried a basic load of ammunition. S-4 moved emergency ammo loads to staging area and had them prepacked for kick-out delivery. Adequate smoke was on hand.

e. Special Equipment: 5 flame throwers were drawn and 2 pair of bolt cutters were drawn.

f. Movement: S-4 organized and moved quartering party to staging area. The quartering party consisted of S-4 section, company representatives and commo section. Unfortunately, the main body began to arrive before the quartering party, due to loading of equipment on CH-47's.

10. COMMANDER'S ANALYSIS:

a. The time lag between Dong Lang's escape and his coming to Allied Forces with the information on the POW Camps was so great as to reduce seriously the chances that the US Personnel (or indeed any personnel) would be found still at that location. Had he come forward immediately, chances of success would have been much greater.

b. The source had very limited ability in estimating distances and direction, and in relating photo maps to the terrain. This is understandable when his background is taken into account. It was for this reason that B Co made a positive confirmation before insertion, avoiding the difficulty that A Co encountered.

c. Brigade FAC's were brought in on all phases of planning and had complete understanding of all aspects of the operation. It was noted however that the FAC's who were flying over the area during the operation were Task Force Oregon FAC's who were unfamiliar with the battalion's plan. This could have led to difficulties had an urgent need for Air Force ordnance materialized.

Recommend that all personnel involved in the planning phase be employed on the operation and not be replaced by personnel unfamiliar with intimate details.

d. A psychological operation plan was devised and employed via loudspeaker broadcasts of prerecorded tapes. However, a replacement aircraft arrived without a copy of the tape and with no one aboard with Vietnamese language capability. The delivery was therefore late and ineffectual.

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Recommend closer coordination be made with psyops personnel
and greater attention be paid to all details of the operation.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

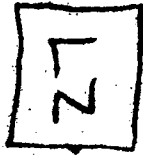
Inclosures:
Sketches 1 & 2

E. R. THROCKMORTON
1LT, Infantry
Adjutant

A TRUE COPY

Michael N. Welch
MICHAEL N. WELCH
CPT, Armor
Brigade Historian

COORD
BS 313537



TROOP

OLD
CAMP



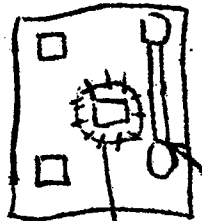
COORD
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MOVEMENT

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COORD
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NEW
CAMP



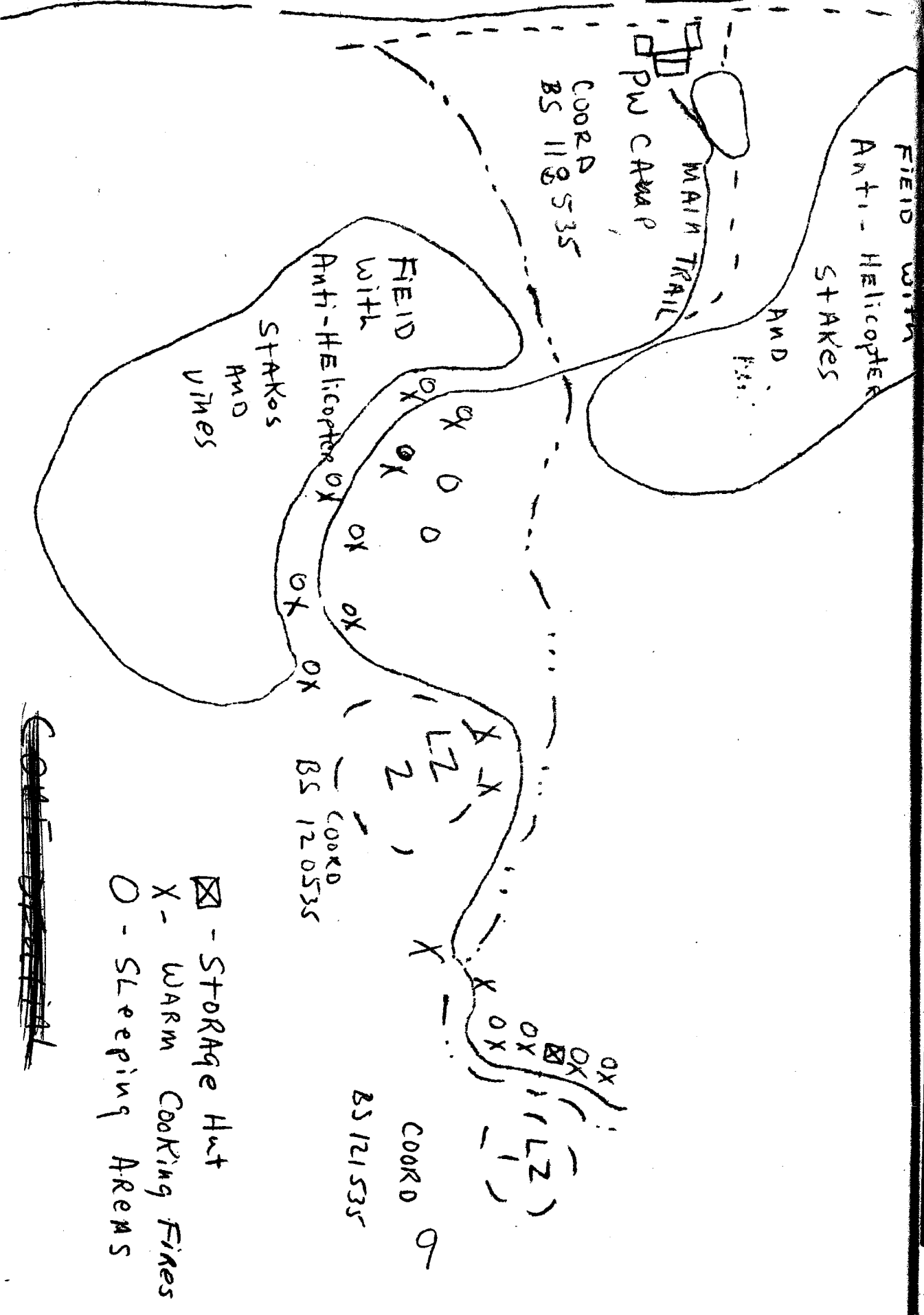
TUNNEL

BARBED WIRE
SURROUNDING
PRISON HUT

SKETCH # 1

OAK

KOMMAN (STRE-M)



- ☒ - Storage Hut
- - Warm Cooking Fires
- - Sleeping Areas

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13. ABSTRACT

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Anti - Helicopter
STAKES