

AIRMOBILE TO O. K. CORRAL

CPT. Joseph S. Stringham

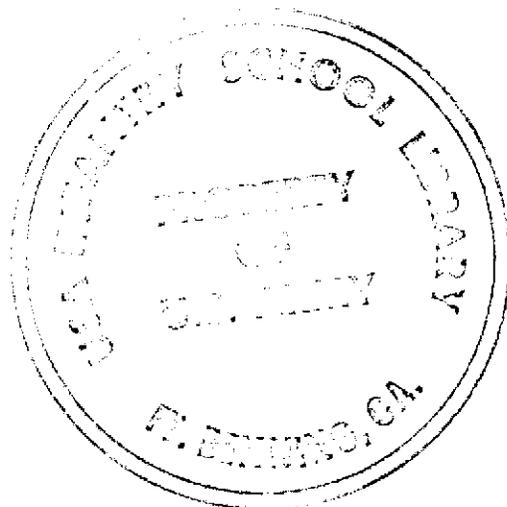


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CPT. Joseph S. Stringham

6,000 Words

INTRODUCTION

In May of 1965 Communist units, both Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese (PAVN), seized the initiative in the South Vietnam conflict. Moving out of their heavily fortified, and well concealed positions of War Zone C and War Zone D in III Corps Tactical Zone (III CTZ), the enemy forces made a determined effort to cut the Republic of South Vietnam (RVN) into two or more parts. With alarming ease and regularity main force Viet Cong regiments, reinforced by PAVN regiments, over-ran the province capital of Song Be on 10 May. Continuing south from Zone C toward Zone D with their next savage attack, their forces rendered the RVN units at Ben Cat completely combat ineffective on 22 May.⁽⁴⁾ At the same time, Rt. 13 north of Ben Cat was permanently interdicted, which left no route of communication from Saigon to the northern most provinces of III CTZ. On June 9, the district capital of Dong Xoi was attacked by an estimated three main force Communist regiments. While the actual town of Dong Xoi itself was not held

by the attacking force, the week-long battle gave the Communist supported National Liberation Front complete control of a large portion of the III CTZ. Except for occasional air and artillery harassing fire, a virtually uncontested line of communication had been established between Headquarters National Liberation Front in War Zone C and War Zone D, the Viet Cong secret base area less than thirty miles from Saigon.

In the face of continuous Communist successes, the United States was frantically attempting to build up US Armed Forces troop strength in the RVN to assist the shattered South Vietnamese forces in checking the unrelenting push by the Communists to gain control of the majority of South Vietnam. Hoping to gain time for the Allied troop build-up and possibly disperse some of these main force Communist units, Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) was given the authority to plan for the offensive use of Strategic Air Command (SAC) in a strike against a Communist Insurgent target in South Vietnam. The giant B-52's of SAC would be loaded with non-nuclear bombs and would carpet an entire area and hopefully obliterate it.

Target analysis section of MACV analyzed the entire country for an area in which a large Communist force existed in a vulnerable position. Because an accurate post strike analysis must be rendered, the area had to be relatively accessible to post strike analysis patrols, and had to be small enough for 30 SAC bombers to completely saturate it with 1000 pound bombs.

EXISTING MILITARY SITUATION

The area that the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) approved was an area 16 kilometers north of Ben Cat, referred to as the Long Nguyen Secret Zone. The target consisted of thick secondary and primary jungle in an area measuring four by two and one half kilometers.

It was the location by which the corridor from Zone C to Zone D was kept secure for the Communist insurgent by as many as two of his main force regiments. Although the Long Nguyen area was fortified, intelligence reports and reconnaissance patrols sent out by the Special Forces Detachment at Ben Cat indicated this to be a semi-permanent position used by large Communist forces infiltrating toward or from War Zone D as a rest area as well as a security post. This area had been nicknamed the "O. K. Corral" by US Special Forces Detachment A-301, because 100 Vietnamese soldiers plus two members of the US detachment were annihilated in this same area on the 84th anniversary of the famous gunfight in Tombstone, Arizona, at the OK Corral. However, the reconnaissance reports from the Allied Forces at Ben Cat all but ceased on 22 May 1965 when the Special Forces Detachment and the four-hundred man force it advised was reduced to 80 men and nine US Special Forces personnel by an assault from an estimated two Viet Cong regiments who were securing the O. K. Corral region. (3:21)

PLAN OF THE OPERATION

JCS charged Detachment C-3, 5th Special Forces Group Airborne, located at Bien Hoa, with the mission of planning and organizing post-strike analysis patrols to conduct a complete assessment on the ground of the damage inflicted on the O. K. Corral by the B-52's, and report their findings directly to J-2, MACV. The stipulation placed on the directive from MACV stated that the patrols would be lead, not advised, by American Special Forces personnel, and would consist of American and Vietnamese soldiers. The S-2 and S-3 of Detachment C-3 planned to send three, 40 man patrols on parallel axes through the area after the bombs were dropped. Since the remainder of Det. A-301 of Ben Cat was familiar with the area, it would furnish two of three patrol command groups. In addition, because the majority of the unit with which A-301 had been

working was annihilated on 22 May 65,⁽⁴⁾ the three patrols would be augmented by Det. A-312 and one company of A-312's Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) and one patrol command group.

The bombs were to be on target with H-hour at 180745 June 65 (local time). At H+25 minutes the three patrols would be air lifted by HUIB simultaneously from Phuoc Vinh into three landing zones on the north side of the O. K. Corral. From here they would move on a 160° degree azimuth across the portion of the region struck by SAC, a distance of 2½ kilometers, and assess the damage. On the south side of the O. K. Corral helicopters would extract the three patrols as they finished their respective "recon" and fly them back to Phuoc Vinh from where the entire ground operation would stage.

Each patrol would carry two airground radios, three cameras, 50 pounds of demolition, 1000 feet of detonating cord, and five extra smoke grenades per American, all this in addition to the equipment a "recon" patrol will generally carry such as arms, ammunition, and intra-patrol radios.

The directive coming down the Vietnamese chain of command stated only that the various echelons of the Vietnamese command would obey their American advisers and ask no questions.

As the Commander of Det. A-301, formerly of Ben Cat, I reported to Det. C-3 on D-1 at 0900 and signed for three copies of the operations order, which were classified "top secret". I was told to discuss the operation with absolutely nobody, American or Vietnamese, with the exception of Capt. Sparge, Commander of A-312, the augmentation detachment. From here, with my A Det., I proceeded to Phuoc Vinh where Capt. Sparge and I organized the operation in accordance with our orders.

Patrol "Alpha" would be commanded by Capt. Sparge and would be infiltrated into landing zone green on the west side of the area. Sparge's patrol would consist of 35 indigenous soldiers plus four American Special Forces NCO's. I commanded patrol "Bravo" which had the same composition as "Alpha". "Bravo" would infiltrate, by helicopter, on

landing zone yellow midway between the east and west limits of the O. K. Corral and proceed on a parallel azimuth to that of patrol "Alpha" toward the extraction landing zone(LZ). Patrol "Charlie" would be commanded by Lt. Kubasik, my executive officer. The personnel breakdown of "Charlie" was identical to the other two patrols. "Charlie" would be infiltrated on LZ red and move on a line paralleling "Alpha" and "Bravo" to the extraction LZ. The extraction landing zone consisted of a large abandoned rice field bordering the entire south side of the O. K. Corral, creating a situation in which all three patrols would be exfiltrating from different positions on the same landing zone. (1)

Continuous air cover consisting of three flights A-1E skyraiders, three heavy fire teams of armed helicopters, and three B-57 bombers would cover the three patrols. It was impossible to anticipate which patrol should have priority of fire so the three patrol leaders coordinated a fire plan. "Alpha" patrol could call fire on it's west flank without co-ordination but never on the patrol's east flank. Patrol "Charlie" could adjust airstrikes on it's east flank at will but not on it's west flank without inter-patrol co-ordination. Patrol "Bravo" would never call airstrike without inter-patrol co-ordination. No strikes to the front or rear would be directed by the three units unless they were co-ordinated on the ground. By this co-ordination we meant to preclude the possibility of an airstrike hitting a friendly unit but still seal off the operational area from enemy reinforcement.

All three of us then went to our respective Vietnamese counterparts to initiate preparations for the operation and inform the Vietnamese that we were ready to assume temporary command of the CIDG units. However, we discovered that, as is often the case, the Vietnamese commanders had received no orders or directives through their

chain of command regarding the operation. They were understandably opposed to this operation when informed that their American advisers would assume command of Vietnamese soldiers in their units, going somewhere, to do something, for a period of unknown duration, and that no further information would be provided.

NARRATION

The post strike analysis operation became completely snarled even while SAC was poised to initiate what would be a multi-million dollar operation before it's termination. Somewhere between Headquarters III CTZ and the designated units carrying out this post strike analysis, there had been an interruption in the Vietnamese chain of command. While the participating US Army Special Forces units had received written orders, their Vietnamese counter-parts had received no written or verbal instructions. To complicate matters even more, Major Sandel, Capt. Spargo's immediate commander, was also excluded from receiving a copy of the orders because of the "need to know" restriction placed on the distribution of these documents. This situation was further aggravated because the operation was staging out of Phuoc Vinh, Major Sandel's headquarters. (3:21) However, because the operation was nowhere in it's present status, it was mutually decided by the three patrol leaders to approach Major Sandel with this problem. In the discussion which followed it was further decided that briefing the Major was essential in order to enlist his assistance in obtaining Vietnamese co-operation. A message was sent to III Corps Headquarters requesting permission to brief the Major on the operation. This message gave the required impetus to the master planners of the operation thrusting before them the realization that their great tactical plan would never be put to the test unless some provision for briefing both the American and Vietnamese chains of command down to the participating units was made.

The master planners from III Corps arrived at Phuoc Vinh, this time with their counter-parts. The Vietnamese commanders in Camp Cao Bien were ordered by their commanders to follow Capt. Spargo's instructions and grudgingly went about preparing for the operation, and there was no need to disseminate any further information.

It was further requested by the Vietnamese that all three units have personnel from both US Special Forces Detachment with them. This was obviously a good idea since the men in my unit were familiar with the area of operation, and Capt. Spargo's detachment was equally familiar with the Vietnamese soldiers with whom we would be working.⁽¹⁾ All preparations proceeded smoothly until Major Sandel called a meeting of both Vietnamese and Americans; the operation may have been compromised as a result. The Major's counter-part demanded to be briefed on the operation and in every detail. This appeared to be unnecessary to all of us because there were twelve hours to go before we were to be on the ground in the Long Nguyen area only 20 miles west of our present location. This allowed ample time for the information to leak out and be transmitted to the Communist in the area.

AVIATION SUPPORT

At 180700 June, HU1B troop carrier helicopters(SLICKS) arrived at Phuoc Vinh in sufficient quantity to infiltrate all three teams into their landing zones simultaneously. The SLICKS were from the 118th Light Airmobile Co., and A Co., 501st Aviation Bn. The armed helicopters (gun ships) were commanded by Capts. Myers, Jarrat, and Broeffer of the 197th Armed Helicopter Company.

The only part of the operational plan for this mission which was carefully thought out and co-ordinated was the flight plan. The route left Phuoc Vinh and went due west for approximately 20 minutes at which time the armada of SLICKS and gun ships would be over the communication check point(CCP). All of the helicopters would turn to an azimuth of 360° degrees and fly five minutes to the three bombing zones. Preparatory air strikes on the landing zones would be conducted by the US Air Force by 12 A-1E skyraiders from H-5 to H-1. At H-1 the three heavy fire teams of armed helicopters would come in just ahead of

the SLICKS firing final suppressing fire on the landing zones. When the SLICKS came to a position 300 meters north of the landing zones, the armed helicopters would mark the exact position of the landing zone with the color of smoke corresponding to the code name of the landing zone, for example, red smoke on LZ red. The SLICKS would then land, discharge their troops, and return directly to Phuoc Vinh to refuel and prepare for the extraction phase of the operation. The armed helicopters would maintain continuous air cover over the patrols with two heavy fire teams while the third fire team refueled. (1)

Unknown to Capt. Jarrat and Capt. Myers, of the armed helicopter unit, the Air Force would also have two F-101 fighters operating intermittently. However, none of the planners considered that this would be vital information to co-ordinate with the helicopter pilots, and, because of this error in judgement, a very serious incident would later arise. In addition to the necessary support and control aircraft in the operational area a C-123 would later in the operation arrive unarmored. The mission of this aircraft was to transport a large group of VIP's who wished to take pictures of carpet bombing.

B-52 STRIKE

At 120745 June the ground around the airstrip at Phuoc Vinh trembled. The loudest, continuous noise I have ever experienced in my life reached us, as we waited in the early morning fog by the silent helicopters. The giant SAC bombers could not be seen or heard. This moment in history, shrouded in the mystery of the terrible noise and trembling earth, reached out to all participating personnel, American and Vietnamese, helicopter pilot and infantryman, leaving the entire group very apprehensive and awed. Capt. Wayne Broeffler, platoon leader of one of the heavy fire teams said to me, "This is going to be a long day. This whole operation just feels like it's going wrong." Indeed, this ill-fated venture had already felt it's first tragedy.

Enroute from Guam on a routine refueling mission, a B-52 and KC-135 collided in midair. The remaining 29 bombers making the strike dropped bombs all over the area missing the O. K. Corral, in some cases, by five miles. A small percentage of the 1400 thousand bombs actually hit the target. (9:2)

TARGET ASSESSMENT PATROLS

At 180745 June the fifteen SLICKS lifted off the ground and moved due west toward Rt. 13 in Binh Duong sector. The ships crossed the CCP at exactly 0810 and turned south toward the landing zones which were then five minutes away. I could see the airstrikes going on in the landing zones as we started to lose altitude on final approach. The nine gun ships made their final runs, three on each landing zone. At H-1 Capts. Myers, Jarrat, and Broeffer dropped the red, yellow, and green smoke on the landing zones. As if by plan, the Viet Cong reacted to the smoke by bringing the helicopters under intense ground fire. This was a surprising complication because it was expected that there would be nothing left to offer any resistance. I looked out of the helicopter as we approached the landing zones, and observed the jungle of the O. K. Corral standing erect and apparently undamaged. This was in complete contrast to the way SAC had said it would look after the B-52's carpet-bombed the area.

The SLICKS discharged patrol "Bravo" at 0815 in an abandoned rice paddy. Sgt. Harrier, who was more laden down than the rest of us, got stuck in the mud. Firing from the helicopters was so intense, and the VC fire coming out of the tree line to our rear so concentrated on our position, it became necessary to move off the landing zone as soon as we could free Harrier from the muck. Because of the added impetus given us by the Viet Cong firing to the rear, we accomplished this task quickly, cleared the landing zone and moved south into the jungle.

"Alpha" patrol immediately engaged an unknown sized Communist force on the landing zone red. "Charlie" patrol moved quickly inland but was followed closely by Viet Cong snipers attempting to determine the size of Kubasik's patrol. Patrol "Alpha" chased their assailants into the Michelein Rubber Plantation on their west flank, after uncovering their prepared positions. All three patrols were supposed to take pictures of the damage created by the carpet-bombing of SAC, but the cameras were inadequate because the thick jungle and dense fog did not allow sufficient light for this purpose. This was not a great set back however, since the damage inflicted by SAC was minimal at best. (9:2)

All three patrols approached phase line "Zullu" at 0919 completing the first phase of the operation. My trip thus far had been uneventful after the initial confusion on the landing zone. Lt. Kubasik was having a good deal of trouble with pursuit of his patrol by the Viet Cong. He was disturbed with the requirement to wait at phase line "Zullu", and finally resorted to placing out booby traps to his rear to keep the Viet Cong from discovering how small his force actually was. It was necessary however, for patrols "Brave" and "Charlie" to pause on phase line "Zullu" in order to allow a more heavily engaged and subsequently slower "Alpha" patrol to catch up. This resulted from the complicated fire support plan which required the three units to remain on a general east-west line. (1)

All three patrols crossed the phase line and proceeded south. "Brave" patrol began discovering numerous rice cache's of approximately 5000 pounds in size. "Alpha" patrol on the west flank continued to receive heavy fire; this time it was small arms and mortar fire out of the rubber plantation. Upon request the armed helicopters disposed of this interference but they also took several hits. The situation, although active, was under the complete control of the

ground units.

At 1000, we of "Bravo" patrol came under intense small arms fire on our east flank from an enemy unit estimated to be of equal size. Not more than 25 meters separated the two units. The strike force soldiers were indiscriminately throwing hand grenades which bounced back off the trees into our position. Due to the good auspices of my four NCO's I was able to stop the grenade throwing, and start a fairly determined assault against the Viet Cong position. I could see about 20 Viet Cong directly in front of me withdrawing to the east and suddenly disappearing. I called "Charlie" patrol via the command and control ship, and informed it of the activity on it's west flank.

At this time, with an enemy unit apparently lodged in between "Charlie" and "Bravo", we were again ordered to stop. Although I was in contact with an enemy force, and a pause would cause us to lose this contact, my request to continue moving was denied. The co-ordinator in the command and control ship decided it was essential to have all three patrols identify their positions at this time for reasons known only to him. All three patrols had to stop and waste valuable time attempting to positively identify their positions. I threw a yellow smoke grenade. The smoke billowed up about waist high and, due to the high humidity, never got any higher. Spreading over the jungle floor at a height never exceeding three feet, the smoke was never seen by the command and control ship. Fifteen minutes of valuable time was wasted on this ridiculous requirement. All three patrols knew within a 100 meters where they were located because all of them had recently crossed a phase line. This visual identification was for VIP's in the C-123.

At 1030 hours the O. K. Cerral began to come alive with both friendly and enemy activity. The Viet Cong were beginning to close

in on their besieged base camp and again Capt. Spargo's patrol on the west flank was receiving the most severe pressure. Our three patrols were moving toward their extraction landing zones with grim determination, and the VC were reacting to the situation and reinforcing their Long Nguyen base with equal determination. (9:2) It was during this period of time that the extraction landing zones were compromised.

Four fighter aircraft still had unexpended ordnance on their wings and requested a place in the operational area to "dump" their bombs from the forward air controller(FAC). The FAC asked the command and control ship where the ordnance could be expended and was told in the clear on FM radio to use the extraction LZ area. Shortly thereafter the skyraiders dutifully expended their loads in the extraction landing zone plainly marking it for both friendly and enemy. This gross mistake, which caused the extraction areas to be compromised, was to be surpassed by yet a worse mistake several minutes later.

At 1045 we discovered the command post, supply dump, and training facility of the Viet Cong. The area had well constructed warehouses full of food and cooking utensils. There were several classrooms and a printing press. The impressing factor about this area was the complex underground network that had been constructed. There were four underground rooms with ventilation tubes and the entire installation was laced together by a network of tunnels. (1) Two tunnels lead out to the east and disappeared. With our inadequate supply of demolition Sgt. Bingo and I rigged one of the underground rooms for destruction. Simultaneously, Sgt. Rothman was placing out security around the camp while Sgt's. Weber and Harrier attempted once again to pinpoint our position for the Air Force FAC above us. Since SAC contributed nothing to

the destruction of this complex, the US Air Force wished to try again again with TAC this time. It was therefore essential to pinpoint the location for the FAC. However, positive identification of the base camp was made only after we set fire to all the above ground structures. The demolition was placed and the position was marked accurately for FAC after about fifteen minutes. The area above the ground had been well searched and it would have been the ultimate situation to be able to search out the tunnel complex but I decided against it for several reasons. One, our mission was to assess damage on the target as a result of the carpet bombing. Two, we had no equipment for this job and even if we had found a large cache of weapons, we were so laden down already we could not carry the equipment out. Thirdly, the indigenous soldiers were getting hard to control and were more concerned with looting the complex than maintaining security positions. We reorganized and moved south after lighting the fuse on the demolition.

As if the first compromise of the extraction landing zone had not been a serious enough blunder, one of the co-ordinators in the command and control ship decided to mark the extraction landing zone with red smoke and so stated in the clear over FM radio. This individual continued to show his diligence by proceeding to mark the landing zone exactly as he stated. This last gross tactical error grew out of the report I sent in to the effect that I was closing on yellow alpha, code word for my extraction LZ. As red smoke rose from the landing zone, Capt. Jarrat and Capt. Myers of the 197th Armed Helicopter Company took it on themselves to go in and confirm whether or not the LZ was compromised. The two men proceeded into the area with one helicopter landing on the LZ while the other covered. Both gunships were hit by intense ground fire. It then became necessary for Capt. Jarrat to take control of the deteriorating situation. He arbitrarily selected another landing zone

two hundred meters south of the planned area in an effort to select ground the Viet Cong did not have covered by fire, and to move it away from the tree line from which the heavy small arms fire had emitted. Capt. Jarrat then contacted the three patrols on the ground, and informed them of the relocation of the landing zone.

"Bravo" patrol had pulled into the last concealed position north of the landing zone by 1130 hours. Local security was placed out while I called the commander to tell him we were ready to extract. Then, while we sat in this very vulnerable position, an argument of whether to extract the patrols piecemeal or simultaneously raged over our heads in the command and control ship. This was sufficient time for the VC to discover our positions and determine our probable course of action. (9:21) Accurate sniper fire began striking near our location and steadily increased in intensity as the minutes ticked by. I had no contact with patrols "Charlie" and "Alpha" but relayed information about the enemy forces, which were now in between our three units. However, this information was not passed on to either patrol. This would cause patrol "Alpha" to become unknowingly surrounded. Capt. Spargo would be wounded and the entire unit would have to fight all the way to their helicopters.

At 1115 I received word that I was to be extracted and was to mark my position with red smoke. I informed whoever was controlling the operation at this time that this would be dangerous, due to the fact I had Viet Cong to the rear and flanks of my position. I further informed the individual above us of the time-honored technique of throwing smoke of an unknown color and having the aircraft make a positive identification. Yellow smoke was subsequently thrown and correctly identified by the command ship and the VC (1)

The five SLICKS came in about 200 meters south of our concealed position. Jarrat, Myers, and Broeffer pounded the trees on our

flanks and rear as we dashed for the SLICKS, across 200 meters of open rice paddies. The rice paddy absorbed a deluge of small arms fire from the adjacent tree lines. I directed my attention on the helicopters that were going to lift us out. Extraction of the middle patrol was effected at 1150 hours.

Patrol "Charlie" and patrol "Alpha" pushed toward their respective LZ's, both of which turned out to be the same open field I had extracted from. The Viet Cong now found themselves being squeezed on two sides and steadily pushed toward an open field by force with far superior fire power to offset their inferior size. The Viet Cong broke off contact, and shipped north through the position I had vacated 40 minutes before. The two patrols extracted simultaneously at 1230 hours returning to the airstrip at Phuoc Vinh. (1)

AIR WAR OVER THE O. K. CORRAL

If anybody can be awarded sole acclaim for the completion or even success of this operation, Capt's. Myers, Jarrat, and Broeffer with their heavy fire teams of armed helicopters from the 197th Armed Helicopter Company have to be thusly recognized. These men spent five of the most frustrating, and often dangerous hours in their careers. Their performance can best be described as heroic. It became readily apparent to us on the ground that these individuals were the only personnel participating in the entire operation who were not so taken up with the novelty of the situation that they forgot their primary mission which was supporting the ground units. Their collective frustrations stem from the fact that only a fraction of the information which should have been co-ordinated with them actually was.

Shortly after the patrols were infiltrated, Capt. Myers was

successfully holding a Viet Cong unit off of patrol "Alpha's" flank. He was flying his ship above and to the rear of his other two ships, who were flying low on Spargo's west flank, delivering close air support. Suddenly, a slow moving C-123 flew between him and the ships near the ground which he was covering. This ship had no function in the operation other than to show VIP's what carpet bombing looked like. It was also the reason all three patrols were stopped and told to mark their position at the height of the operation when speed was essential, at a minimum. Capt. Myers informed the C-123 it was hampering operation. The large cargo aircraft subsequently lumbered in a slow orbit at a higher altitude. An hour later Capt. Myers put his helicopter into a steep bank and quickly lost altitude to avoid colliding with an F-101 jet fighter. Two of these jet fighters arrived unscheduled over the target area to join in the fun. The six armed helicopters were scattered in all directions by a second pass and near collision again with Capt. Myers' helicopter. With this last near collision in the air, Myers called the control tower at Tan San Nhut, Saigon, with the following transmission, "Get these damn fighters out of the area before I blow them out of the sky." The jet fighters departed as quickly as they had arrived. (10)

After the sky raiders were told to drop their unexpended ordnance in the extraction LZ area at 1030 hours followed by the incident which saw this area marked with red smoke, Capt. Jarrat stated to his co-pilot that the extraction LZ was probably compromised, and would have to be checked out. He personally landed his ship on the ground with Capt. Myers covering him. Both ships were hit. At this time Capt. Jarrat arbitrarily moved the location of the extraction landing zone and informed the three units on the ground by secure means where they would be extracted from. (10)

During both the infiltration and extraction phases, all nine gun ships put such a high volume of accurate fire that only a few of the troop carrier helicopters were hit and only Capt. Spargo was wounded in the ground forces.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Military operations with the Vietnamese are always in danger of being compromised because of the degree of Communist infiltration into the Vietnamese Armed Forces. However, Americans must remember that we are supposed to be helping the Vietnamese and withholding information from Vietnamese commanders can hurt the working relations which the American advisor has with his counterpart.

In any advisory effort there is a parallel chain of command. The advisor chain and the advised chain. It is absolutely essential that ideas and plans conceived at higher command levels be disseminated through both chains. If this is not accomplished in this matter, nothing will function smoothly and there will be strained relations between advisor and advisee at lower echelons.

From its conception, this whole operation is a shining example of totally improper procedures and techniques to be employed in an advisory effort. Every command echelon in the Vietnamese units below Corps Headquarters knew nothing. In an effort to keep from compromising the operation, the Vietnamese commanders and lower command levels were insulted by being told only that their advisors were now their commanders. The Vietnamese commanders understandably did not accept this situation. Then, instead of adopting a middle of the road doctrine of telling the Vietnamese enough to appease their curiosity and satisfy their egos without compromising the operation, we went from one extreme to the other and let the whole operational plan out.

As the mission was received from Headquarters, MACV, the three patrols were merely target damage assessment units whose sole purpose was to evaluate the damage dealt by SAC. By the time the three patrols were placed on the landing zones there were 40 men in each patrol. These men were laden down with satchel charges, extra

radios, extra ammunition, and machine guns. This was a combat patrol in size and equipment with a mission of a reconnaissance patrol. The progress the three units made through the area was slow due to the extra equipment. It was a large enough force to be easily discovered by the Viet Cong.

The area could have been covered more thoroughly by eight to ten, three man "recon" teams with the one mission of assessing target damage. The teams could have moved through the area in less than an hour. They could have covered the area more thoroughly and there would have been substantially less support required.

One of the basic fundamentals of small unit patrolling is to assign one, and only one, mission to a patrol. Our patrols in this operation were to evaluate damage, search and destroy, seize, and evacuate caches. It would have been much less confusing had the mission, as received from MACV, been disseminated directly to the participating units. There was no place for searching and destroying because J-2, MACV, wanted only to know what effect that SAC had had on the area. If the patrols had stayed in the area any longer than they did none would have gotten out and all information would have remained with them.

On any joint operation the command and control personnel are the one vital link which binds the separate units into a team. During this operation the different individuals in the command and control helicopter were so curious about what the area looked like that they didn't properly control or co-ordinate the mission. Landing zones were repeatedly compromised. The patrols on the ground were unnecessarily delayed. Near collisions in the air between armed helicopters and other support aircraft were frequent. So poor was the performance of the personnel controlling this operation that Capt. Jarrat, commander of the Armed Helicopter Support, unofficially

assumed the additional responsibility for command and control. He was forced to redesignate a new extraction landing zone and personally keep tabs on the location of the three patrols. Between Jarrat and Myers the whole operation finally went under a unified command, although unofficial.

Operations with as complex a support requirement as this one should be co-ordinated in detail with all participating units. Any one not participating should stay clear of the area of operations. In reconnaissance of the O. K. Corral, VIP aircraft, fighter aircraft, and control personnel arrived unannounced and greatly hampered the operation. These unplanned for participants all too frequently jeopardized lives and accomplishment of the mission.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Plans and directives conceived at joint headquarters will not be carried out unless the advisor and his counterpart are notified through their respective chain's of command.

2. Advising the Vietnamese Armed Forces is a very sensitive task. The individual must disseminate sufficient information to his counterpart so as not to insult him, but not too much information so as to possible compromise the operation.

3. Reconnaissance missions in Vietnam can more easily and securely be accomplished by a small "recon" patrol of three to five men each.

4. One mission should be assigned at a time to any small unit patrol.

5. Reconnaissance patrols should travel with as light a load as possible. Carrying extra equipment slows your speed of movement and does not contribute at all to making a quick silent "recon".

6. Landing zones should be referred to only by code name over the radio. The method of the ground forces throwing colored smoke and the pilot identifying the color is the only accepted method of air ground identification. This holds true for airstrikes, resupply, and extraction alike.

7. The authority to select new or alternate extraction landing zones must be placed with the commander of the armed helicopters supporting an operation.

8. Duties in the command and control helicopter should remain with the same person for as long as possible. The developing situation in any military situation can be followed with more continuity than changing over control personnel every hour will allow.

9. No individual or unit should participate in any military operation unless their services have been previously planned for,

co-ordinated, and are vital for mission accomplishment.

10. Aviation in support of military ground operations is the deciding factor in the success of these operations a good majority of the time. It is absolutely essential that future ground commanders and advisors in Vietnam be intimately familiar with how to employ USAF, TAC air, and US Army aviation and realize the importance of complete co-ordination with these units prior to the initiation of the operation.

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