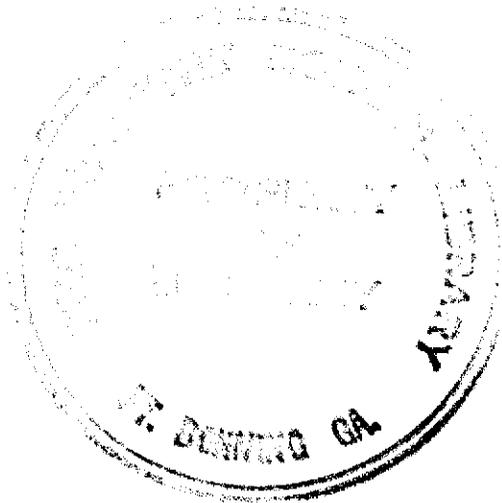


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OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 13TH INFANTRY REGIMENT,  
9TH INFANTRY DIVISION (ARVN), IN A SEARCH AND DESTROY  
MISSION ON 15-16 JULY 1966 IN KIEN PHONG PROVINCE,  
REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. (PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A BATTALION  
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OPERATIONS OF THE 1ST BATTALION, 13TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, 9TH INFANTRY DIVISION (ARVN), IN A SEARCH AND DESTROY MISSION FROM 15-16 JULY 1966 IN KIEN PHONG PROVINCE, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. (PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF A BATTALION ADVISOR)

#### INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1966, guerrilla activity had increased to such an extent in the Mekong River Delta area that the 13th Regiment, 9th Infantry Division (ARVN) had been relocated from Long Ho to Kien Phong Province. Long Ho is in Vinh Long Province. Kien Phong Province had been plagued with Viet Cong actions since the first of the year. Units from the 9th Division and the 7th Division (ARVN) had labored almost fruitlessly to neutralize aggressive insurgency actions of the Viet Cong. The 9th Division of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam was responsible for eliminating all Viet Cong activity in Kien Phong Province. In addition to routine search and clear operations and ambushes; the division was charged with securing Highway 8A and the lines of communications and logistics between Kien Phong, Sadec, and Vinh Long Provinces. The 1st Battalion, 13th Regiment, 9th Division (ARVN) was the operational battalion for the regiment in Kien Phong Province. (SEE MAP "A")

#### THE DIVISION PLAN

The operation, to begin on 15 July 1966 and end when the mission was completed, was planned to be a search and destroy mission. In addition, the 1st Battalion, 13th Regiment had a be prepared mission to reinforce a local outpost in My An District, when the primary mission was completed. The 1st Battalion, 13th Regiment was to be airlifted from the airfield at Cao Lanh (WS 7052) and put in at Landing Zone RED (WS 8261). It was estimated that it would take at least two days to complete the operation. There were to be three objectives for the battalion on this operation.

The first objective was the junction of Cai Beo and Thap Muoi Canals. Our mission was to search the critical junction and destroy any enemy found. The second objective was approximately two kilometers east, along the Thap Muoi Canal (WS 858633). When the second objective was secured, resupply boats that were coming down the Thap Muoi Canal would link up with us and continue to objective three. The third objective was the local outpost (WS 900692), where we were to reinforce and provide added security. (SEE MAP "A")

#### THE EXISTING SITUATION

This particular area in Vietnam had at one time been under Viet Cong control. During the summer 1965, the Republic of South Vietnam pacified the village of My An and established it as district headquarters. Since the summer of 1965, the Viet Cong had attacked the established outposts and harassed the local populace. The Viet Cong's objective was to overthrow the local government, thereby reopening the infiltration routes into South Vietnam from Cambodia.

On the night of 13 July 1966, outpost number 1 was attacked and overrun by the Viet Cong. Artillery was fired on the Viet Cong position from My An District. Reports indicated that the Viet Cong unit used two routes of withdrawal. One element withdrew to the east and the other to the northwest. Intelligence sources showed that a Viet Cong unit, known as the Thap Muoi Battalion was located and operating in the outline area of My An. The hamlet of Ap Thap Muoi and adjoining canals was believed to be the base of operations for the unit. River blocks and tax collection points were spotted along the Thap Muoi Canal east and west of My An District to impede incoming and outgoing traffic.

It was felt that the Viet Cong had war supplies stocked along the Thap Muoi Canal for future assaults.

## THE BATTALION PLAN

The 1st Battalion, 13th Regiment, had been in the town of Cao Lanh (Kien Phong Province Capital) for four days to provide additional security and assist in eliminating The Viet Cong from the plagued Province. I was the assistant Battalion advisor with Captain Albert F. Crowder, who was the Senior Advisor for the battalion. There were two other American Noncommissioned Officers on our team.

This operation, considered to be an airmobile search and clear mission along the Thap Muoi Canal, was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 13th Regiment. We were, of course, to exploit any success. It was determined that the operation would be phased. The first phase would be the airlift into landing zone RED and assault of Objective 1. The second phase would be the seizure and search of Objective 2 and the supply boat link up. The third phase would be to continue to Objective 3, searching the banks of the Thap Muoi Canal and provide security for the resupply boats. The general plan (SEE MAP "B"), upon landing, was for two companies to move north from LZ RED straight into the objective using the canal to possibly slow the enemy's withdrawal. The 3rd Company was to move northwest, cross the canal and set up a blocking position to cut the withdrawal of any enemy trying to escape. The balance of the battalion, consisting of Headquarters Company and the security platoon, was to be employed as the reserve force and would follow the main attack companies.

After the seizure of Objective 1, the battalion would continue to Objective 2 with a two company front. 3rd Company would be on the north of the canal, 1st Company on the south with Headquarters Company and the security platoon following. 2d Company

would cross the canal, follow 3rd Company, and become the Battalion's reserve force. Plans for the third phase was similar to the 2d phase. Organization of forces would be determined after seizure of Objective 2 was completed.

#### THE PREPARATION

On 14 July 1966, the day prior to the operation, the battalion prepared for the coming day. Supplies were brought in from Sadec by truck convoy. This was an augmentation to our normal weekly resupply of ammunition and rations.

A map reconnaissance was made by the battalion commander, CPT Crowder, and I. A ground reconnaissance was not possible because of the situation. An aerial reconnaissance was requested, but all aircraft was committed elsewhere in the Division Tactical Area (DTA). The aircraft for our airlift would not be on station until 0600 hours, 15 July 1966. It was determined that surprise would virtually be an impossibility. The population in the area and the flat terrain would prevent us from getting too close without the enemy being alerted. However, we felt that the speed of the helicopters and sudden appearance on the scene would keep the enemy from gaining an advantage or moving all their stores of supplies.

We did not plan to take the 81mm mortars. We were to be in range of artillery support. There were two 105mm Howitzers located at My An. Two Aerial Rocket Artillery gunships would remain on station until Objective 1 was secured. Each company had one (1) 60mm mortar and one (1) 57mm recoilless rifle. In addition, each company had one (1) M-79 grenade launcher, and one (1) .30 caliber light machine gun. The strength of the battalion was approximately three hundred and twenty men. This was normal for most operations, especially since the battalion had been operational for some time. Each company had about eighty (80) men. Headquarters Company and the security platoon had about sixty (60) men.

Contact was made with the artillery support elements, through our one (1) battalion forward observer. Fires were planned and coordinated for the entire operation. All fires were to be on call.

The troops were organized into helicopter loads. All effort was made to maintain unit integrity to facilitate the battalion assault upon arrival at LZ RED. The battalion rehearsed their actions for loading at the pick up zone (PZ). Two airmobile companies, from Vinh Long and Can Tho, were planned <sup>to</sup> support the operation.

Request was made for air support. Two Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) Skyraiders were assigned to support the operation. The Aircraft were to be available on call from Can Tho.

By late evening, after the order had been issued and every detail covered, the battalion commander felt that all preparations were as complete as possible.

#### NARRATION

##### FIRST PHASE

On 15 July 1966, at 0700 hours, the 1st Battalion, 13 Regiment, airlifted out of Cao Lanh on the first phase of the three phase operation. The airlift was accomplished in two sorties. There were twenty aircraft in the first sortie and eighteen in the second sortie. The order of airlift was 1st and 2nd Company followed by the 3rd Company, Headquarters Company, and the security platoon. All troops were in LZ RED by 0740 hours.

The battalion commander planned to be in the assault position by 0900 hours. The greatest distance to be covered from LZ RED to Objective 1 was three (3) kilometers. At LZ RED 3rd Company was to be released to move into their blocking position. The main assault forces would head straight for Objective 1. (SEE MAP "C")

The primary idea of our scheme of maneuver was to capitalize on the sudden appearance in the area as well as put ourselves in an advantageous position to block the enemy's withdrawal. This plan left only one outlet for the enemy and that was the canal, which we planned cover by artillery fire.

The release point for 3rd Company was crossed at 0750 hours. 3rd Company moved to the northwest and to our west. We expected them to be in position by 0900 hours. The main body stopped for a short time, to give 3rd Company an early start. Approximately a half hour later the main body moved out toward Objective 1. About 600 ~~hundred~~ meters short of the objective, we came under machine gun and small arms fire. We had not received a call from 3rd Company and did not know if they were in position. The battalion commander decided to start his assault. 1st and 3rd Companies quickly deployed and began to return the fire. Our entire main assault elements, to include headquarters company and the security platoon, were in the middle of rice paddies. Our only protection was the dikes separating the rice paddies.

(SEE MAP "C")

It was evident that we had not attained the element of surprise. The enemy seemed to be well organized in their defense and was ready and waiting. The terrain in this area is flat and the enemy had grazing fire from well dug in positions along the higher banks of the canal. The battalion commander estimated there was about a company size force at the junction of the canals. The Aerial Rocket Artillery support ships located the firing and was directed in on the enemy position. It was to our advantage, however, in that the enemy opened fire prematurely, for our front line troops were about 600 meters short of the objective. As a result, we suffered only one casualty from the initial burst of fire.

We were able to effectively deploy the two lead companies. Initially we were unable to move forward due to the heavy volume of enemy fire. Later, the gunships began to take effect upon the enemy. The enemy fire was reduced and the assault companies were able to advance upon the enemy. Progress was very slow, but indications were that the Viet Cong had had enough and their volume of fire began to die out. The initial assault companies continued to advance and fire. We received a call from 3rd Company. They heard the fire fight and reported being in their blocking position. In addition, 3rd Company reported activity moving east along the southern bank of the canal. The Aerial Rocket ships had expended all ordance and had returned to rearm. The battalion commander called for ground artillery on the withdrawing enemy. Much activity was now visible within the confines of the Viet Cong positions. By 1100 hours, the forward companies had moved well into the enemy positions and sent word that the Viet Cong were moving across the canal and east. Effort was made to adjust artillery fires on the withdrawing enemy, but according to company commander of 3rd company they were ineffective.

The battalion commander instructed 3rd Company<sup>to</sup> displace and link-up with the rest of the battalion on Objective 1. A thorough search was made of the entire objective area. The positions that the enemy had built were relatively good, but they showed that the enemy had not been in position very long. Some of the positions were partially completed, and some showed an effort was made to reinforce them. The search uncovered four (4) dead Viet Cong found within the debris of their fortifications.

Ten assorted weapons were found. All of the weapons were United States type. They were believed to have been captured during the attack on the local outpost.

They included four (4) M1 rifles, one (1) Thompson Sub-machine Gun, one (1) Browning Automatic Rifle, and four (4) M1 Carbines. There were ten (10) communist made hand grenades and an assortment of small ammunition and explosives. There was small network of trenches connecting the positions and along the canal banks. There were no signs of any large stores of supplies on Objective 1.

The battalion reorganized and prepared for the move to Objective 2. The battalion commander established communication with the supply boats. They reported moving along slow about nine (9) kilometers short of Objective 1. The company commanders were called to battalion to insure coordination for phase two.

#### SECOND PHASE

The plan was for the 3rd Company to continue along the northern bank of the Thap Muoi Canal. 2nd Company was to cross the canal, revert to battalion reserve, and follow 3rd Company. Sampans were secured from along the canal for the crossing. The canal crossing was accomplished without incident.

It took the company approximately thirty (30) minutes to complete the crossing. It was now 1400 hours, and all units were in position to continue the move to Objective 2. Just as the forward companies began to move out again a couple of shots were heard and then an explosion sounded near the forward edge of Objective 1. A check of the area revealed that a couple of the ARVN soldiers from the security platoon had noticed movement along the north edge of the canal during the reorganization. They went back to take a look. It turned out be a very excellent concealed spider hole, that contained two Viet Cong. The top of the hole was covered with mud. They had evidently come up to see what was happening. After a brief fight, the Viet Cong were killed.

This incident called for a more detail search of the canal and its immediate banks. Thirty minutes later, more hiding places were uncovered, revealing five (5) more Viet Cong. The five Viet Cong were interrogated and revealed that they were local civilian forced to join the Thap Muoi Battalion and fight the Imperialistic Americans who were using the Vietnamese as puppets. They also revealed that the Viet Cong threaten the safety of their families.

At 1500 hours, the battalion started the move again towards Objective 2. The five Viet Cong were <sup>Brought</sup> along by the security platoon. The move to Objective 2 was slow because of a number of footmines and traps along the trails bordering the canal. The Viet Cong had employed them along their routes of withdrawal to slow our advance. The battalion suffered five (5) wounded as a results of the ingeniously concealed obstacles. It took the battalion approximately one (1) hour to reach the planned assault positions of Objective 2. (SEE MAP "D") No hostile fire was received from the objective area, therefore, the battalion commander instructed 1st and 3rd Companies to move into the area and conduct an extensive search. The result of the search revealed evidence of Viet Cong, but none was found. They had hurriedly fled the area for fires were still burning and remnants of food were found in the houses. A small store of approximately one (1) ton of rice was found concealed under a hay stack. The battalion kept the rice. It was to be loaded onto the supply boats and taken in to My An District Headquarters.

The battalion commander contacted the supply boats and received word that they were thirty (30) minutes from Objective 2. He was instructed to remain at present position until arrival of the boats. The battalion established a perimeter defense on Objective 2. The results of the afternoon operation totaled six (6)

Viet Cong killed and five (5) captured. Their weapons included four (4) U. S. 30 Caliber Carbines, one (1) K-50, communist made, ten (10) hand grenades, and some small arms ammunition.

Later about 1630 hours the supply boats arrived with word to remain in position for the night and be prepared to move out for My An by 0600 hours, the following day. The battalion tightened the perimeter defense and sent out ambush squads up and down the Thap Muoi canal and along the north and south trails approaching Objective 2. The battalion commander called his company commanders together and issued his order for the following day's security mission.

#### THIRD PHASE

At 0630 hours, on the 16 July 1966, the battalion moved out on the third and final phase of the operation. The distance to be covered was approximately six (6) kilometers to My An District and another three and a half (3 1/2) kilometers north of My An to the local district Outpost 1. (SEE MAP "D") The general plan was to move with two companies abreast, 1st and 2d Companies, one on either side of the Thap Muoi Canal. 3rd Company was in reserve, following 2nd Company. Headquarters Company, and the security platoon followed 1st Company. The supply boats moved along the canal parallel to Headquarters Company. If any danger was encountered during the remainder of the move, the battalion would counter it using the two forward companies as assault forces. Again the battalion moved along slow, watching the route for footmines and traps. When the battalion came upon any of these obstacles, they were dearmed or blown in place. Later, during the operation, the battalion commander ordered the security platoon to put the Viet Cong prisoners aboard the supply boats and move forward along the canal in sampans.

The battalion continued their move to Outpost 2 and on into My An District without further incident. It was 1100 hours, when the battalion reached My An District. The battalion went in the town to eat the noon meal. The customary seista followed after the meal.

At 1300 hours the battalion, along with the supply boat convoy, headed north for Outpost 1. The battalion used the same formation as used earlier, <sup>two</sup> forward companies front, one company in reserve and single file along the beaten trail (18 inch front). No incidents were encountered during the final move of phase three. By 1530 hours, the battalion had closed Objective 3 with the operation completed.

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Overall, this operation was considered a success. Actual body count of the enemy killed was ten (10). Five Viet Cong were captured. The weapons are listed as follows: four (4) M1 rifles, one (1) Thompson Sub-Machine Gun, one (1) K-50. Twenty (20) hand grenades, some small arms ammunition and a few documents were captured. The total loss to the 1st Battalion, 13th Regiment were two (2) killed and twelve (12) wounded.

In a guerilla war of this type where the enemy can choose the time and place to fight, there is little doubt that he cannot afford to make a mistake, for if he does, it is likely to be his last. In the case of the first phase of this operation, the enemy must have felt that he had a superior force and felt that, by his position, he had the overwhelming advantage or he would have fled much sooner. Up until this time we had not had any significant contact with the enemy during the daylight hours except for sniper fire and harrassing fire. This action may have been necessary for the Viet Cong to relocate their supplies. The real reason for their attempt to stay and fight this time was never answered.

Although this operation was considered to be a success, there were many basic fundamentals of tactics that were violated. Formation for movement to contact during phase 2 and 3 was a single file, eighteen (18) inch front. Objective 1 was considered the primary objective because of the suspicion of stores of supplies. Too much time was used by 3rd Company to get into blocking position. A possible alteration in initial plan could have been to bring another unit up the canal to set up blocking position in the east. 3rd Company could have been landed to the north of the Thap Muoi Canal thereby shortening the distance to their blocking positions. These actions would perform a twofold mission. They could have prevented the removal of the stores of supplies, if any, and at the same time cut-off the enemy withdrawal up the canal.

#### RESULTS

This operation did not by any means stop the flow of men and supplies or the Viet Cong harrassment along the Thap Muoi Canal, but many similar operations that followed helped to sharply curtail his movement and actions. Later in the year of 1966, the 7th and 9th Infantry Divisions (ARVN) conducted joint operations in the Province. Information obtained from these operations and others, practically neutralize the Viet Cong activity and restored the Province to relative calm.

#### TRAINING IMPLICATIONS

1. Proper applications of the fundamentals of tactics are necessary for any attack to be successful. These fundamentals are important in Vietnam as well as in any conventional situation. Flexibility in any tactical situation is highly desirable, but flagrant abuse of the basic essentials is unacceptable. Lack of flank security and single file for attack formations are the most significant violations.

2. Main attack launched against the strongest Viet Cong positions, could have caused complete failure of the operation.

3. Only one (1) forward observer for the battalion greatly hampered the effectiveness of the artillery fires. All company commanders should be able to adjust fires without having to depend on the one overworked battalion forward observer.

4. The use of established routes is most likely to provide the enemy with opportunities to inflict casualties on friendly troops. To beat the enemy at his own game, friendly forces should move away from recognized routes.

5. The use of Scout Dogs could maximize the search effort and reveal more hiding places for the Viet Cong. American units reported that they were effectively used on prior operations.

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