

3 February - 28 February 1968

ENGAGEMENTS AROUND HARDCORE

(GOLDEN DRAGONS)

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HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION, 14TH INFANTRY
(Golden Dragons)
APO San Francisco 96355

13 April 1968

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report

SEE DISTRIBUTION

1. A special report is hereby submitted to cover combat action by the 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry which occurred approximately 25 kilometers south of Da Nang during the period 3-28 February 1968.

2. The reasons for this special report are as follows:

a. To provide a comprehensive summary for historical purposes of the battalion's activities during a continuous and prolonged period of combat against a determined NVA enemy.

b. To provide a forum for examination of lessons learned by this battalion during a period of intense combat activity.

3. It is hoped that this account of activities and comments by the battalion commander will be of interest and possible benefit to the readers.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

Robert J. Byrne
13 April 1968

ROBERT J. BYRNE
1LT, Infantry
Adjutant

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COMBAT ASSAULT

Elements of the 2d NVA Division were employed in the 1968 TET offensive in the Da Nang - Hoi An area. In order to block and otherwise isolate these elements from their traditional base camp area in the highlands east of An Hoa, the 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry along with other 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division elements was ordered by the Americal Division (the brigade was under the operational control of the Americal Division during this action) to organize an area of operations (AO) to include the critical high ground south of Da Nang, east of An Hoa, and west of Hoi An. The Golden Dragon battalion commander, during a reconnaissance on 3 February with the brigade commander, Colonel George E. Wear, and the 2d Battalion, 9th Artillery commander, Lieutenant Colonel Gerald B Bobzien, selected the site of the combat assault to be the topographical crest (EM148 - AT978501) of the most prominent ridge in the area of operations in order to secure terrain for the battalion firebase. On this reconnaissance it was verified that that the general area was "hot", due to observations both from on the ground and from the air. Four gunships and eleven lift aircraft (UH1) provided the Army aircraft assets for the combat assault.

An artillery preparation was fired from the firebase to the southeast (1st Battalion, 35th Infantry) and from Marine artillery to the north and northwest. Due to poor weather conditions the effects of the preparation could not be observed with clarity. However, the first lift landed almost without incident, although fire was received from the vicinity of the landing zone. As the succeeding lifts arrived, the fire became more intense. Antiaircraft fire, both 30 cal and 12.62, was directed against

the incoming lift and gunships from at least four confirmed locations. One "Blue Ghost" gunship from the 7/17th Air Cavalry was hit by 12.62 mm ground/air fire; it crash landed and was abandoned by the crew, who were picked up by one of the other gunships. Alpha Company, the lead rifle company on the heliborne combat assault, was followed by Delta Company. Immediately behind Delta was the 4.2 inch mortar platoon which was airlifted into the landing zone by CH-47 (Chinook) helicopters. The enemy fire on the LZ increased in intensity in spite of return fire by A and D Companies and the gunships; two casualties were incurred by Alpha Company and two more by the heavy mortar platoon while off-loading. A fire started around the landing gear of the Chinook but fortunately a crewman was able to extinguish it allowing the aircraft to lift off from the LZ.

By the closing hours of the first day, two rifle companies (A and D), the 4.2 inch mortar platoon and a battalion control element led by the S-3 were firmly entrenched on the LZ, now named "Hardcore." A listening post was established by the second platoon of Delta Company, 400 meters west of Hardcore. At approximately 0400 hours on the morning of 4 February an undetermined size NVA force was surprised by the listening post and a short fire fight ensued. A relief force sent from the second platoon swept the contact area, finding two confirmed NVA killed, two RPG machineguns and a B40 rocket launcher. The four man listening post incurred two wounded in the encounter.

(Figure "a" depicts significant terrain features around Hardcore)

II INITIAL CONTACT

The remaining major elements of the battalion closed Hardcore on 4 February.

A Company pushed to the southwest, B Company to the north, and D Company to the northeast from LZ Hardcore. Besides the usual search and destroy mission, D Company was to secure the area for the extraction of the UHI gunship which had been shot down during the combat assault on the previous day; the gunship was rigged and extracted. No maneuver company had contact other than for an occasional sniper round until afternoon.

About 1300, when pushing west into the small village of Tho Son (AT985516), B Company hit a determined NVA unit, estimated to be a reinforced platoon or larger size unit. The fight ensued until dark. On four occasions, the B Company commander, Captain Bruce G. Shipley, hammered against the hostile position; each time was with the support of artillery. Army gunships raked the area. The battalion requested and received an immediate airstrike on the target.

The enemy would wait until lead elements were within 3 - 5 meters away before firing from their positions, later determined to be an "L" shaped ambush. Although the enemy positions were not fully exploited until the following day, B Company confirmed three enemy killed and captured three (3) AK 47 rifles and eight enemy packs. It is believed that the enemy losses were in fact much higher. Finally, the battalion commander ordered Captain Shipley to withdraw from the area of contact in order to reorganize for the night and prepare for the next day's offensive.

In order to withdraw, Captain Shipley had to evacuate one seriously wounded man from the forward area of contact. The assigned Dustoff aircraft, piloted by Warrant Officers Norman Shanahan and Gregory Shuntz, effected a daring voluntary pick-up of the wounded man. Supported by a ring of

outgoing suppressive fire from elements of B Company, the pilot spiraled the Huey into the tight perimeter, now blazing with outgoing protective fire. Flying conditions were complicated by the oncoming dusk. However, the extraction was incredibly effected without hits ~~off~~ the Dustoff aircraft. The battalion commander, who witnessed the rescue from his OP at Hardcore and listened to the radio transmissions associated with the pick-up, remarked that if Hollywood had produced the drama that unfolded in about 15 minutes, no one would believe it!

The battalion commander decided to attack the stubborn position with two companies (B and D) at first light the next day, 5 February. The attack was from a new direction (from the south) and was preceded by an artillery preparation. The execution of the attack was marred by an artillery computation error which caused 2 rounds of 105 mm howitzer to fall within the command group and the 1st platoon of D Company. The company commander, Captain Charles L. Cosand, was among the nine friendly troops wounded. Although he suffered hits in the face and leg, Captain Cosand resolutely maintained command of D Company until the objective was secured before temporarily releasing the company to the executive officer, in order to be treated by the battalion surgeon.

With the enemy driven off by the ground action of the previous day, the artillery firing during the night and the two company attack, both companies now swept through the objective easily. In retrospect Captain Shipley concluded that because of the configuration of the "L" shaped enemy position, without prior knowledge of its exact location, only a direct assault was possible. He had attempted to outflank it the previous day without success.

The results of the first three days of action were 5 NVA killed, 3 weapons captured, with 16 wounded suffered by friendly forces.
(Figure "b" depicts tactical maneuver of 4 & 5 February)

III

ENGAGEMENTS TO EFFECT ENCIRCLEMENT

The following day, 6 February 1968, both B and D Companies crossed the Song Chiem Son (River) before first light in pursuit of the remaining enemy from the previous two days' encounters. These two companies were to sweep to the north and west, while A Company was to move directly west on the south side of the river to complete the encirclement.

Bravo Company was moving along the main trail running northeast - southwest in the vicinity of Thanh My (AT972533) when the point platoon called the company commander to determine if friendly elements were located to their front. They reported that a large group of soldiers were waving to them from across the rice paddy. The B Company commander then called Delta Company to determine if Delta had B Company in sight. Upon receiving an "affirmative" answer, the point platoon was told to move across the paddy. Once in the open, the enemy opened fire; the soldiers spotted by the point were "dinks," not Delta Company. At this time D Company was in fact at least 1.5 kilometers away to the northeast; it is unknown whether they had actually sighted Bravo Company or the NVA.

D Company was immediately ordered to relieve the pressure on B Company. After a difficult maneuver, D Company came into position, and due to the support of gunships, artillery and fire and maneuver by both companies, the situation was favorably resolved by the end of activities on the 4th day of

operations in the AO.

The next day, 7 February, the basic operation continued. A Company, located near Le Nam (AT960518), experienced heavy fire from two directions as it began its early morning movement. The enemy struck as the battalion command and control (C&C) aircraft was landing at the company location. The C&C pilot was killed; several others were wounded and the aircraft was damaged. After calling for artillery fire and saturating the target with direct fire, the area appeared sufficiently secure to bring in a medical evacuation (Dustoff) aircraft for the wounded. This aircraft also was damaged by ground to air fire and was forced down at the A Company location. Heavy artillery fire and an airstrike were utilized in an attempt to reduce the pressure on Company A. The Alpha unit could not maneuver all platoons until the two downed aircraft could be rigged and evacuated.

Meanwhile, D Company, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry was ordered by brigade to the "operational control" of the Golden Dragons. This freed C Company to go to the aid of A Company and also facilitated the encirclement from the south. C Company advanced to the area of greatest threat to A Company (vicinity coordinates AT956523), allowing the helicopters to be evacuated. In the meantime both B and D Companies were completing their sweep to the north and west across the Song Chiem Son (River). As the 5th day 7 February, ended, B and D Companies were in blocking positions (coordinates AT967542 and AT960542 respectively) across the northern fork of the Song Chiem Son (River) and A and C Companies were in position (coordinates AT950520 and AT944526 respectively) to move to the northeast to sweep the kill zone

formed by the encirclement maneuver. In preparation for the sweep of 8 February, airstrikes and artillery were utilized. A and C Companies moved into the objective area encountering sporadic resistance and taking light friendly casualties. Total results of the encirclement actions (from 6 February through 8 February) included 32 enemy KIA, 3 enemy weapons CIA while US Forces suffered 8 KIA, and 25 wounded. (Figure "c" depicts tactical maneuver of 6, 7 & 8 February)

IV

ROCKET/MORTAR ATTACK AGAINST HARDCORE

On the morning of 8 February 1968, approximately 6 mortar rounds and three or four 122 mm rocket rounds were directed against Hardcore. Immediately reports from B and D Companies localized the mortar positions, and counter mortar fire was directed by these companies, utilizing the battalion 4.2 inch mortar platoon.

Fortunately, the battalion commander at the battalion OP observed the flash of fire from the rocket position and artillery fire was directed against it. Fortunately, also the airborne FAC was overhead and assisted materially in directing supporting 105 mm artillery into the rocket position. An immediate airstrike request diverted several flights of fighters which accurately struck the rocket position; the effort was of course controlled by the airborne FAC. The airstrikes uncovered an antiaircraft firing crew manning their weapon, which also was struck. No mortar or rocket rounds were fired subsequent to the retaliatory effort by the battalion. It is believed that the rocket position was destroyed, and that as a minimum the mortar positions were forced out of action.

The rocket firing position was located outside the Golden Dragon area of operations at coordinates AT967572. Close liaison with the 3d Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment facilitated clearance for the artillery and airstrike.

V

THE ATTACK TO THE EAST

Instructions from brigade required that the battalion attack to the east on 9 February into a newly authorized extension of the area of operations, approximately described by the following coordinates: BT 0055, 0052, 0353, 0356. This action was in response to recently acquired intelligence material indicating that a large size NVA unit had moved into the area. The attack was coordinated with a similar action by the 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry, located to the east of the Golden Dragon area of operation. Accordingly, A and C Companies were ordered to attack to the east, with appropriate objectives designated in the eastern portion of the AO extension. In order to control the activities of the battalion during this phase of operations, the battalion commander moved overland with a small command group and established a daylight observation post on the northeastern part of the ridgeline, vicinity AT989509; it afforded excellent observation and radio coverage of the area of interest.

After advancing across the north - south railroad tracks, C Company soon encountered elements of the enemy force, verifying its presence in the area. After a stiff fight in the vicinity of Ban Lanh (BT005537), Charlie Company effectively reduced the initial resistance by means of artillery and gunship support, direct weapons fire, and unit maneuver. Unfortunately, two short

rounds of 105 mm howitzer wounded two of C Company's men. Medevac was requested for these and other casualties; however, the aircraft was somehow downed enroute and the Battalion C&C aircraft with Doctor David E. Bishop, the battalion surgeon, on board, tended to the evacuation. The company then closed on the main enemy position, met heavy resistance and proceeded to destroy the enemy force.

A serious problem existed in that the 1st platoon's ammunition supply was nearly depleted due to the earlier contact and the 2d platoon was about half way through its supply of ammunition for the same reason. An emergency resupply of ammunition was requested; the helicopter attempted to land, but was driven off by intense enemy fire. Also, initially, priority of artillery fires and gunship support was given elsewhere due to the serious situation developing concurrently with Bravo Company (which will be discussed later).

Regardless of these obstacles, Charlie Company tackled the objective, a heavily wooded area running on an east - west axis. On its southern side was a gully 20 feet deep; on the northern side was the Song Ky Lam (River). When making contact with the enemy, C Company was located on the southern side of the 20 foot gully. The second platoon was used as a diversionary force in that it placed fire on the enemy's flank while the third platoon maneuvered from the west to the east toward the objective. The 1st platoon was used to secure a LZ for the ammunition resupply. The C Company CP and 81 mm mortar element were being used as a reserve. At the time the company commander, Captain Robert R. Vaughn, could not determine the size of the enemy force. The third platoon engaged the enemy and received intense automatic weapons fire. The

CP and reserve reinforced the 3d platoon and the order was given to adjust weapons for automatic fire in order to gain superiority. At times the fighting was as close as 1 - 10 meters.

The woodline was encircled by a trench six feet deep. The enemy occupied the trench system and the several "hootches" beyond it. The attacking troops made maximum use of M-79 grenade launchers, LAWS, and hand grenades in gaining possession of the enemy positions. Once in the trenches an enemy 82 mm mortar was captured and 25 known dead within 20 meters of friendly positions were counted. All the dead had packs and weapons and were wearing camouflaged uniforms. Another 20 or more were seen being carried off but were not accounted for as confirmed or possible kills. The trenches afforded good cover but greatly limited the maneuvering area. Gunships were requested and they pursued the enemy who was now attempting to escape to the northeast. The company was forced to discontinue further pursuit in order to get the much needed resupply of ammunition which had finally arrived.

After the completion of the resupply, a night laager was found 100 meters from the objective; gunships and artillery were employed to saturate the entire area. About 0300 hours that night, noises were heard coming from the contact area. The "dinks" were pounding on gongs and chanting "hey Joe, you number 10, you die!" Shortly afterwards seven mortar rounds believed to be 82 mm were received inside the company perimeter. At the same time a light was seen and movement was heard to the east of the perimeter about 30 meters out. A hand grenade was thrown and the light went out and the movement ceased. As a result, the mortars stopped firing.

Concurrent with C Company's action of 9 February, Alpha Company was heavily engaged in assisting both C Company of the 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry and in reducing the pressure on C Company of the Golden Dragon battalion.

In the meantime, B Company was ordered to proceed with all available speed to block possible escape routes for the enemy from Charlie Company's assault. After moving only about 1000 meters, B Company engaged a numerically superior enemy (NVA) force in vicinity of Boa An Dong (AT985535). A violent small arms and hand grenade battle took place in which the NVA used short range rockets (B-40 type) and 82 mm mortars. Counter-mortar fire directed from the battalion OP silenced one mortar position and severely restricted the action of one other. However, B Company took serious casualties; the enemy was entrenched and determined to stay and fight. At the time the action started, B Company was in file and the enemy split the file with recoilless rifle fire, isolating the second platoon. The company commander gave the order for the remaining three platoons to withdraw and form a perimeter. At this time the entire element was receiving heavy recoilless rifle, B-40 machinegun and mortar fire.

The company commander instructed the 1st platoon to move up two squads in an attempt to relieve the pressure on the 2d platoon's flank. This required them to "low-crawl" over three hundred meters, which they did successfully. The 1st platoon relieved the 2d platoon, recovered the wounded and moved back into the perimeter formed by the remainder of the company. The 2d platoon's dead had to be left in the contact area.

At about 1430 hours, Delta was committed to the relief of B Company and finally after a bloody battle both companies linked up and were able to reorganize for the night.

While reorganizing, eleven of the wounded from B and D Companies had to be evacuated from the contact area. Due to the seriousness of the wounds, an attempt had to be made for evacuation before dark. The landing zone was marked with smoke and covering fire from small arms was given by elements of the two companies. Gunships protected the evacuation from the air. As the Dustoff landed, enemy 82 mm mortar rounds fell in the perimeter and heavy enemy automatic weapons fire hit in and around the landing zone. The evacuation was effected but not without minor casualties. One of the gunships protecting the Dustoff was shot down. The pilot fought the aircraft all the way to the ground; it crashed, but miraculously the crew was unhurt. They were picked-up by a sister gunship. The gunship was evacuated the next day.

After the casualties were evacuated an attempt was made by B and D Companies to withdraw from the immediate area. B Company met heavy resistance and could not move. It was decided by both commanders to remain in the contact area for the night. As darkness closed a final mortar attack fell on D Company's position killing four and wounding sixteen more. After dark the enemy attempted to probe the friendly positions.

During the reorganization that evening, the third platoon of Bravo Company was separated from the main body and forced to organize a platoon perimeter. At approximately 2100 hours, the enemy attempted to slip by the third platoon on a major east - west trail. The enemy had no idea of the third platoon's location and fired recoilless rifles at random. This triggered the firing of an enemy 82 mm mortar. The enemy recoilless riflemen, apparently thinking the mortar belonged to Bravo Company, laid heavy fire directly on the tube. In turn, the mortar shelled the recoilless rifle positions. Thus an all night

firefight erupted between two enemy units with the third platoon enjoying the show. At this point in the confusion, an enemy platoon (on line) laid down a heavy base of fire. In return the enemy recoilless riflemen walked the strike of their weapons up and down the other enemy position.

There is no way of knowing how many "dinks" were eliminated by each other. However the third platoon also took their toll. The enemy moved past the platoon location on two parallel trails, with the third platoon in a trench between the trails. The platoon used hand grenades which they threw on the trail after holding them for three seconds with pins pulled and hand safety released. Again the enemy could not determine the source of the grenades and would fire their weapons in fear and desperation into their own ranks as they moved along the trails. At first light the next morning, the third platoon joined the remainder of the company.

A portion of the night perimeter was manned by the weapons platoon of D Company. They were dug in beside a trail bordered by a heavy bamboo hedgerow. The enemy threw eight to ten grenades at their positions with little effect. The grenades could not clear the bamboo and they fell harmlessly short of the intended target.

On the next day, 10 February 1968, an extensive U.S. Air Force airstrike, artillery and mortar preparation, to include CS munitions and U.S. Army gunship fire softened up the objective area. B and D Companies advanced to seize the objective, destroy bunkers and recover seven friendly dead. Fresh enemy graves were found; evidence of the violent nature of the engagement were apparent everywhere. In the meantime, A and C Companies mopped-up the

enemy position further to the east. In the objective area were numerous indications that the previous day's fighting had inflicted heavy casualties on the NVA. The total results for A, B, C, and D Companies in the two day operation were 116 enemy killed, 25 individual weapons and one ⁸²81 mm mortar CIA with 13 U.S. soldiers killed and 53 wounded.

(Figure "d" portrays the tactical concept in "Attack to the East")

VI

MOP-UP OPERATIONS OF THE AREA NORTH AND WEST OF HARDCORE

On 11 February, B Company, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry, on a local sweeping action, received sniper fire from a hamlet, An Tam 2 (AT955508), only 1.8 km from Hardcore. (The company had been under operational control of the Golden Dragons since 10 February 1968). In order to attack the enemy from the northeast the company commander carefully worked his platoons using a combination of direct fire, maneuver, and indirect fire support until he ran into stiff resistance from within the inner confines of the built up area. Due to the pressure the forward most element fell back but not all the men were able to withdraw; a wounded man, a dead comrade, and a machinegun (without bolt) remained. The company immediately prepared for another attack in order to overrun the position; artillery and mortar fire were used in preparation. As the wind direction was favorable, the 4.2 inch mortar platoon fired their 3 remaining rounds of CS ammunition in support of the assault. The battalion command and control aircraft, loaded with CS grenades, orbited overhead with the S3 Air, Lieutenant Harold Ebbitt, on board.

The company attack was successful in allowing the wounded to be carried from the battlefield. However, after arriving in the forward area, it was discovered

that the enemy was now located across the river from the attacking unit.

B Company was forced to withdraw, leaving the body of one soldier and the machinegun in the contact area.

Meanwhile, an incident in a somewhat lighter vein occurred. While orbiting above the village, the command and control aircraft ran short of fuel. As B Company had not called for CS hand grenades to be dropped, Lieutenant Ebbitt and his crew of grenadiers were caught with several CS grenades with pins loosened, ready to be dropped. To conserve time the aircraft commander elected to fly to the Marine Airbase (Industrial Complex, AT875475) to refuel. Unfortunately the readied CS grenades rolled from the door of the UH1 and burst underneath the Marine control tower. There were apologies galore from the embarrassed crew of the "Charlie-Charlie"; however, U.S. Army - U.S. Marine relations reached their nadir, especially for the Golden Dragons!

When it returned from the refueling mission the battalion commander dispatched the aircraft to the company's location with the battalion surgeon on board. The wounded man recovered from the forward area was in serious condition, and the medical evacuation helicopter had been delayed for some unknown reason. The company medics worked desperately to keep the man alive as he was being moved to a secure helicopter lift area. They had almost worked their way to the evacuation pad. As the Golden Dragon surgeon arrived, a dismayed voice announced over the radio only two words -- "he's dead!" Having barely touched down, the command and control aircraft returned to the firebase.

The following day, 12 February, two companies attacked from a different direction (from the south) with Delta Company, 2d Battalion, 35th Infantry, commanded by Captain Robert H. Scherer, on the west side of the river, and Bravo Company, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry on the east. Both companies ran

into mines and booby traps. Delta Company drew sniper fire from the vicinity of Chau Phong (AT948502). However, the attackers reduced the enemy position to rubble and recovered the dead and the machinegun. It was discovered that the position, in addition to being defended by mines and booby traps, was also protected by extensive bunkering and tactical wire. The results of this two day action were 14 enemy KIA, 3 weapons CIA at a cost of 3 dead and 16 wounded.

On 13 February, B Company, 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry was released to the control of its parent organization. By this time, the Golden Dragon area of operations was reduced in size generally by that territory covered in the attack to the east. Extensive search and destroy operations were initiated in order to clear out the areas of former contact in the flat lands adjacent to Hardcore. Additionally, maneuver by rifle companies A, B, and C was designed to block traditional avenues of infiltration in the area. On the first day of this phase of the operations around Hardcore, a stiff fire fight developed between A Company, commanded by Captain Albert D. Carter, and an enemy position about 5 km west of the firebase. The position was reduced by fire and maneuver with the aid of supporting armed H23 aircraft from the Brigade Aviation Section. However, during this action, one H23 was shot down; the crew and aircraft were evacuated successfully. The results of the day's contact were 5 enemy killed, 2 weapons captured with only 2 U.S. soldiers WIA.

During the continuation of mop-up operations on 14 February, it was apparent from observations at the battalion OP at Hardcore that the enemy was again on the move in the western and northern portion of the area of operation. Both operations were conducted in order to clear out the territory covered in the attack to the east. Extensive search and destroy operations were initiated in order to clear out the areas of former contact in the flat lands adjacent to Hardcore. Additionally, maneuver by rifle companies A, B, and C was designed to block traditional avenues of infiltration in the area. On the first day of this phase of the operations around Hardcore, a stiff fire fight developed between A Company, commanded by Captain Albert D. Carter, and an enemy position about 5 km west of the firebase. The position was reduced by fire and maneuver with the aid of supporting armed H23 aircraft from the Brigade Aviation Section. However, during this action, one H23 was shot down; the crew and aircraft were evacuated successfully. The results of the day's contact were 5 enemy killed, 2 weapons captured with only 2 U.S. soldiers WIA.

A and C Companies moved to counteract the activity. Apparently reacting to the maneuver companies, about 40 enemy were observed in the open area along a river bank (AT966531) about 2.5 km north of Hardcore. The Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Charles W. Ryder Jr., who was present at the battalion OP, assisted in calling mortar and artillery fire on the enemy. About 20 rounds of 4.2 inch CS munitions were employed to increase the effectiveness of the high explosive rounds. Meanwhile, both companies made contact about 1.5 km away from the observed location of enemy described above. C Company, in the vicinity of Ca Bon (AT949534), was engaged sharply while crossing an open area between two forested village complexes. C Company used artillery, gunships and maneuver to continue the advance toward the enemy sighted in the open. While C and A Companies fought to get to the objective area, mortar and artillery succeeded in holding the enemy in place until an airstrike, previously preplanned for another target in the AO, was diverted to the current enemy location. Close air support, increased by three other "diverts" accurately hit the area with high drag bombs, napalm, and CBU. It was evident to observers that the enemy had been hard hit. However, due to the concurrent contact by A and C Companies, C Company could not fight their way to the area of the airstrike until 15 February.

An early morning attack on 15 February was utilized to gain control of the objective. A search of the area disclosed 13 bodies, several drag trails and other evidence that the airstrike had found its mark. In the search of the area, C Company was constantly harassed by sniper fire. At the same time A Company searched out the area to the west and southwest of Hardcore until 16 February. Also B Company worked out the area to the north of Hardcore. At this time, in addition to organic means, a reconnaissance platoon of APC's

supported C and B Companies in turn. These mop-up operations were conducted from 11 to 17 February. The total results for the overall period for the Golden Dragons and attached units were 67 KIA, with 3 U.S. KIA and 26 WIA.

On 17 February, a C130 aircraft enroute to the Industrial Complex (U.S. Marine Base - 8747), received 200-300 rounds of semi-automatic and automatic ground to air fire. The aircraft was at an altitude of about 1000 feet over grid coordinates AT956521. A 3d Brigade FAC - Helix 52 piloted by Major Leonard Severtson) was in the area, and upon being informed of the incident (which had been observed from the battalion OP), proceeded to the Marine Base to inform the pilot of the nature and location of the enemy target. Major Severtson left the C130 crew busily patching holes in the transport fuselage. The C130 pilot carefully followed instructions in making a safe exit from the area at a considerably higher altitude. Later, an airstrike was called on the enemy location.

(The scope and tactical concept of the "Mop-Up Operations" are graphically represented in Figure "e".

VII

THE PUSH TO THE SOUTH

During the mop-up operations of the area north of and otherwise in the vicinity of Hardcore, the battalion reconnaissance platoon, "Fox Force", led by First Lieutenant Terry E. Bender, operated on a "work night, sleep day" basis on the long ridge line across Crocodile Lake and directly south of Hardcore. Fox's mission was to screen the battalion's southern flank, and to report significant activity. During this operation, there were no enemy sightings. On 16 February, Fox secured a two ship landing zone on the north side of the aforementioned ridge line, into which A Company airlanded. A Company immediately pushed to the south, and operated without contact on 16 and 17 February,

On 17 February, the battalion commander established Minibase Fox at coordinates AT958469. Two tubes of 4.2 inch mortar, one ground mounted 106 recoilless rifle and associated ammunition and equipment were airlifted by UH1 aircraft. Minibase Fox was utilized as the forward battalion command-observation post for controlling the push to the south. The battalion commander and elements of the command group manned the OP during all daylight hours and overnight as required by the activity in the area.

On the following day, 18 February, Charlie Company combat assaulted into a landing zone protected by A Company and Fox Force from commanding high ground in the vicinity of the LZ. During the pick-up of the next to last lift, a lift helicopter received automatic weapons ground fire from the flat area across the river to the north of Hardcore, crashed and burned. All four crew members and four combat troops were killed. Both A and C Companies pushed further to the south after a B-52 strike in the saddle at the southern border of the battalion area of operations. Due to the dense jungle vegetation, ground movement was slow and tedious. During the activity of 18 February, 1 NVA was killed, 8 U.S. killed, and 1 U.S. wounded.

The battalion move to the south on 19 February consisted of two companies, A and C, advancing on parallel axes. Both companies made slow progress in the rough terrain and thick vegetation. D Company was relieved of fire-base security by B Company in order to secure the east flank of the battalion, and search and clear the area in the vicinity of Scorpion Lake. No enemy contact was produced by A and C Companies on the 19th.

In the meantime however, while securing the east flank of the battalion, D Company routed an enemy force with small arms fire, 4.2 inch mortar support and a diverted airstrike. The company suffered one man killed in the action while killing 4 enemy soldiers.

On the 20th of February, the push continued on two parallel axes, with A and C Companies abreast, C Company on the right. Early in the morning, Company A received sniper fire from a heavily wooded hill (AT960438) to the south of their CP location. Just prior to this incident, the battalion commander, from the OP on Minibase Fox, observed through the BC scope what he believed to be an element of A Company. In reality, the personnel observed were well dressed enemy (NVA)... part of the force that was later in contact with A Company. Artillery fire was accurately adjusted jointly by the A Company FO and the battalion LNO (from Minibase Fox). An immediate airstrike also was requested and it effectively covered the target area. A Company swept the area and found 3 enemy KIA by the artillery and airstrikes.

Delta Company attacked to the southwest on an axis lying to the south of Scorpion Lake. The third platoon of D Company was attempting to maneuver to the high ground south of Scorpion Lake when it encountered an undetermined size enemy force firmly entrenched along a steep ridge. A stiff fire fight ensued but the enemy could not be dislodged. The third platoon, in an exposed position required covering fire from the 4.2 mortars on Minibase Fox. The fire was placed on the enemy as the platoon withdrew to a secured position where the wounded could be extracted. D Company then maneuvered north around the lake for more advantageous terrain, in an attempt to dislodge the enemy on the following day. C Company had no contact in their southward movement.

During the afternoon of 20 February, the Assistant Division Commander of the Americal Division, Brigadier General Ryder, visited Minibase Fox and observed the action. An incident in which General Ryder took particular interest was the finding of an occupied "hootch" - cave complex (AT981438) on a narrow ledge on the southwestern face of Hill 845. The complex was discovered by Helix 53 (USAF Major Wilbur Skaar) while flying a FAC visual reconnaissance mission along the near perpendicular face of the mountain. Major Skaar later arrived on the ground at Minibase Fox, and assisted in directing the ensuing action. It was decided to attack the complex by firing a destruction mission with 8 inch howitzers from the Marine Industrial Complex, some 11 km to the west. The mission was adjusted by the Airborne FAC now on station (Helix 52 - Major Severtson) ably assisted from Minibase Fox by General Ryder, Major Skaar - the ground FAC, and the Golden Dragon artillery LNO, Captain Jack Jones. After the destruction mission, which further exposed the complex by clearing some of the vegetation from the area, two U.S. Army gunships were directed on the target by the Airborne FAC. As a result of the attack, the complex burned the remainder of the afternoon, throughout the night, and until mid-morning the next day. It was judged to be an important NVA command/logistical installation. This opinion is based partly on information available to the battalion commander through Brigade S2 that related favorably to the time and location of the friendly attack.

The following day, 21 February, A Company searched out the area of previous contact, finding stoutly constructed enemy "hootches", two of which were filled with brown rice. Living quarters and air raid shelters were also found. After destroying these, A Company moved to the south. It is believed that

these constructions were part of an important enemy base camp area lying further to the east of the area of contact (vicinity AT964423). This conclusion is based on FAC sightings and a terrain analysis. Unfortunately, the opportunity to check the area with ground troops did not present itself. C Company continued to move to the south, finding a complex of well used trails in the area. Delta searched the area of the previous day's contact without finding the enemy.

On 22 February, both Alpha and Charlie Companies ran into sporadic enemy resistance in their movement to the south. Unfortunately, Alpha had a soldier killed early in the day. Efforts to evacuate the man (a Dustoff was called before he died) proved fruitless. While attempting to lower a jungle penetrator into the area, the Dustoff was hit by groundfire. The rounds damaged the UH1 engine, which forced the aircraft down about 1.5 km from the area of contact. Delta Company immediately dispatched a platoon to protect the downed bird. Until the arrival of ground troops, the Air Force FAC orbited the area, and was later joined by gunships. The crew was then evacuated unharmed by a Dustoff slick aircraft. By 1430 hours, the aircraft had been rigged and evacuated without incident. In the meantime, after sweeping, Alpha carried the body out of the area of contact. It was considerably later in the day before it was possible to evacuate the body by CC aircraft with gunship escort.

Charlie Company met with increasing resistance until, at about 1500 hours, it encountered a hornet's nest of activity to the north of Hill 341 (AT954416). The resistance consisted of at least two well placed machineguns and a variety of other semi-automatic and automatic weapons positions. The enemy also

employed mortar fire against Charlie. After maneuvering, Charlie used gunships which assisted in relieving the pressure. The company was able to withdraw to a position from which artillery and air could be employed. At the time of the initial encounter, C Company reported one friendly KIA and three wounded. As the situation developed to the advantage of the friendly elements, the KIA suddenly became alive and returned by the most direct route to the friendly lines.

He was PFC William Demott, the point man for the 2d platoon, who after killing one enemy soldier and wounding another, pursued the wounded NVA soldier along a main trail that led to Hill 341. The trail disappeared around a large rock formation. When PFC Demott arrived at this location the NVA soldier and two other "dinks" opened up with a machinegun. PFC Demott and the second man in the column, PFC Richard Sommers, absorbed most of the burst. PFC Demott, thinking that Sommers was wounded more seriously than he, laid down a covering base of fire. This allowed PFC Sommers to withdraw to a safe place to receive medical attention. Demott then dropped to the ground; both the company and the NVA assumed him to be dead. To insure that he was, an NVA officer fired at him with a pistol at point blank range; the bullet merely grazed his forehead. In an attempt to recover the body, Captain Vaughn and two volunteers began working their way to his position. Enroute, an NVA soldier rose from his concealed position and hurled a grenade at the rescue party. Captain Vaughn was thrown to the ground and lay temporarily stunned ... quickly he fired at his assailant and killed him. He continued on until within 20 meters of the supposedly dead man. At this point Demott leaped to his feet and emptied his remaining ammunition at the enemy position, killing the NVA officer. He

turned and screamed, "get back, I'm still alive, I ain't gonna die!" Like a streak of lightning he raced through the column and continued to run until he was stopped by the company medic located with the rear platoon. Demott was still alive although he was covered with blood, sweat and dirt. For Captain Vaughn he was the "prettiest sight we had seen in a long, long time... We didn't know whether to laugh or cry."

In the meantime, the report of Demott's death was joyfully corrected!

Charlie's assault carried from north to south; the objective was a heavily wooded hill (Hill 341 - AT954416) in the middle of the primary valley pass extending south from Hardcore in the direction of LZ Ryder. Delta Company swept the previous day's area of contact with negative results. The results of the action of 21 and 22 February were 6 enemy KIA, and 1 weapon CIA while U.S. losses were 1 KIA and 8 WIA.

The action on 23 February began slowly. The plan called for a new direction of attack against the objective (Hill 341) by two companies, A and C, preceded by an extensive artillery preparation. Delta Company was to continue searching out the area between Minibase Fox and the A/C Company objective. Alpha and Charlie Companies maneuvered to the south and then attacked from east to west, with Charlie on the right. All went smoothly as the companies entered the woodline of the objective.

At this same time (about 1200 hours), an army observation airplane (01) "Black Ace 271" crash landed on the side of the mountain, BM 845. It had been observing for the Golden Dragon Battalion Commander and for the Delta Company Commander. Fortunately, a visual "fix" on its approximate location

was furnished by the battalion commander to the Airborne FAC and the artillery battalion commander who happened to be visiting the area in an OH23 aircraft. The aircraft and crew were sighted and within minutes they were protected by gunships. The 2d platoon of Delta Company started for the position. Later both crew members were extracted (at the fresh air end of a nylon rope) by the Golden Dragon S3, Major James T. Campbell, and taken aboard the utility aircraft and deposited some 3 km away at the Delta Company CP. At that point they were transloaded inside the Huey and transported to the brigade CP at LZ Baldy. Nobody was injured other than being shaken up a bit. Later in the day the O1 aircraft was recovered by Chinook aircraft.

Shortly afterwards, Charlie and Alpha Companies received sniper and sporadic mortar fire. Both elements maneuvered against the enemy and worked their way to the vicinity of the topographical crest of the hill. A pre-planned air-strike was placed on the hill mass (AT957406) about 1 km to the south of the objective. At that time, the attacking companies encountered determined resistance from prepared bunker positions. When the companies were within twenty meters of the trenches and bunkers, the "dinks" blew one long, loud blast on a whistle. Immediately, semi-automatic and automatic rifle fire from the ground positions and from snipers suspended in the trees along the woodline struck at the advancing elements of Alpha and Charlie. A second whistle signal preceded an 82 mm mortar attack on the rearmost elements of the attacking companies. Fire and maneuver failed to dislodge the hostile forces. Both elements tried repeatedly to overrun the position; Charlie Company appeared to have hit the defensive site head on. At this point, C Company had suffered 3 soldiers KIA and several wounded. As it appeared that needless casualties were being taken, both elements withdrew

tactically, with the permission of the battalion commander. While this was being done, an immediate airstrike hit the opposite side of the hill and the sharp valley position beyond it. 4.2 inch mortar fire was directed at suspected mortar positions throughout the valley with little positive effect. Gunships and airstrikes were interspersed with each other as the two elements withdrew. Wounded and dead were evacuated by Dustoff and CC aircraft, under cover of the airstrikes and gunship attacks. As the withdrawing elements lengthened the distance between the objective and themselves, attack aircraft were called in on the near side of the hill. The Airborne FAC observed the enemy fleeing from the objective along the ridge line trail to the next hill to the south. The FAC, USAF Major Wilbur Skaar, used his M-16 rifle in an attempt to hold them in place until the next set of fighters appeared, a scant 05 minutes later. Even though the light was failing (it was now 1815-1845 hours), two more airstrikes hammered at the objective and the enemy, now exposed in an open area. In the meantime, the two maneuver companies had laagered for the night, received resupplies, and were in the process of reorganizing for the next day's operation.

Earlier when it was obvious that a major battle was imminent, Delta Company was ordered to assemble and move to a location on the prominent hill mass, AT952424, to the north of the objective as a blocking/reaction force which could support by fire the activity on the objective hill. Plans were made for the next day's battle to include airstrikes, artillery preparations, mortar fire and scheme of maneuver. Highlights were the contingency use of CS munitions, the use of smoke to lessen the effect of mortar fire and attack from a different direction.

Most of the afternoon action was observed by Major General S. W. Koster, the Commanding General of the Americal Division, who visited the battalion commander, 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry, on Minibase Fox.

Saturday the 24th of February dawned full of promise. Visibility was excellent in the target area at 0800. However, at 0830, the weather rapidly became unfavorable and the hope for airstrikes had diminished. The FAC reported that the trail (north - south) between Hill 341 and the saddle further south had much traffic during the night. The weather brightened during the period 0930 to 1130, but air support was still unavailable. Even though the Airborne FAC remained on station hoping for a break, the weather progressively worsened until visibility was 0/0 through EENT. The battalion commander made the decision to attack Hill 341 using the following preparation: 30 rounds 4.2 CS, followed by continuous 105 mm HE and WP until lift was forced by the advancing troops. At the same time, 105 mm HE was fired from LZ Ryder on the hill in the mountain pass to the south; this continued throughout the day. The scheme of maneuver was coordinated with gun-target (GT) lines from Minibase Fox, LZ Hardcore, LZ Polar Bear (USMC Industrial Complex) and LZ Ryder. Had the fighter bombers been used, their heading of 140 degrees to the target would have been coordinated with the scheme of maneuver. Special equipment to include gas masks, M79 CS gas grenades and emergency resupply of ammunition was delivered to the troops. Alpha and Charlie Companies moved into their attack position approximately 500 meters southeast of Hill 341. Delta Company moved into its supporting position about 600 meters to the north of the objective. Alpha and Charlie advanced from southeast to northwest under cover of supporting fire into the woodline of the objective. Fires were lifted on the objective and shifted to a possible escape route

just south of Hill 341. At the same time the 4.2 inch mortar platoon began firing at suspected enemy mortar positions. The companies advanced into the area of previous contact. For a short, suspenseful time it appeared that the enemy was in retreat. However, such was not the case. Again, a loud whistle sounded; this time, both companies concentrated their return fire into the tree branches. Seven NVA snipers fell dead from the trees ... both A and C Companies began their close in maneuver. The NVA defenders seemed to sense that the tide of battle was running against them; two short blasts on the whistle reverberated in the jungle air as 82 mm mortar rounds fell to the front, center and rear of the advancing troops. During this close in maneuver, Lieutenant John C. Martin, A Company's 1st platoon leader distinguished himself under intense fire by personally rescuing two of his wounded soldiers who were lying helpless in the bullet swept area; in so doing he was severely wounded in the shoulder. Bleeding profusely, he regrouped and rallied his troops for a renewed assault and pressed forward toward Hill 341. He personally eliminated an enemy sniper in his path. It was during this assault that Lieutenant Martin fell mortally wounded in the chest.

Besides Lieutenant Martin who was killed by small arms, A Company suffered 9 other casualties from mortar fire. At this time, the battalion commander called for an orderly withdrawal so that covering artillery fire could be employed. Throughout the action, First Lieutenant Willy E. Lehninger's heavy mortar platoon fired against suspected enemy mortar positions, apparently with negative results.

Delta Company remained in position to cover the withdrawal. The companies withdrew, bringing their wounded and dead with them. When the hill was vacated, artillery from LZ Hardcore was brought in on the enemy. Due to

weather conditions, 105 mm ammunition resupply was hampered and strict conservation had to be imposed which limited the pressure that could be placed on the enemy. However, the companies were able to withdraw to night laager positions, specifically selected to prevent enemy mortar ambushes. As the companies closed their locations, Delta Company's FO adjusted 155 mm artillery from the Marine Industrial Complex against Hill 341. Due to the thick fog, the adjustment was essentially by sound and accuracy was therefore doubtful. Plans were laid for fires throughout the night; however these plans would be curtailed by the ammunition resupply problem. The results of the contact on 23 and 24 February were 8 NVA killed, 1 NVA captured, 4 U.S. killed in action and 19 wounded.

Considerations by the battalion commander on future courses of action included the following facts: that attacks had been conducted from three different directions on the hill, that maneuver room for more than two companies was limited by the narrowness of the pass (bounded on the east of the objective by steep slopes and on the west by a sharp ravine), that six air strikes and massive artillery bombardments had been expended in the target area on the previous day with no diminution of enemy resistance, that the mass of the attack had been increased from one company to two maneuver companies, that CS had been used in an effort to soften the resistance, that the terrain favored an attack down hill from the south (a direction unfavorable without a combat assault and doubtful of success by combat assault because of threatening potential enemy positions to the east and south), and that on three separate occasions, unacceptable friendly casualties had been taken without penetrating the basic defensive complex. Therefore the recommendation to brigade was that the following day be devoted primarily to strikes against

the objective area by artillery and air, that the stage be set for both B52 and A6 strikes (and the targets thereof) and that pressure be exerted from favorable terrain to the south and/or west.

On Sunday, 25 February, Alpha and Charlie Companies prepared a common LZ to evacuate their dead and wounded. With this accomplished, an attempt at an artillery ambush was made on Hill 341. (The same sequence of events was followed as on the two previous days - preparation by airstrikes and artillery.) Delta Company moved the 1st platoon to within small arms range; at about the time the ground attack had occurred previously, the platoon opened fire in the hope that the enemy would expose himself and his positions. An artillery TOT fell on the objective after approximately 5-7 minutes as planned. In the meantime, Alpha and Charlie Companies had departed their LZ and penetrated the jungle. They moved into ambush positions for the night. The results of this tactic could not be determined as time did not allow for complete exploitation of the objective. In essence, the day was spent in short movement with consideration given to reorganization or whatever the company commanders felt necessary.

At about noon time, Helix 52, who had been on a visual reconnaissance mission over the battle area for the Golden Dragons, informed the battalion commander that he had just discovered that he had zero oil pressure, and that he was going to orbit LZ Hardcore until he could determine whether the difficulty was in the instrument or in the Ol Bird Dog engine. At the firebase, B Company commander was informed of the trouble and instructed to monitor the situation. Major Severson orbited until he believed the difficulty was with the instrument and then headed for LZ Baldy at a healthy altitude of about 4000 feet.

The battalion commander continued to watch the aircraft with binoculars and noticed a sharp swing back toward Hardcore from about 5 km out. Upon asking 52 if he were in trouble, Major Severtson replied matter of factly "well, I've just lost an engine" as if he had at least one to spare! He then informed the battalion commander that he would land in the valley northeast of Hardcore, and if possible would the Golden Dragons please pick him up? In the meantime, the S3 Air, S2, and Bravo 6 came into action, arranged for a security element to protect the bird; loaded the element (from Bravo 20, or "Bomber") into an available Huey, and arrived at the downed aircraft. Major Severtson was picked up, brought to Hardcore, and later transported by UH1 to Baldy. Later the O1 was lifted out by Chinook aircraft. After traversing about 4-5 km to the northeast, .50 caliber ground fire hit the O1 as it was swinging underneath the CH47, causing it to drop. Upon impact with the ground, a slightly damaged USAF Bird Dog aircraft became a total loss. At last inspection, troops believed to be North Vietnamese were in and around the vicinity of the crash.

Monday 26 February was spent in maneuvering to support either effort that faced the Golden Dragons, to remain and continue the offensive against Hill 341 and surrounding territory (hopefully with the aid of B52 and A6 strikes) or to move to the Bong Son area. Mop-up actions on the plains area continued in the vicinity of Hardcore. Bravo Company had made contact with 5 or 6 enemy wearing khaki uniforms in vicinity of AT977501, and Alpha and Charlie Companies moved to commanding terrain approximately 1.5 km to the north of Delta. Company D remained in place on the critical terrain overlooking the objective hill and the suspected base area to their immediate east. Results

of the day's action were 4 enemy killed by 4.2 inch mortar fire called for and adjusted by Bravo Company.

Visits by both Protestant and Catholic Chaplains to Alpha and Charlie Companies and by the brigade commander to Charlie were accomplished. The brigade commander informed the Golden Dragon commander that an extension of ten days in the present area of operations had been approved; immediate instructions were given to Alpha and Charlie Company commanders and to the staff to prepare for continuation of the attack. However, at approximately 2000 hours, word was received that the extension was cancelled and that the battalion would be relieved by the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry on the following morning, the 27th of February. Immediate plans were initiated for PZ's, LZ's and command and control functions. Alpha Company was to move first to secure the LZ for the incoming units, followed by Charlie, and then by Delta, but only (in Delta's case) after relief in place by a company of the incoming battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Gully, the battalion commander of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry and his artillery liaison officer planned to join the Golden Dragon battalion commander on Minibase Fox in order to coordinate the movement and to arrange for change of responsibility for the AO. The Golden Dragon artillery LNO arranged for covering fires from LZ Polar Bear during the relief. 4.2 inch mortar fires from Minibase Fox would also be employed. The evening of the 26th and early morning of the 27th of February were filled with last minute preparations at LZ Hardcore for the move of 27 February.

In closing out LZ Hardcore, it was discovered that 40 rounds of 105 ammunition had been left for destruction. After a thorough police and when all had departed the firebase, a detachment consisting of the battalion commander, S3, the engineer platoon leader, demolition sergeant, and a radio operator

set the demolition charges at two separate locations, boarded the UH1 - CC aircraft, and orbited the firebase at about 3000 feet to observe the destruction of the ammunition. After 7 minutes, one of the charges exploded. After 15 minutes, the other had not exploded (the fuze was designed for 7-10 minutes duration) and the rear detachment reluctantly departed the area. The incident was reported to brigade and to the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry. The S3 was instructed to inspect the area on the following day to determine whether or not this charge exploded during the night (it had), as well as to monitor the extraction of Delta Company. In the meantime, Delta Company passed to the operational control of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry; all other Golden Dragon units were lifted to Dragon Rear at LZ Baldy. Minibase Fox was taken over by the incoming battalion as an OP. Control of the area of operations was relinquished by the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 14th Infantry to the commanding officer of the 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry at Minibase Fox at 1730 hours.

On 28 February, all elements of the Golden Dragons, except the rear detachment led by the executive officer, had departed LZ Baldy and arrived at LZ English to be transported to their new firebase in AO Pershing, LZ Geronimo. The rear detachment would close the new area on 29 February.

The inclusive confirmed totals for Golden Dragon action from 3 February through 28 February were 243 enemy killed, 1 enemy captured, and 43 weapons (to include one 82 mm mortar) captured or destroyed. The battalion suffered 40 killed and 153 wounded during the same period.

(Two phases of the "Push to the South" are graphically represented in figures "f" and "g").

XIII

REMARKS ABOUT CONTROL OF COMBAT POWER

A prodigious and awesome resource of combat power is available to the infantry battalion in Vietnam. The major problem is to employ this power selectively without one striking force interfering with or impairing upon the effectiveness of the other.

The basic decisions of a battalion commander relating to control involve answers to the following questions:

- a. What should be the scheme of maneuver?
- b. What are priorities of fire (artillery and 4.2)?
- c. Is close air support needed? If so, how should it be used?
- d. Are gunships needed? (On immediate basis)

If properly made, the resulting decisions can insure minimum interference of various resources with each other in their application against the enemy. Guidelines for the battalion commander's consideration in deciding how the battalion is to be employed are:

- a. The scheme of maneuver which must be designed around the gun-target lines.
- b. The use of U.S. Air Force close air support which must be designed around (1) the scheme of maneuver (location of the recommended bomb/strafing flight path in relation to the physical positions of the troops) and (2) the physical configuration and location of the target.
- c. Priority of fires -- assignments must be made on the basis of the best GT lines for the maneuvering element, the range to the target, the nature

of the target, the degree of contact with the enemy and integration of these fires with the possible use of USAF close air or U.S. Army gunship support.

d. Use of gunships which is generally under the same considerations as close air support; their use depends on the proximity of enemy forces to the friendly troops. Experience teaches that gunships can be employed closer and more selectively than air or artillery. However, gunships have been found to be less effective when used late in the afternoon. Artillery is then a much better choice if any latitude is allowed due to the capability to continue operation into the night.

The execution and control of the above must be decentralized yet responsive to the battalion commander. Once broadly defined, the scheme of maneuver is in the province of the company commanders. It is executed by the company commanders with visual or other checks by the battalion commander to insure that directions are maintained and that reported ground locations are accurate. Once determined, priority of fires and their employment can be the responsibility of the artillery liaison officer, provided he is with or in close contact with the battalion commander so that the effort is coordinated. Close air support must be controlled by the Airborne FAC; however certain assistance is required from the ground commander. The FAC must know the location of friendly troops, GT lines of artillery in the area, and the nature of the target. This information is available from two sources: the company commander(s) in contact and the battalion commander. The FAC must be able to receive timely inputs from both. Gunships must be controlled at one echelon lower; the lead aircraft must receive his information from the platoon leader or company commander in contact ... at times however, the battalion commander can supply supplementary information.

It is recognized that the preoccupation of GT lines in relation to scheme of maneuver will be criticized by artillery purists. Actually, on the two occasions which the Golden Dragons suffered casualties from friendly artillery fire, only one resulted from a "short" on the GT line and then the troops were about 3 km from the target. However, on other occasions, discoveries of shorts on H&I fires, although not endangering troops, added to the conviction that only on emergency conditions would artillery be employed when the troops were on the gun-target line. From a conceptual standpoint, this rationale is based on the fact that of all the problems confronting the battalion during the reporting period, by far the most troublesome was the loss of confidence by the troops in artillery. In spite of a vigorous command program to restore and maintain the necessary confidence, remnants of doubt are still with the unit.

The standard aid for command and control is the use of the CC aircraft; however, in and around Hardcore sufficient ground OP's were available. Considerations of non-permissiveness for RW aircraft, and advantages of stability for observation and the excellent fields of observation influenced the battalion commander in the decision to use ground OP's for control of the battles. The entire AO was visible from three OP's: one at Hardcore (AT975500), one to the northeast of Hardcore (AT989509) on the same ridge line, and one to the south on the prominent hill (AT958469) between Crocodile and Scorpion Lakes. In some cases it was advisable to use the CC aircraft in conjunction with the OP; in those cases the artillery LNO and a member of S2/S3 section or the battalion commander used the CC aircraft. However, the most valuable visual reconnaissance of the area was accomplished by the "professionals", specifically and foremost by the airborne U.S. Air Force FAC and to a less effective

degree, by various observers aboard U.S. Army observation aircraft (O1). During critical periods, this type of observation was readily available. It provided an extension of the ground OP which was transferable to the battalion commander (who also knew "the lay of the land" from both a ground and air viewpoint). Both these agencies observed artillery and mortar firings and made timely and accurate corrections. At the direction of the battalion commander, the Airborne FAC also successfully controlled U.S. Army gunships on many occasions.

The problem of coordination of the aforementioned combat power is complex. As an example, the scheme of maneuver, the fireplan, and the use of tactical air and gunships in the battles for Hill 341 involved use of artillery from three locations and 4.2 inch mortars from Minibase Fox. Another coordination problem is the inadvertent overflight of the battle area by itinerant aircraft, to include those used by higher commanders, for which necessary artillery and mortar fire must be suspended. An examination of the scheme of maneuver in relation to the GT lines and proposed flight paths displayed in figure "h" will give the reader an appreciation of this problem. No method other than the use of an appropriate ground OP is believed capable of responsive control of a situation such as this. In many cases, artillery and mortar fires could be continued while airstrikes were in progress; in some cases during airstrikes on targets 2 & 3, resupply and medevac missions were accomplished under airstrike cover without the least degree of interference. In other cases, when artillery and mortar supporting fires were forced to lift because of the flight path of the fighters, coordination between the battalion commander, the FAC, and the artillery liaison officer minimized the time that the artillery was prevented from firing.

It must be emphasized that the various staff functions remained critical and active throughout the entire period. The S3 was the "day or days ahead" man and the principal coordinator of all staff functions. As required, he supplied air observers and control officers for the CC aircraft. On occasions, when two or more separate battles were conducted simultaneously, he controlled those battles which could not be observed from the battalion commander's OP, by the use of a different OP or by use of the CC aircraft. He obtained resources, such as aircraft, as needed by the battalion or company commanders. He initiated requests for specific critical materials -- such as gas masks, CS gas rounds and grenades. He concerned himself with the details of air movement and the dismantling and destruction of Hardcore. The S2, also working as the right arm of the S3 -- operated in much the same manner. The S4, S1 and executive officer performed their functions satisfactorily by extended, frequent staff visits to the firebase and the battalion OP.

It is absolutely necessary during periods of intense activity such as the battles around Hardcore that one individual have control and an overview of the critical activities. This individual must be the battalion commander. He alone is responsible to command and otherwise manage the variety of resources at his disposal. He can be assisted by one other officer of his operational staff at the point of control, in this case, the battalion OP. More assistance is not required and in fact may be counter-productive. Decisions must be timely -- in many cases instantaneous -- or the target will disappear and the opportunity for striking it with optimum weaponry may also vanish. This requires that the battalion commander personally monitor and use the communications means available to him. It requires that communications procedures be abbreviated; information must be passed immediately, e.g., to the FAC between passes

at the target; this information is available from the battalion commander and the contact company commander (who may be receiving inputs from his platoon leaders and squad leaders) -- therefore radio transmissions must be organized properly for accomplishment of this task. There is no opportunity for the luxury of a "go between" in the form of a radio operator. Voice recognition -- teamwork -- logical sequential transmissions -- are of paramount importance. The battalion used the air/ground net for contact with all air activity in the battle area -- at times priority use of the net was dictated by the conduct of an airstrike -- however, by monitoring the net, other aircraft in the area could govern their activities accordingly. It was necessary, for example, for the resupply aircraft to check in with the battalion OP in order to prevent their flights from interfering with the tactical situation, and to advise them of "hot" areas in the immediate vicinity. The OP was in effect a tactical "control tower" for aircraft in the AO.

The organization of the command group at the OP consisted of the following personnel and equipment:

a. Personnel:

- (1) Battalion commander
- (2) S2, or operations staff officer (only during critical periods)
- (3) Artillery LNO or Forward Observer from the firebase security company
- (4) Radio Operator (two during critical periods)

b. Equipment:

- (1) 4 radios (AN/PRC 25) used as follows:
 - (a) Battalion command net
 - (b) Battalion fire control net (used by Artillery LNO)

(c) 1 utility - used principally on air/ground net

(d) 1 utility - used principally to monitor the company net of the company or companies in contact.

Note: as the "record" transmissions were made through the battalion operations center, no requirement existed for monitoring of the other nets at the OP; the utility radios could be used at will to enter the brigade net, adjacent battalion nets, and other nets as required, in addition to the principal usages noted above.

(2) One periscope, observation (B.C. Scope)

(3) 2 sets binoculars; one 6X30, one 7X50

(4) One starlight scope

(5) One TA312 telephone (on firebase only)

Mention should also be made of the associated equipment that often was used in conjunction with the OP. This was the 106 mm recoilless rifle, the Xenon searchlight, and the 4.2 inch mortar. These are mentioned due to their responsiveness and opportunities for usage due to that factor.

On occasion, all three OP's were manned simultaneously. Except for the contact of 9-10 February, when it was manned by the battalion commander, the northern OP was manned by the company commander, Company B. Often, the opportunity presented itself during activities of 11-17 February for concurrent observations of the same area from both the northern OP and the firebase OP. Such coordination enhanced the accuracy of artillery/mortar fire, and assisted in the control of airstrikes.

IX

REMARKS ABOUT CLOSE AIRSTRIKES

During the period 3 February to 26 February, 89 airstrikes of varying ordnance were employed by the Golden Dragons. During that period, one ARC LIGHT was recommended, but not accepted. Another ARC LIGHT was employed partly in the AO but not against a principal target of the battalion; in addition, numerous combat sky-spot strikes were used. Throughout the entire operation the closest cooperation and highest technical and tactical expertise were evidenced by the Airborne Forward Air Controllers assigned to the parent brigade of the Golden Dragons. For the most part, the targets were "live" as developed by the maneuver elements of the battalion, or in part developed by the maneuver elements in conjunction with intelligence reports from higher headquarters. Targets also resulted from the sightings of air observers and visual observation from the battalion OP, usually in conjunction with maneuver by the companies. In general, the accuracy achieved by the fighter aircraft was satisfactory. The response time generally fell between five and thirty minutes for immediates. Most preplanned strikes were readjusted to more precise and timely locations 30 minutes prior to the strike through direct coordination with the Airborne FAC. This flexibility allowed the battalion commander to influence the ground combat by timely strikes that would contribute directly to the mission accomplishment of the maneuver elements. Such action was necessary since preplanned strike requests required 48 hours notice in advance of the desired time on target.

As mentioned earlier for strikes in close proximity of troops (i.e. within 2-3 km), it is necessary for both the battalion commander and the company commander to be in radio conversation with the FAC. Target and friendly identifications and necessary corrections between passes must be transmitted expeditiously.

Also, possible shifts in ordnance impact may be required during the course of the strike - for example - for new targets uncovered by the strike such as automatic weapons positions.

It is necessary for the battalion commander to suggest, or otherwise approve and understand the flight path of the fighters. Overflight of the troops must be avoided. The flight path should not interfere with artillery in other parts of the AO. If properly planned other tactical maneuvering may be accomplished while the airstrikes are in progress. On several occasions, both medevac and resupply helicopter missions were conducted for the companies in contact on landing zones within 1 km of the ongoing airstrikes. These areas were normally "hot". On such occasions no ground to air fire was encountered. This is attributed largely to the airstrikes and partially to the selection of flight paths and LZ's.

Generally outstanding accuracy was achieved by high drag bombs. Outstanding results were obtained also with CBU attacks and, in general, strafing runs also were accurately placed. The A-37's were employed twice during the operational period; in both instances their performance was outstanding, both in accuracy and flight characteristics. The A-37's were able to turn quicker and more precisely into target runs than heavier fighter aircraft.

One of the most successful air attacks was conducted against an enemy which had been flushed out of wooded village areas by the maneuver of two companies. About 40 of the enemy were observed hiding in spider holes along the riverbank (AT966531) north of Hardcore. Mortar and artillery were called in and afterwards, two preplanned airstrikes were diverted from other targets in the battalion AO. Two additional immediate airstrikes were also utilized. The fighter runs

and attacks were precise: CBU's were dropped and napalm was used in addition to high drag bombs. Unfortunately, the closest maneuver company was in contact 1.5 km away (their target was too close for air support - gunships were used as well as artillery) and was unable to fight its way to the strike area in time to exploit it that same day. The assesment by FAC included 22 confirmed killed by air. The next day, the company attacked the enemy positions against light sniper resistance and 13 enemy killed by air/artillery were found. Numerous drag trails were discovered leading across the river.

The importance of timely and accurate air support to an infantry commander cannot be overemphasized. When confronting numerous trained, highly disciplined NVA and hardcore VC units with a tested and considerable ~~antiaircraft~~ capability, air support becomes a significant contributing factor in maintaining an offensive posture in the AO. It is believed that the selective employment of available air power was a principal determining factor in the favorable balance of power maintained in the Golden Dragon AO. Even when three companies were in heavy contact and the fourth soon to be, never was it necessary to reorganize the battalion into an overall defensive posture. (It must be understood that at the time of the aforementioned activity, the battalion was given operational control of two additional rifle companies which were committed, but not in heavy contact at that moment).

The last airstrike in the area of operations during the Golden Dragon tenure, unfortunately, had a regrettable outcome. On the third or fourth pass, the fighter pilot turned too close to the target, (not following the suggested flight path), and accidentally punched out the 500 pound Mark 82 bomb short of the target. The bomb exploded twenty meters from the Delta Company CP.

One man was killed and six were slightly injured.

The bomb damage assessment by the company commander on the ground (who himself was located about 20 meters from the impact) was critical of the effectiveness of the ordnance. Even though the bomb is designed to be anti-structural, more anti-personnel effects should be designed into it. There were 25 personnel within a 50 meter radius of the point of impact. Of these, in addition to the casualties mentioned above, 10 others were knocked to the ground by the concussion. No other adverse effects were observed. It is emphasized that these personnel were in positions having no overhead cover, and for the most part, took advantage only of the natural cover of the area.

Another adverse effect of a "short" is the deterioration of confidence in air support. This must be countered by a vigorous positive attitude on the part of the ground commander.

It is emphasized strongly that in no way does the above described accident affect the policy of the battalion in its use of airpower, except to underscore the checks and balances available to ground commanders in the control of airstrikes. In all fairness, it must be mentioned also that the Airborne FAC controlling the strike was from a sister brigade. This also may have contributed to a slight degree in the incident, although the FAC did have communication with the battalion commander and had correctly identified the target and the friendly locations, and received the battalion commander's recommendation for flight path (which did not include overflight of troops).