

Incl 23

ORLL, 1st Div, Period Early 30 Apr 66.

HEADQUARTERS 3D BRIGADE  
1st Infantry Division  
APO US Forces 96345

AVID-WB-C

3 April 1966

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report (MACV/RCS/J3/32)

THRU: Commanding General  
1st Infantry Division  
ATTN: G3  
APO US Forces 96345

TO: Commander  
US Military Assistance Command Vietnam  
ATTN: J321  
APO US Forces 96243

1. NAME AND TYPE OF OPERATION: Operation COCOA BEACH - Search  
and Destroy.

2. DATES OF OPERATION: 030700 March 1966 - 061600 March 1966.

3. LOCATION: BINH DUONG Province and BEN CAT District XT7948 -  
XT7940 - XT7040 - XT7048 (Overlay attached as Appendix 1).

4. COMMAND HEADQUARTERS: Headquarters 3d Brigade 1st Infantry  
Division.

5. UNIT COMMANDERS:

Colonel William D Brodbeck, CO 3d Brigade  
Lt Col George M Shuffer, Jr, CO 2/2 Infantry  
Lt Col William S Lober, Jr, CO 1/16 Infantry  
Lt Col Kyle W Bowie, CO 2/28 Infantry  
Lt Col Frank R Tims, CO 2/33 Artillery

6. TASK ORGANIZATION:

Headquarters 3d Brigade  
2/2 Infantry  
1/16 Infantry  
2/28 Infantry  
2/33 Artillery (DS)  
B Btry 2/32 Artillery  
D Btry 8/6 Artillery  
D Company 1st Engr Bn

REPORTING FORCES:

Artillery:

) Size of Force: 3 six gun 105mm howitzer batteries  
Battery 2/33 Artillery; D Battery (8 inch howitzer  
; and B Battery (175mm howitzer SP) 2/32 Artillery.

Defensive concentrations fired in around the 2/28 Infantry perimeter. Extensive harassing and interdiction fires were employed around the 2/28 Infantry perimeter during the hours of darkness. On 4 March continuous fire support was provided to the 2/28 Infantry during their search and destroy operations. Check rounds were fired on the defensive concentrations around the 2/28 Infantry perimeter and H&I fires employed during the hours of darkness. On 5 March at 0600 hours the battalion FDC answered calls for fire from the artillery FO's with the 2/28 Infantry. At 0745 hours the aerial FO arrived over the battle area and, in conjunction with the ground FO's, continued to adjust artillery fire the remainder of the day. At 0900 hours D Btry 8/6 Artillery and B and C Batteries 2/33 Artillery fired preparation fires around LZ BLUE (XT785465) to be utilized by the 1/16 Infantry. On 060900 hours March all batteries fired preparatory fires on LZ RED (XT707439) to be utilized by the 2/2 Infantry. Continuous artillery support, on call, was provided as the infantry battalions policed the battle area.

(3) Results: Enemy losses attributed to artillery fire are 75 KIA by body count.

(4) Summary of Rounds Fired:

105mm	2230 rds	39 tons
8 inch	94 rds	9.5 tons
175mm	<u>10 rds</u>	<u>1.5 tons</u>
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>2334 rds</b>	<b>50 tons</b>

b. Army Aviation:

(1) All infantry battalion commanders were supplied with an OH-13 for command and control. The Brigade CP group operated from a UH-1D equipped with a command console.

(2) Resupply of the battalions in the field was accomplished by UH-1D helicopter.

(3) OH-13 helicopters from the 3d Brigade Aviation Section had provided day and night surveillance of the Brigade TAOR prior to the battle on 5 March and observation after the battle to determine the VC routes of withdrawal.

(4) UH-1D helicopters were utilized in the airmobile assaults of the 1/16 Infantry and the 2/2 Infantry on 5 and 6 March respectively.

(5) Armed helicopters provided support during the operation and assisted in the preparation of the LZ's on 5 and 6 March 1966.

c. US Air Force: During Operation COCOA BEACH 73 close air support sorties were flown in support of the 3d Brigade Task Force. Within 30 minutes after the Brigade headquarters was notified of the attack on the 2/28 Infantry perimeter on 5 March, an airstrike was directed against the attacking VC. Continuous close air support missions were flown in support of the 2/28 Infantry from 050715 March until 050915 March. At 050900 March an F-100 was shot down by ground fire while making a bombing run. The pilot ejected safely and was picked up by ground troops from the 2/2 Infantry within 20 minutes after ejection. The plane was a total loss. At 050915 March 3 sorties were used to prepare the LZ for the assault landing of the 1/16 Infantry. On 6 March 1966 four sorties were used to prepare the LZ for the assault landing of the 2/2 Infantry. The Air Force is credited with killing 150 VC and destroying two 81mm mortars and four 50 cal machine guns. The close air support during Operation COCOA BEACH was outstanding.

5 March 1966	66 sorties
6 March 1966	<u>7 sorties</u>
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>73 sorties</b>

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8. INTELLIGENCE:

a. Estimate of VC Strength:

The VC units determined to have taken part in the battle of LO KE on 5 March were the 272 Regiment and the 241 Heavy Weapons Battalion which normally supports the 272 Regiment. Estimated strength of the 272 Regiment plus the 241 Battalion is 2000 men.

b. Intelligence Received Prior to 5 March 1966:

The last reported location of the 272 Regiment prior to 3 March 66 was received 28 February 1966 from Headquarters 1st Infantry Division (source: Headquarters, MACV). However, a report was received at 3d Brigade Headquarters on 042035 March from the BEM CAT Advisor that an unidentified regimental size unit was located vic XT790485. This is approximately 4 kilometers northeast of the location of the LO KE battle on 5 March. The source of this report was an agent. The 272 Regiment had previously been reported as follows:

<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SOURCE</u>
16 Feb 66	XT6545	III Corps
19 Feb 66	XT7150	III Corps
20 Feb 66	XT7148	III Corps
28 Feb 66	XT7044	MACV

c. Situation Anticipated in Objective Area:

Reports indicated that a large scale VC operation was either in the planning, training and supply phase or was ready for execution in the northern portion of the Brigade TAOR. It was anticipated that a large VC force would attack friendly units when committed to an operation rather than attacking a base camp area.

d. Situation Encountered During the Operation:

The VC followed their established pattern of attacking a force much smaller than their own. As expected, they attacked a US Force in an operational area away from the base camp. After the battle and a pursuit was initiated the VC withdrew on all sides to scattered areas. They were routed into disorganized, small groups and took advantage of their knowledge of the jungle and terrain to effect a rapid retreat.

e. Terrain Features, Obstacles and Weather:

The battle was fought in the LO KE Rubber Plantation which is flat and devoid of underbrush except for scattered patches of tall grass and hedge-hogs. The area to the west of the battle area was thick jungle. There were no major obstacles in the area. The weather, initially, was good. On 050800 March a low stratus began to form. By 050830 March a 1900 foot broken ceiling existed and remained until 051100 March at which time the cloud cover became scattered. Visibility below the ceiling was good except for smoke in the battle area.

f. Surveillance:

During and immediately following the battle on 5 March, all means available were utilized for surveillance of the enemy. Visual air and ground reconnaissance were employed during daylight hours. SLAR, RHO HAZE, and the Starlight Scope were used at night. The RRU Team maintained surveillance to detect enemy radio and CW transmissions.

g. Psychological Warfare:

There were no psychological warfare operations conducted during the operation. The 3d Brigade does not have the capability for conducting tactical psychological warfare operations in a timely and effective manner. Again, an opportunity to immediately exploit a target of opportunity (ie, a major victory and the rout of an enemy force) was lost due to improper organization of person-

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nel and equipment of the PsyWar team attached to the 2d Brigade. Reaction time to obtain either loudspeaker broadcast aircraft and/or an appropriate leaflet is too long to be of value. Hundreds of VC were fleeing the battle area seeking safe areas. They were susceptible to psychological appeals and directions on how to surrender. It is believed that many ralliers were lost due to inadequate Psy/Ops support. A recommendation as to organization of a tactical Psy/Ops team is being prepared and will be forwarded to higher headquarters for consideration.

9. MISSION: The missions originally given the 2/28 Infantry in their Operation Order 13-66 (Operation COCOA BEACH), dated 2 March 1966 were:

- (a) Destroy VC, their equipment and emplacements.
- (b) Disrupt VC activity.
- (c) Gain intelligence.
- (d) Interdict VC supply routes.

Upon commitment of the 1/16 Infantry and 2/2 Infantry on 3 March and six days later the mission of all units was to pursue, find the enemy and destroy him.

10. CONCEPT OF OPERATION: The overall Brigade concept of operation for March, of which COCOA BEACH was a part, was to conduct a series of battalion size operations within the 3d Brigade TAOR. The 2/28 Infantry was the first unit to initiate S&D operations in their portion of the Brigade TAOR from 3 to 8 March 1966. When the 2/28 Infantry had been out for 4 days, another infantry battalion would initiate a battalion S&D operation in their portion of the Brigade TAOR. After six days the 2/28 Infantry would return to base camp and the third infantry battalion would conduct S&D operations in their portion of the Brigade TAOR. All operations would be within 105mm howitzer range of LAI KHE. Therefore, one or two infantry battalions would be operating in the Brigade TAOR at all times.

This concept proved effective in that a major engagement with the VC occurred on 5 March 1966. After the battle of LO KE the Brigade concept was altered so as to commit forces in an attempt to find and destroy the fleeing enemy.

The 2/28 Infantry initiated the Brigade concept on 3 March with Operation COCOA BEACH. The 2/28 Infantry's concept for Operation COCOA BEACH was to move by foot into the area of operation and set up a battalion perimeter. Companies would then search and destroy from this battalion perimeter. The battalion would move every two days to a new area until the entire area of operation had been searched.

11. EXECUTION: A day by day description of the execution phase of Operation COCOA BEACH is included below. The major action of Operation COCOA BEACH was the battle of LO KE on 5 March. This action drastically altered the plans for Operation COCOA BEACH and changed it from a battalion S&D operation into a Brigade pursuit and destroy operation. (NOTE: A complete resume of the 2/28 Infantry account of the Battle of LO KE as published in 3d Brigade Battle Bulletin Number 8 is attached as Incl 1).

3 March 1966 - The 2/28 Infantry initiated Operation COCOA BEACH on 030700 march. The battalion moved by foot from LAI KHE to a battalion defensive position vic XT773445, where they dug in and resupplied by air. During the evening of 3-4 March the 2/28 Infantry placed out ambush patrols on likely enemy avenues of approaches around the battalion perimeter. There was no enemy contact on 3 March.

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4 March 1966 - On 4 March A and B Companies 2/28 Infantry were dispatched to the west and north respectively. At 041140 March A Company 2/28 Infantry sprang a VC ambush at XT754459 resulting in the routing of the ambush force. C Company was sent to assist A Company. A Company then continued to XT753459 where they found a base camp that could accommodate 40 to 60 men and contained tunnels, foxholes, documents and 7 underground cooking stoves. The camp was destroyed and the documents evacuated. B Company had negative contact but did discover a large trench vic XT780455 that ran for about a kilometer into BAU BANNG (XT790458) and had been recently occupied by a large VC force. All companies returned to the battalion perimeter by 041645 March and resupply by air was accomplished. The battalion remained in the same perimeter as on 3 March and again dispatched ambush patrols around the perimeter.

5 March 1966 - On 050030 March an intelligence report received from the B&I CAT District Advisor was passed to the CO 2/28 Infantry. This report was that an unidentified VC regiment was located at XT790485 or about 4 kilometers northeast of the 2/28 Infantry. At 0600 hours the patrol from B Company 2/28 Infantry spotted a VC company vic XT768461 and fired on it inflicting heavy casualties on the VC. The patrol then moved back to the 2/28 Infantry perimeter where they had to fight through another VC company that was preparing to attack. At about the same time, the patrol from A Company spotted VC all around them vic XT773439 moving from east to west and this patrol fought its way back to the 2/28 Infantry perimeter. By 0630 hours all patrols had returned to the 2/28 Infantry perimeter and at 0635 hours the VC launched their first attack from the northwest. The Brigade Headquarters was notified of the attack at 0640 hours and an FAC was sent up and gun ships requested. The VC continued their attacks from all directions but heavy fire from the 2/28 Infantry, artillery fire and airstrikes stopped every attack resulting in heavy VC casualties. At 0745 hrs the 1/16 Infantry was alerted for commitment to assist the 2/28 Infantry. At 0800 hrs the 2/28 Infantry was running low on ammunition and a UH-1D helicopter successfully brought in some ammunition. The helicopter received heavy VC ground fire and crashed short of LAI KHE killing all 6 men aboard. At 0930 hrs the 1/16 Infantry made a helicopter assault landing vic XT785465 in an attempt to cut off the escape routes of the VC to the north and east. The 1/16 Infantry moved to the west running into small groups of VC attempting to flee the battlefield. At 1200 hrs the fighting around the 2/28 Infantry perimeter had subsided so that a patrol from A Company 2/28 Infantry moved to the south in an attempt to make contact with the VC. This patrol came across a VC company digging in along the road vic XT773439. The company was oriented to the south so as to prevent any attempt to reinforce the 2/28 Infantry by land from LAI KHE. The VC backed off and artillery fire was called in on top of this VC company. At 1300 hrs the 1/16 Infantry linked up with the 2/28 Infantry and the battle was over. The VC had been completely beaten and routed leaving over 100 bodies around the 2/28 Infantry perimeter. The remainder of the 5th of March was spent in policing and searching the battlefield. The 1/16 Infantry and the 2/28 Infantry went into a perimeter for the night of 5-6 March in the northwest of the battlefield.

6 March 1966 - On the morning of 6 March the 1/16 Infantry and the 2/28 Infantry continued to police and search the area around the battlefield. Intelligence reports indicated that the probable escape route for the VC had shifted to the west and north. This information was received from several POW's (including one from the 1/16 Infantry) and indicated that their rally point after the battle was in the vic of NHA MAT (XT7949). Based on what intelligence was available, the Brigade CO decided to commit the 2/2 Infantry to the west in an attempt to catch some escaping VC and to search and destroy toward the west in order to gain more intelligence on the VC whereabouts. The 2/2 Infantry made a helicopter assault landing vic XT707439 at 060900 March 1966. The landing was unopposed and the 2/2 Infantry moved east to link up with the 1/16 Infantry. The 2/2 Infantry occupied a block position vic XT769460. The 2/2 Infantry had negative contact except for a few VC. The 2/2 Infantry did find several fresh graves and some bloody bandages but did indicate that a portion of the VC regiment had in fact withdrawn toward the northwest. The 2/28 Infantry, after sweeping the battlefield and the village of BAU BANNG, returned to LAI KHE and Operation COCOA BEACH was terminated at 061700 March 1966.

12. RESULTS:

a. Enemy Losses:

(1) Around the 2/28 Infantry perimeter at LO ME 199 VC bodies were found. Due to darkness, the areas further out from the perimeter were not searched until the following day. Airstrikes and artillery hit groups of VC as far as 3 kilometers from the 2/28 Infantry perimeter. Eye witness reports from artillery FO's, FAC's and the Brigade CO in the air along with agent reports received after the battle indicate that at least 460 VC were killed during the battle.

(2) Captured Equipment:

<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>ITEM</u>
4	50 cal MG
1	60mm mortar base plate
1	Mount, 57mm RR
1	Medical kit (large)
1	AT weapon
2	Submachine guns
9	Automatic rifles
13	Rifles
850	Rounds 50 cal ammunition
3	Rounds 57mm RR ammunition
8	Rounds AT ammunition
32	Rounds 60mm mortar ammunition
2500	Rounds 30 cal ammunition
30	Hand grenades
	Thousands of feet of electrical wire and Miscellaneous web equipment and clothing

(3) Destroyed Equipment:

150	Hand grenades	1	57mm RR
2	81mm mortars	4	50 cal MG
3	60mm mortars	1	Bicycle

b. Friendly Losses:

<u>DATE</u>	<u>KIA</u>	<u>MIA</u>
3 March 1966	0	0
4 March 1966	3	4
5 March 1966	10	25
6 March 1966	0	0

13. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS: Initially the battalion S4, 2/28 Inf planned and coordinated the resupply by air of the 2/28 Inf. During the course of the battle of LO ME on 5 March it became apparent that the Brigade needed a parachute resupply capability. Two hours after the battle started, emergency resupply of ammunition was requested. The S4, 2/28 Inf, loaded a UH1D and proceeded to the battle area. The ammunition was delivered but at a cost of 6 men killed and 1 UH1D destroyed. The battalions out of necessity go on operations lightly loaded, which places the burden on the Brigade to insure that they can be resupplied with the items they need and in the quantities requested. Experience has shown that all four major contacts with the enemy by units of the 3d Brigade have resulted in the necessity of resupplying during the battle. A parachute delivery capability should be readily available to the Brigade.

14. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED:

a. Conclusions:

(1) FCL's must be established for coordination of artillery/air Force support so that continuous support is provided and neither on must "stand-down."

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(2) All intelligence data concerning an area of operation must be made available to the commander.

(3) The Brigade must have the capability to resupply a unit by parachute as during an engagement resupply by helicopter may be impossible or may result in costly loss of aircraft and lives.

(4) All means of gathering intelligence in order to determine the route or routes of withdrawal of the enemy must be utilized in order that an effective pursuit can be immediately initiated and the enemy destroyed.

(5) It is extremely important that units dig in well and have an extensive security plan to include patrols and LP's in order to prevent a surprise attack.

(6) Reaction forces must be committed when sufficient information is available to determine the VC main attack and his most probable route of withdrawal in order to cut him off and destroy him. Once the reaction force is committed it must push the attack aggressively and remain flexible so as to react to any enemy actions. The pursuit must be initiated as soon as it is apparent that the enemy is withdrawing.

b. Recommendations:

(1) That a Psy/Ops team with the capability to give immediate leaflet and loudspeaker support be available in the Brigade.

(2) That a parachute delivery capability be available for immediate use by the Brigade if the necessity arrives.

15. COMMANDER'S ANALYSIS:

Operation COCOA BEACH reinforced the belief that small battalion S&D operations in the Brigade TAOR are more likely to produce contact with a large VC unit than the large Brigade and Division size operations. The outstanding conduct of the defense by the 2/28 Infantry, the speedy and aggressive reaction by the 1/16 Infantry and the outstanding artillery and close air support combined to make this operation a complete success.

Once it had been determined that the 2/28 Infantry was under an attack by a large VC regiment, the original plans for Operation COCOA BEACH were no longer applicable and the operation changed from a S&D operation to a pursuit and destroy mission. The enemy had been located. The heaviest and most persistent attacks on the 2/28 Infantry perimeter in the early hours of the battle were coming from the northeast. Thus, the decision was made to airlift the 1/16 Infantry to the northeast of the battle area in an attempt to cut off VC escape routes to the north and east and to place the main VC force between the 2/28 Infantry and the 1/16 Infantry in order to destroy it. The results proved this to be a sound decision as the 1/16 Infantry did encounter many groups of fleeing enemy. Complete destruction of the enemy force was not accomplished as the VC units were broken down into numerous small groups that fled in all directions and eluded their pursuers.

On the morning of 6 March, after analysing all intelligence data available including reports of POW's captured in the battle, the decision was made to commit the 2/2 Infantry to the west of the battle area. It was believed that a large portion of the enemy force may have escaped to the west and north. Since it was known that the VC had suffered many casualties, it was hoped that the 2/2 Infantry's sweep from the west to the battle area might turn up more enemy dead and wounded and recover abandoned VC equipment. It was realized at this time that the landing of the 2/2 Infantry was too late to cut off any force which may have fled from the battle area on the 5th of March. The main purpose of landing the 2/2 Infantry on the 6th was to aid in searching and policing the battle area and in attempting to gain intelligence as to the probable location

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defeated VC forces. The decision not to commit the 2/2 Infantry on the 5 March proved to be a sound decision because no accurate information as to the route of the VC withdrawal was available on the 5th. The commitment of the Brigade's last maneuver element without adequate intelligence as to the location of the enemy force would not have been appropriate.

Operation CUCCA BEACH confirmed that the VC are no match for a US unit when the VC elect to attack or to stand and fight in force. The tenacity and the aggressiveness of the US infantryman when backed up by the tremendous fire support available to him remains unbeatable.



WILLIAM D BRODBECK  
Colonel, Infantry  
Commanding

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