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17TH MILITARY HISTORY DETACHMENT
1ST INFANTRY DIVISION
APO San Francisco 96345

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Date
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DIA

AVDB-T (MHD)

3 January 1969

SUBJECT: Combat After Action Interview Report: Operations vic Tong Le
Chon 18 Oct-10 Nov 1968 (U)

TO: Office of the Chief of Military History
Department of the Army
Washington, D.C. 20315

1. Name: Operations vicinity of Tong Le Chon (attacks on FSPB Rita and Julie)
2. Inclusive Dates of Operation: 18 Oct-10 Nov 68
3. (C) Location: XT560850 and vicinity (FSPB Dot), XT500805 and vicinity (FSPB Rita), XT522892 and vicinity (FSPB Julie), Map Sheet Vietnam 1:50,000, Sheet 6232 II, series L7014 (Incl 6).
4. Control or Command Headquarters: Headquarters, 1st Bde, 1st Inf Div.
5. Persons Interviewed:
 - a. LTC Vernon C. Coffey, Commanding Officer, 2-28 Inf, 1st Inf Div (Incl 1).
 - b. LTC James M. Hanson, Commanding Officer, 1-26 Inf, 1st Inf Div (Incl 2).
 - c. MAJ Allen A. Nauman, Executive Officer, 1-26 Inf, 1st Inf Div (Incl 3).
 - d. CPT Richard L. Rogers, Commanding Officer, and 1Lt Joseph G. Montoya, 1st Platoon Leader, 2-28 Inf, 1st Inf Div (Incl 4).
6. Interviewing Officer: MAJ William W. Campion, 17th Mil Hist Det, 1st Inf Div.
7. (C) Task Organization: REGRADED UNCLASSIFIED
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1st Bde
2-28 Inf

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1-26 Inf
1-2 Inf (A/O 31 Oct @ Julie)
1-16 Inf (Mech) (-) (initially 5-60 Inf (Mech))
3/B/2-34 Arm
B/1-4 Cav (-)

8. (C) Supporting Forces:

Artillery Observers
Forward Air Controllers
Light Fire Teams (Incl 5)
Tactical Air Sorties (Incl 5)
Artillery
D/1-5 Arty (105)
C/8-6 Arty (155)
B/1-5 Arty (105)
1 Sect 1/29 SL (-)
A/1-5 Arty (105) (A/O 2 Nov @ Tong Le Chon)
A/2-11 Arty (155) (IIFP) (A/O 4 Nov @ Tong Le Chon)

9. (C) Intelligence: Enemy forces have been credited for some time with the capability of renewing pressure against the Saigon Complex. The intelligence build-up prior to the operation indicated the possibility of the 1st NVA Division in the vicinity of the Fishhook Area, Tong Le Chon, and immediately across the Cambodian border. This area is astride a main infiltration route south through War Zone C into the Saigon Complex.

10. (C) Mission: 1st Inf Div elements under OPCON 1st Bde, 1st Inf Div, establish FSPB Rita, Julie, and Dot from which the units would conduct reconnaissance-in-force and sweep operations vicinity of the Fishhook Area to determine possible presence of 1st NVA Division.

11. (C) Execution: Operations commenced in the Tong Le Chon area on 18 Oct 68 with the establishing of three Fire Support Patrol Bases in the Fishhook Area.

Disposition of forces for the operation commenced on 16 Oct with relocation of Hq/1st Bde (Pw) Command Post from Loc Ninh to a field location near Tong Le Chon vic XT622810.

At 0930 hours on 18 Oct the 1-26 Inf (-) was airlifted by rotary wing to a location vic XT566849 near which FSPB Dot (XT560850) was established without contact. D Btry/1-5 Arty (105) and 1 Sect 1/29 Arty (Search Light Section) (-) was also located at FSPB Dot on 18 Oct.

The 5-60 Inf (Mech) (-) moved overland to a position vic XT500805 at which FSPB Rita was established. Units occupying this position were 3d Plat/Co B/2-34 Arm, C Btry/8-6 Arty (155), and B Btry/1-5 Arty (105). Light resistance was encountered by 5-60 Inf (-) in its overland move.

At 1230 hours the 2-28 Inf (-) conducted an airborne assault into positions vic XT523893 near which FSPB Julie (XT522892) was established.

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On 19 Oct B Trp/1-4 Cav established positions with the 1st Bde Fwd CP via Tong Le Chen thus completing the initial force disposition for the operation.

On 21 Oct 68 the designation of the 5-60 Inf (Mech) was changed to the 1-16 Inf (Mech) and the unit will be referred to by that designation in the remainder of this narrative. In addition, the designation 1-16 Inf (Mech) has been used throughout in other portions of this report to avoid confusion.

There was sporadic and scattered light activity in the operational area during the period 18-25 Oct, as the units continued with reconnaissance-in-force and night ambush patrol operations in an attempt to locate and establish contact with the enemy.

In one event of particular note on 21 Oct, at approximately 1000 hrs, a Long Range Patrol under OPCON of the 2-28 Inf established contact with an estimated 15 VC during which 3 VC were reported as KIA. In attempting to extract the team, a UH1D received ground fire which resulted in its subsequent crash via XT511900. The crash resulted in the death of the entire crew and patrol, a total of 10 US personnel.

On 25 Oct several events occurred which served as a preliminary to one of the two most significant engagements of the operation. Commencing at 2200 hours, H&I fires from D Btry/1-5 Arty from FSPB Dot resulted in 128 secondary explosions throughout the night via XT504901 to XT546900. In addition elements of the 2-28 Inf firing 81mm mortar H&I fire during the same evening observed 12 secondary explosions via XT530836. Throughout the evening an airborne forward air controller reported extensive vehicular traffic on the Cambodian side of the border in the area of these secondary explosions. His report described the sight as one "resembling a freeway in heavy use during darkness."

On 23 Oct the Section of Search Lights I Btry/29 Arty was transferred from FSPB Dot to FSPB Rita.

On 26 Oct the 1-16 Inf (Mech) concluded operations in the Tong Le Chen area and moved overland to Quan Loi.

One of the two most significant engagements of the operation commenced early in the morning 26 Oct when the 2-28 Inf at FSPB Julie came under enemy mortar and ground attack commencing approximately 0100 hours. The enemy penetrated the FSPB perimeter wire but was repelled at approximately 0215 hours. Sporadic but intense fighting continued until 0630 hours when the enemy was again successful in penetrating the position but was repulsed almost immediately. With this contact broken at 0635 hours, sporadic contact continued throughout the day of 26 Oct as the unit searched the area of the previous evening's engagements locating 80 VC KIA, 26 AK 47s, 3 GHICOM MGs, 3 RPG launchers, and 5 B40 rds within and immediately adjacent to the perimeter. Again during the late evening of 26 Oct at approximately 2200 hours, the enemy attempted to breach the FSPB perimeter with a ground attack which was repulsed. A later search of the area revealed an additional 25 VC KIA

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from this contact. Four VC prisoners were taken during the day. Total casualties of the 2-28 Inf from the various contacts of 26 Oct were 8 US KIA and 33 US WIA.

On the morning of 30 Oct the 2-28 Inf was replaced at FSPB Julie by the 1-2 Inf at 0745 hours.

On 31 Oct while conducting reconnaissance-in-force operations vic of FSPB Julie elements of the 1-2 Inf engaged an unknown size enemy force vic XT514892. The contact was supported by light fire teams, artillery, and tactical airstrikes and broke shortly thereafter. At 1400 hours contact was regained with an estimated platoon sized enemy element. Again supported by artillery and light fire teams, this contact broke at 1530 hours. Cumulative US casualties for the engagements were 5 US WIA while 25 VC were killed by the 1-2 Inf elements and another 17 killed by airstrikes.

On 1 Nov at 1530 hours the 2-28 was reinserted into the Fong Le Chon area to conduct operations out of FSPB Rita.

Throughout 1 Nov FSPB Rita was subjected to intense shelling by enemy with RPG, mortar and rocket fire along with several ground probes. The artillery at the FSPB was used in a direct fire role against the enemy ground attacks. Artillery, light fire teams, and tactical air strikes supported throughout the day. In addition to the armor, artillery, and search light units previously listed at the FSPB, also included at this time were B Trp/1-4 Cav (-) and the 2-28 Inf which arrived during the day. Total US casualties for all elements included 12 KIA and 54 WIA while 5 ACAVs and 2 155mm howitzers were also heavily damaged. The enemy lost 27 VC KIA (BC).

Sporadic, light contact continued around the FSPBs until 8 Nov when FSPB Julie was disestablished by 1-2 Inf.

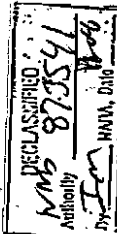
On 2 Nov the 30th Rangers (ARVN) were committed in the operational area and established positions vic XT628818.

On 3 Nov 3/B/2-34 Arm was withdrawn from FSPB Rita and A/2-11 Arty (155) (IIFP) was located with 1st Bde Fwd CP vic XT622810.

On 9 Nov the 2-28 disestablished positions at FSPB Rita along with B/1-5 Arty (105).

On 10 Nov FSPB Rita was disestablished when elements at that location (B/1-4 Cav (-), C/8-6 Arty (155), 1 Sect 1/29 SL (-)) moved to locations occupied by the 1st Bde Fwd Command Post. In addition the 1-26 Inf was replaced in FSPB Dot by the 36 Rangers (ARVN).

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Combat After Action Interview

Interviewees: Captain Richard L. Rogers, Commanding Officer, Company C, 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division. Lieutenant Joseph G. Montoya, 1st Platoon leader, Company C, 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division.

Interviewer: Major William W. Campion, O75523, 17th Military History Detachment, 1st Infantry Division.

CAMPION: This interview is being conducted with Captain Richard L. Rogers, Commanding Officer, Company C, 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, on the 18th of November 1968. The interview has to do with the operations of his unit in and around the area of Tong Le Chon during the period 18 October 1968 to 10 November 1968. Captain Rogers assumed command of Company C on the 24th of August 1968. Captain Rogers, I wonder if you would describe a little bit of this operation to us?

ROGERS: On 18 October our Battalion air assaulted into an LZ which later became our NDP location there at Julie. We had planned to go in at approximately noon, however, bad weather and aircraft availability pushed us back much later, and we ... started our air insertion around 1430 and it was completed after 1500 hours. The LZ was not an ideal LZ as there was a lot of high brush on the LZ and each of our loads that went in had to move in in the stagger trail formation and find a location. We finally were all on the ground and began preparing our night defensive position around 1600 which gave us about 30 minutes after we got on the ground to get organized and actually start our preparations. We worked that night preparing our positions, clearing fields of fire, until 0330 on the 19th. At that time we had completed getting out our wire and completing our overhead cover and completed our bunker positions themselves. The next day we continued to improve our positions, which was the 19th of October, and we worked all that day on the preparations for these positions, since our mission was to lure the NVA in that area into attacking us in our NDP.

CAMPION: Can you tell us at this point, Captain Rogers, what other units occupied the fire support base with you?

ROGERS: Sir, this was not an actual fire support base, as such, because we did not have artillery. We only had our organic weapons of the Battalion. We also had our Alpha Company and Bravo Company, plus our Battalion CP. Our Headquarters Company element was in there with us. We, as I say, worked on the NDP on the 18th and 19th, preparing it, cutting fields of fire, having special ... engineer LZ clearing teams come in to set charges and blow some of the large trees and to cover up some of the bomb strike areas so that we wouldn't have humps so that we could have good fields of fire. On the 20th we started RIF operations in the area. We would move out early in the morning and come in late in the evening, checking out the area trying to determine enemy activity, possible base camps, and general signs of VC movement.

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Combat After Action Interview: CPT Rogers & Lt Montoya continued.

We had negative significant findings except for (enemy) scout patrols. We knew they were checking out our NDP on both the 20th and 21st. However, on the 21st there was a helicopter shot down while we were on our RIF; and when we closed the NDP about 1630, we went back to our positions to prepare for our night time activities and we got a notice to move out to the crash site to secure the aircraft. It was at this time we were put in the lead, Charlie Company, with Alpha Company going with us (and) Bravo Company staying back to secure the NDP itself. As we moved out to the west of the NDP approximately 600 meters with my first platoon as the point of my company, Lieutenant Montoya's platoon overran a small RPG outpost team of three men. Quick reactions on his part and an aggressive action, I might add, by them with a quick base of fire ... (helped them overrun) and kill these three VC, taking negative casualties on our part at that time. We did draw additional fire from what I estimated as a squad of ten men, possibly as many as fifteen. This was coming from across a stream bed that was directly to our front. I maneuvered my second platoon up to cover, while I attempted to move Lieutenant Montoya's platoon across the stream bed to the other side. I was able to get one squad across, and then I went ahead and moved the rest of his platoon across. ... At this time they picked up bunkers and heavy movement on the other side. I felt ... it necessary at this time to check in with Colonel (LTC) Coffee and tell him that I felt we were going into a base camp and fortified positions and that it would be necessary for us to pull back and hit this area with some of our big stuff, artillery and airstrikes.

CAMPION: Also present here at this time is Lieutenant Joseph G. Montoya, the First Platoon leader of Company G, whom Captain Rogers referred to a moment ago.

MONTOYA: When we left the base camp to secure this downed chopper, I felt sure we were going to hit something on the way up there as my platoon was in the lead. We were especially alert at this time, and because of this, I think, this is why we picked up these three VC and killed them before they could fire a shot at us. We spotted them from about 75 meters away. At first we just spotted the grass moving. As we moved up my right flank spotted the actual VC, and they opened up. The VC allowed almost a whole squad to walk by them so they must of been asleep or loafing. After we killed these VC, we sent my first squad across; and they picked up movement, and then we brought them back so that we could bring in some (airstrikes) and some artillery. ... When we pulled my squad back across I checked out the three dead VC, noticed one man had his pants rolled up, and there were no scratches on his legs or anything of that sort. So I knew that they couldn't have moved to far without getting some scratches or something, or if they had moved along distance, he would of had his pants rolled down. So I reported to Captain Rogers that fact that there must be a base camp near by, and this is when he reported it to the Battalion Commander.

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Combat After Action Interview: CPT Rogers & Lt Montoya continued.

CAMPION: All right, Captain Rogers, I wonder if you could carry on now from these events which occurred on the 21st?

ROGERS: The significance of the action on the 21st, I felt, was the fact that it was a RPG team, and also the next day we had negative activity at all. However, on the 23d, our NDP was probed and hit in the Bravo Company sector which was the northern portion of the NDP. Their company strength was well down, and they had a small portion of the NDP. We had a very large RPG and mortar attack, primarily RPG rounds, fired with deadly accuracy into our NDP from just outside. As I say, this was two days later on the 23d. The 24th we had negative activity. So based on the fact that we had activity or would have had activity I felt on the 21st (which) we disrupted by overrunning this outpost or this RPG team, ... (with) the additional activity we had on the 23rd, the night of the 25th when I briefed my platoon leaders I told them I felt that the VC had set a pattern of every other night and to be especially alert that night and make sure that when we sent our LPs out that we did have good personnel on LP. ... Also I put one of my best squad leaders from the 2d platoon in charge of the ambush patrol that we had out that night. This ambush patrol was located about 450 meters west of the NDP; and as a result of this AP being out, they did, during the course of the contact on the night of the 25th or early morning of the 26th, provide us with good information. However, it turned out to be a real hindrance to us in that it cut off a lot of our supporting fires that could of been used, close air support, artillery, what have you, that we could have used right in on the wire had we not had this ambush patrol out.

CAMPION: All right, at this point Captain Rogers will discuss the events which took place on the evening of 25 October and the early morning of 26 October. These are the events which are most significant during this time frame as far as his unit is concerned in this operation in and around Tong Le Chon.

ROGERS: Since the terrain in this area was heavily wooded, jungle primarily, and the most open area around was to the west which came directly into my company sector, I felt and also Colonel Coffee felt like this was the most likely avenue of approach into our NDP. This (is) because they did have ease of movement up to the NDP. Not necessarily was it the best approach from the wire into the NDP but definitely up to the location of the NDP they could move troops in much closer and faster. The night of the 25th started off like a routine night. We were firing our H&I fires and to the northeast of the NDP. We got some secondary (explosions) out of our artillery H&I fires. They also picked up a (VC) unit by mistake on the radio ..., and the interrupter told us there was a unit that was receiving artillery fire ... From this it was determined that we were actually hitting a unit in some type of either move or base camp with our artillery fire. We had a number of secondary explosions, the exact number I couldn't begin to tell you, and there was some question about how many we actually did have but there were a large number of secondary explosions. This was at approximately 2130 hours to 2200 hours. We had nearly nothing from then until

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Combat After Action Interview: CPT Rogers & Lt Montoya continued.

approximately 0030 when the Alpha Company LPs reported some movement. In addition, Alpha Company was on the east and ran from the south up to the northeast of the Battalion NDP, which made them on my left. My LPs began picking up movement shortly afterwards. At approximately 0100 hours on the 26th we had the attack come. They were firing RPG, 75mm recoilless rifles. ... At the time we were unable to tell because of the amount of fire that was coming in that they were 75s. We did know that they were big. We thought though that they were RPG-7s at that time. The attack continued primarily with mortars and RPG's until about 0230 I would say with very little actual aggressive assault on the NDP. I was forced to pull back my LPs because of the movement that was around them and coming in. They were actually cutting the wires on the claymores. ... We had our people holding the claymore wire tight so they could detect this if the wires were cut or if the "Victor Charlie" started playing with the wires or attempting to turn them around on them. We did have several bangalore torpedoes brought up along the wire and we had alot of movement out in front of the wire. In one location we were having trouble getting to because a large tree that we had cut down and had not been able to move out of the area because of the size. It was about four feet in diameter, and we had cut it up but had not been able to get it out. They were using this to shield their movement up to the wire. I had moved the wire outside of the tree to include the tree inside the NDP or inside the wire. We got two bangalore torpedoes in the wire in this general vicinity which opened large gaps in the wire. We continued to fire in this area because we felt like they would be coming in through there and from the south where my first platoon was located. The VC, although I felt like they would hit us in mass charges, did not attempt to come at us in mass charges as such. They came in small groups, three man cells or two groups of three to five or six men, and this was the way we were picking them up coming into the wire. We did not have enough illumination, so they were able to sneak through the wire and get up in closer than we liked. However, I did not feel that there was such a significant force that it was worthwhile to pop our claymores. I mean they were small groups, and I felt like we would need our claymores if they did hit us with a mass attack. So we used our hand grenades and M16s plus M79s with only one machine gun firing during the entire attack. Based on the small groups, I just didn't feel like it was worthwhile to give away the locations of my automatic weapons. This continued for several hours up until about 0430 when, (since) we had had so much activity inside, ... both the Colonel and myself felt that it was necessary that we sweep the sector up to the wire and either push out or kill or capture any VC that were inside the wire. Otherwise they could be setting satchal charges and what have you right up on our bunkers.

CAPTION: All right, Captain Rogers, we'll pause at this point and hand this over to Lieutenant Montoya who may have a few remarks, comments, and observations to add at this time.

MONTAYA: Prior to sweeping our company sector, one of the big hindrances we noticed in the company sector was (that) we had three bomb craters that

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Combat After Action Interview: CPT Rogers & Lt Montoya continued.

were right in front of my platoon sector; and during this time the VC were crawling into these bomb craters and throwing hand grenades from inside of the bomb craters. In order to silence them we used our hand grenades and M79s; and in this bomb crater we killed, I believe, 11 VC in this one bomb crater which was no more than ten feet in front of our bunker. So they did in fact get within reaches of our claymores, and this is another reason why it would of done no good to blow the claymores.

CAMPION: Lieutenant Montoya, since you were actually on the perimeter at the time of the attack, I wonder if you could speak for a moment here about illumination and actually what you were able to see as the attack progressed?

MONTOYA: During the attack we had very little illumination, but while there was illumination up we could see some VC crawling in. ... We had a water trailer in our company sector. Also we noticed some VC crawling up to the water trailer, so I went over to the mortar pits and had one of the mortars fire their mortars on the water trailer and bring them in as close as 25 meters from our position. But, as far as illumination and what we were able to see, it was almost nil until they were right inside the bomb crater. Then we could see the VC **popping** their heads up every now and then to throw their hand grenades and fire their AKs over. In this case the VC/NVA were using mostly hand grenades during the assault; but they were firing AKs, and also they had some automatic weapons. I don't know what they are called, but they were using quite a bit of small arms fire at this time.

CAMPION: All right, Captain Rogers, we'll pass it back to you now, and you can pick it up where you left off before.

ROGERS: As Lieutenant Montoya mentioned, the mortars did a tremendous job. ... Because of our limited support that we were able to call in because of our ambush patrol that was out, our mortars did a tremendous job; and we were borrowing ammunition from the other companies because they had negative activity in their sectors. The mortars, as Lieutenant Montoya mentioned, were brought up within 25 meters or less of our front line position and did a tremendous job throughout. We also brought them up within 25 meters of my ambush patrol which I neglected to mention earlier. The ambush patrol was continually reporting the movement of fresh troops up to the south of their location toward the NDP, and to the north of them they were hauling out wounded and dead. These ran in groups of anywhere from thirty to fifty people at a time that they could pick up moving. Because there were only 12 men out on the ambush, I told them not to pop the ambush because of the distance that these units were out and also because of the fact that it would be so difficult to get out to them until we did have a complete picture of the situation. As it turned out though, one NVA walked directly into the ambush and they shot him. A few minutes later, a second walked directly into the ambush, they also killed--shot--this NVA. However, as he fell, he pulled the pin on a grenade; and we took one killed and two wounded in the ambush position. This presented an additional problem to us as to how to get out our wounded and, to me, as how best to get them out without taking additional casualties and (how) to pull them out and still try to save the

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Combat After Action Interview: CPT Rogers & Lt Montoya continued.

men who were wounded and going into shock. This was also a problem with our illumination. Even though we felt that we needed illumination, we also had to do what we felt was best for all of our units that were out. Alpha Company still had their LPs out in the position, and each company had out their ambush patrol, and we did not want to disclose their locations. ... Firing illumination in the NDP with the close proximity of these ambush patrols and our LPs outside the wire, we felt, ... would be disastrous to these elements. So we tried to reach a happy medium of some illumination yet not so much illumination that it was just like daylight to disclose these locations. The attack continued until ... after we completed the sweep in our sector which was (started) around 0430 ... It must of been 5 o'clock when it was completed. I had Lieutenant Montoya's platoon move out the south of the perimeter heading west to link up with my AP and bring them back. With three casualties and only nine healthy men, I didn't feel like that they could bring in their casualties without giving up all security since all of them were litter patients. At this time the first platoon with ~~Lieutenant~~ Montoya moved outside the wire (and) hit a element outside the wire approximately 50 to 75 meters to the west of the NDP. He called in and reported this to me--that there were a lot of troops, several that they had seen, several that they had killed--and at this time I decided to pull him back into the NDP before attempting to recover the ambush patrol.

CAMPION: Lieutenant Montoya, do you have something you wish to add at this time?

MONTOYA: Yes. At this time when we went out to link up with the ambush patrol, as Captain Rogers said, we were 50 to 75 meters out when we hit a element that may have been trying to come into the wire also. I took one wounded man there; and as we were pulling back, I also noticed that ... the NVA or VC had their mortars set up approximately 150 to 200 meters outside the wire, and I could see the flashes from the mortar tubes popping up. At this time I reported this to Captain Rogers and also shot a azimuth to the mortars and had our mortars fire on them which I believed silenced them right soon.

ROGERS: I'd like to add here that, by moving the first platoon and their actions outside the wire hitting this group, I am convinced that it did disrupt a last attack for that morning that they had planned. It took them completely by surprise, caught them off guard, and also silenced all incoming heavy stuff that they had both their RPGs, 75 recoilless rifles, and 60s and 82s that were coming into the NDP. I went ahead and pulled the first platoon back inside the NDP to wait for full daylight and also to not have a cross fire started between two linking up elements in contact. My AP reported that the men were in pretty good condition. They had settled down after approximately three hours out there in this condition now, and basically I felt like the best thing for everyone was to wait until we had the situation well at hand and enough light to see. After

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Combat After Action Interview: CPT Rogers & Lt Montoya continued.

pulling the first platoon back in, we continued to fight with the sporadic contact that we were having up until that time. We had also during the sweep picked up approximately 15 to 17 weapons—three machine guns and about 12 to 14 AKs and RPGs. We did pick up one prisoner. ... I called the interpreter down from Battalion to come and interrogate him, and he reported that there were 20 men in the attack on the NDP which I knew was false because we had nearly that many bodies that we had physically stepped over. I insisted that the interrogation continue of the prisoner. ... As it continued, we also picked up two additional prisoners, correction: three additional prisoners, who were wounded in the sweep in front of our sector still prior to daylight.

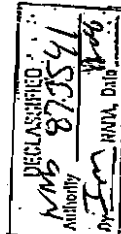
CAMPION: Captain, in the reports, the official reports, that came back on this contact, one of these prisoners was identified as a NVA officer. Did you confirm that or do you have any information regarding that?

ROGERS: Yes. He did turn out to be a Company Commander of one of the elements that was involved in the contact. Also the following morning, later in the morning when we were sweeping ... our company sector, I did come across a Battalion Commander who had been killed, and (I) was able to get the operation plan from him. He had it on him. His aide was still with him at that time and refused to be taken alive. We were a little stunned at the tenacity of these VC/NVA that were wounded and trapped. They knew they were trapped. They pulled the grenades at close range, fired on us, opened up on us at extremely close range, 5 to 10 feet in several instances. Lieutenant Montoya's platoon, when he went out to recover the AP at approximately 0700 hours, had numerous contacts even in daylight getting out to the ambush site. Lieutenant Montoya's platoon was able to recover the ambush, as I say, killing between 12 and 17 VC in their move out there. There were also a number of VC that had been killed around the ambush site which we were unable to count because my primary emphasis then was on getting our wounded back—the two wounded who were in shock. One VC threw two grenades at Lieutenant Montoya and his radio-operator (where) his fast reactions saved a number of his troops. He returned the grenades. They got into a grenade pitching contest, and he was able to knock this (man) out with only he and his radio-operator taking shrapnel from the grenades.

CAMPION: Lieutenant Montoya, since you did accompany the unit moving out to the AP site, I wonder if you could provide us some of your description of that event?

MONTOYA: During our second move to try to link up with the ambush patrol, we finally accomplished this. However, we did make a lot of contact on the way out there as Captain Rogers said. There were several VC in one bomb crater. However, most of them were dead. There were some that were still alive, but they were still trying to get at their grenades as we came up on them. They were wounded, but they were still trying to pull the

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Combat After Action Interview: CPT Rogers & Lt Montoya continued.

grenades on us. When we were pulling back with the ambush patrol, my radio operator and I were bringing up the rear because the others had their hands full. ... At this time one of my men mentioned to me that there were some dead NVA in another bomb crater. At this time I went over to check it out, and I was about 10 feet away from the bomb crater when the NVA pulled the pins on two grenades and threw them at me and my radio-operator. ... This also demonstrates the tenacity of these troops--the NVA--because at this time he knew he was completely outnumbered and it would have taken nothing, almost nothing, for us to surround him. ... He could of given himself up, but instead he tried to carry on and kill as many troops as he could with himself.

CAMPION: I wonder if you could describe real quickly here--it's a good point to do it--how these people were dressed?

MONTOYA: These people were dressed in--they looked more less like our stateside fatigues. ... Some of them were kacki in color, some of them were real light green, some of them were wearing steel pots, and they were all, most of them, carrying AK 47's. However, there were a few that were carrying rolls of wire for claymores or to set off charges of some kind that were almost 200 feet long I would say. They looked like just a half of wire on their backs.

CAMPION: In general, were they young soldiers or older soldiers in age?

MONTOYA: I would say they were mostly young soldiers. None of them that I saw looked very old. I would say they were all between the ages of 18, 19, and 22, 23.

CAMPION: All right, Captain Rogers, I wonder if you can carry on from here?

ROGERS: Upon Lieutenant Montoya's return with his platoon to the NDP, he was evacuated. So from here on I'll cover the events of that day as we went out to sweep our sector and to attempt to recover or to capture any documents that would assist us in evaluating what size force we were up against plus any other intelligence information that we could gain. I briefed my people in particular based on the reports that my first platoon had sent back, plus what I had seen, telling them to be extremely careful about moving into closed up areas and to use their hand grenades to check out an area before moving into it if they couldn't physically see in the area. I wanted to take any prisoners that we could. However, I did want to attempt to prevent any casualties, needless casualties, that I felt from people who were trapped and were willing to give everything to the VC cause. So for that reason we did a lot of reconning-by-fire as we swept. However, this did not prove totally successful. ... I mentioned earlier that I was able to find a Battalion Commander and (in) atleast three other cases we tried to get individuals to come out and surrender and they refused to do so. They just stayed in there and either fired back or attempted to pull grenades, and to eliminate these we were forced to shoot them or throw hand

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grenades in to knock them out so we could continue our sweeps. In our sweep we were only able to complete about 250 meters outside which was where we started in the area to the south where we had picked up the mortar fire and returned the mortar fire. At that location we also picked up a medium caliber machine gun and numerous bodies. I can't recall the total in that area but they had been completely blown apart by both mortar fire and the M-79s which we had fired from the NDP into that location. I was amazed at the number of VC that were actually killed with small arms fire. My estimate ran as high as 65 to 70 per cent of the VC (who) were actually killed with small arms fire from our NDP of the troops actually attacking. Now as you got farther out away from the perimeter there were the elements that were killed with our mortars and also the M-79s but I had never seen this many VC that were killed strictly by small arms. ... When I say small arms, as I mentioned earlier, this is not automatic weapons fire. I'm talking about M-16 fire. I would say at least 45 to 50 that I saw had been shot with M-16 fire, for figures. We were forced to pull back from the sweep without being able to complete it that day because of time and some casualties that we had taken in real thick bamboo after losing two of my platoon leaders. One had been pulled back on R&R plus one, Lieutenant Montoya, ... had been wounded. ... Two E-7s (were) running these platoons. ... I lost one of them plus 5 additional troops wounded and or killed. We had so many people tied up carrying weapons, equipment, and wounded that a 35 man force out there was not sufficient to continue the sweep. As I say, we were loaded down anyway, and we could not bring back all the equipment that we had found. After pulling back into the NDP we had a lot of work to do in continuing our improvement of our NDP which we continue to do as long as are in a NDP. ... That night we were hit again as was felt would certainly happen. ... They would come back to recover their dead if nothing else, and the action started at about 1930 that evening. They started hitting us with both mortars and RPGs again, primarily again coming from our sector. ... We were able to hold this off and I only had to pull back two of my LPs. The third I was able to keep in position, which told us exactly where the attack was coming from They presented no serious threat to us, nor even got close to the wire, thanks to our starlight scopes and our good illumination and supporting fires that night since we did not have out any LPs on the night of the 26th.

CAMPION: Let me interject one or two questions here at this point. The first of those is that it appears throughout the attacks during the evening 25 October-early morning of 26th October, and the attack on the evening of 26th October, that the main VC/NVA effort was in your company sector and not in the other company sectors within the Battalion. Can you confirm and comment on that-number one. Number two-the second attack, the one of the evening of 26 October, appears to have conformed almost identically, perhaps not quite as strong, with the one of the previous evening. It appears the VC/NVA showed very little desire to change their attack plan or to approach you from a different direction. Is that true and can you comment on that?

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ROGERS: Reference to both of these questions, I found no change at all. They even attempted to move back into the same location to set up their mortars. However, I was covering that with H&I fires plus had prepositioned defcons (defense concentrations) located on that area. They hit us in exactly the same location and only slipped off, I think to a mistake on their part, into Bravo's Company sector to the north. They just got misoriented a little but in trying to find the location they could break through. They accidentally moved over and hit a little more from the northwest than from the west and southwest.

CAMPION: Now Captain Rogers will carry on from this point and cover in general summary form, I suppose, the events that surpassed during the remainder of the time that you were engaged in this operation.

ROGERS: We continued our daytime RIFs and had tremendous supporting fires each night after the night of the 25th because we had, as I say, kept our ambush patrols in instead of putting them out. ... We got just fantastic supporting fires from both artillery and our airstrikes and gunships also that worked the area and actually strafed along the wire of the NDP. The RIFs the following days were primarily company sized RIFs with our companies down at much smaller strength. (It) presented a problem of control because of the loss of my ... squad leaders and platoon sergeants. However, the troops kept pushing and did a tremendous job of just fighting 24 hours a day, you might say, because there was no rest at night. We had activity every night, plus pushing all day. (It) really became a problem to try to get the troops going. However, they did rise the occasion I made a comment the other day that probably expresses my feelings the best. It's really easy to lead a bunch of tigers and this is the way the troops put out for me, and it made my job much easier.

CAMPION: Lieutenant Montoya, let's get a comment from you here. There is one thing we haven't covered yet, and that is some description of the manner in which this NDP was set up. Can you give us a idea of its size and of the type positions from which your people were fighting during the defense of the NDP?

MONTROYA: The size of the perimeter was rather small for a battalion size perimeter. It was approximately 150 to 200 meters across and each company had approximately eighteen positions per company. ... The way these positions were built would conform to the standard type positions that are always built in the 1st Infantry Division such as the two firing ports at 45 degree angles and with at least two layers of sandbags for overhead cover, but after the attack more sandbags were added to this. Also we had a double thickness of sandbags around our sleeping positions. However, during the attack most of the fighting was done from behind the positions and not from inside. The positions were used mostly as cover to get away from the RPG rounds and mortar rounds, but most of the 79s and hand grenades and M-16s were fired from outside the positions.

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CAMPION: Let me ask you one more question here, Captain Rogers. Do you think that it was the intent of this enemy force to completely overrun and eliminate, so to speak, your NDP, or do you think it was his intent to perhaps inflict the maximum number of casualties without any real thoughts toward overrunning the NDP? I ask this question because of your comments regarding the size and method in which he attacked, that is, small units and clusters of individuals which repeatedly followed each other in.

ROGERS: Sir, it is my belief that the VC were attempting to get elements inside the NDP to knock out some of our front line positions prior to mounting a large scale attack. I base this on the fact that the reports of my ambush patrol that was out, the number of troops that were in the area, plus also the large groups of casualties that we found assembled outside, well outside, the NDP that never got up into the ... small arms fight. This also: the way that they came in, the charges that they were carrying--satchel charges, grenades, numerous bangalore torpedoes--indicate, all indicate, to me that they were attempting to overrun the NDP. ... They were just not able to mount an attack because of the fire that we were putting out and the fact that our mortars were covering the area so well in and around the wire. ... They couldn't get up close enough to get their entire unit committed. We found no radios at all, even with the battalion command group that we found, which is an indication to me that they just lacked coordination and ability to adjust. ... Units were directly under the leadership of small units, and these small unit leaders probably fell down from the velocity of the fire.

CAMPION: While you mention the point of this Battalion Commander, you did also mention that he had the attack plan on him which you were able to secure. I wonder if you could comment briefly here on what you saw in that attack plan, if you did get a readout on it, and what information that revealed to you regarding the enemy intention.

ROGERS: The operation plan was drawn on paper with ink. It was not a American type overlay as we use nor was there a map with it. However, it did show three forces converging on the NDP from the west, hitting directly into my sector with the--correction, from a little bit northwest on about a 300 degree azimuth from the center of our NDP and to about a 160 azimuth with the entire attack coming from that. It also showed some supporting positions which I have already mentioned here.

CAMPION: Lieutenant Montoya, from the standpoint of a platoon leader involved in this action and as an individual who was most directly involved, I wonder if you could give us a comment or two regarding the capability and ability of the individual soldier, the individual American soldier, as you saw him conduct himself during this engagement.

MONTOYAF As I see my own men, the ones that I was with out there on this operation, if the rest of the troops in all of Vietnam or the Army are anywhere like my men, I think there the best damn troops in the world, but

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they also have emotions as was shown later on when several of their buddies were killed or wounded. But they weren't afraid all the time they were out there.

CAMPION: And, Captain Rogers, I think probably a most appropriate question to ask you here to conclude this would be to have you provide us with what you consider the most significant lesson learned from your standpoint as a Company Commander during this single engagement?

ROGERS: There were two significant teaching points for me, and also Colonel Coffee and I had discussed this. The first (is) that a ambush patrol should definitely be atleast 1000 meters out from another unit so that you can get supporting artillery in between these units. Also the most difficult thing for me as a Company Commander was to suddenly be without your platoon leaders-without your key personnel, and having to push the people to a point that they do begin to break, and knowing that you've got to keep pushing to keep them alive even though no matter what your personal feelings are. You've just got to keep pushing, and they all look to you to see how your holding up. And the young E-5s that we have must ... put out and they've got to drive. This is the hardest thing when the troops are tired. When the going get tough, then the tough have to get going. They really have to push; and if nothing else also I found that the harder that you can be on them at a time like this, yet fair, this is when your real leaders and significant people within the company really blossom to the front. In many cases this turned out to be PFCs that I moved up as squad leaders over a NCO because he could do the job regardless of his rank. He could do the job, and I think you have to know your people and be able to recognize this and see who they are looking to and who will push them; because this is what is going to keep them alive, and this is what they are looking for.

CAMPION: This interview has been conducted with Captain Richard L. Rogers, the Commanding Officer, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry, and Lieutenant Joseph G. Montoya, 1st Platoon Leader, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry, and has to do with the operations of their units in and around the area of Tong Le Chon during the period 18 October 1968 to 10 November 1968.

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