

HEADQUARTERS
1ST BATTALION 8TH INFANTRY
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96265

AVDDA-BRAB-6

31 May 1967

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report (RCS: MACV J-3132):

THRU: Commanding Officer
1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division
ATTN: AVDDA-BRC
APO San Francisco 96265

TO: Commanding General
4th Infantry Division
ATTN: AVDDH-CG
APO San Francisco 96262

1. (C) Name or identity and/or type of operation: FRANCIS MARION (DUC CO III): Search and Destroy Operation.
2. (C) Dates of Operation: 161040H May 67 to 241345H May 67.
3. (C) Location: PLEI DOC (YA719309, YA 717308, YA716315).
4. (C) Control or Command Headquarters: 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division.
5. (C) Reporting Officers: Col Jackson, 1st Brigade Commander; LTC Gannon, 1/8 Inf Commander; Capt Williamson, A1/8 Inf Commander; Capt Shelly and Lt Allen, B1/8 Inf Commander; and Capt Peterson, C1/8 Inf Commander.
6. (C) Task Organization:

1/8 Inf:	A1/8 Inf	A6/29th Arty
	B1/8 Inf	B5/16th Arty
	C1/8 Inf	
	A1/22nd Inf	
	B1/69th Armor	
7. (C) Supporting Forces:
 - a. A6/29th Arty (105mm) DS Battery fired 8300 rounds in support of operation.

Downgraded at 3 year intervals
Declassified after 12 years
DOD DIR 5200.10

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b. B5/16th Arty(155) (Reinforcement) Battery fired 4940 rounds in support of operation.

c. C5/16th Arty(155) Battery fired 1845 rounds in support of operations.

d. B6/14th Arty(8 inch and 175) batteries fired 1794 and 690 rounds respectively in support of operation.

e. Fires from all batteries were extremely effective. Artillery adjustments were within twenty-five (25) meters of supported troops. During the periods of limited or no contact, batteries fired battle field denial fires within 400 meters of the unit's perimeter.

f. Air: Immediate request for air support was forwarded thru both Army and Air Force channels. Throughout the period from 18 May to 23 May there were 57 sorties flown with mixed ordnance (napalm, cluster bombs, 20mm, and 500 GP bombs). Over all results of airstrikes are unknown, however a POW captured on 21 May indicated that he had heard that one airstrike had hit one of the NVA battalions. Gunships employed against small pockets of resistance supplemented airstrikes and artillery effectively.

8.(C) Intelligence: The terrain throughout the entire contact area is primarily single canopy jungle forest. The trees vary from 5 to 30 inches in diameter and from 15 to 75 feet in height. The vegetation is comparatively dense in most areas affording limited visibility and limiting speed of movement. There are numerous small streams in the area that generally flow north-west. They eventually flow into the SE SAN River which forms the Cambodian border to the west. To the north and east are densely wooded mountains. To the south towards Highway 19 the area opens and becomes somewhat level. There are numerous high speed trails throughout the area.

The enemy was estimated to be possible elements of the 66th NVA Regiment which had made previous contact with the 3rd Bn, 12th Inf. The enemy unit that was contacted was the 320th or 32nd NVA Regiment which had a total strength estimated between 1200 and 1400 personnel. All three battalions of the regiment were contacted at one time or another during the period.

During the contact on the 18th the 4th platoon was lured into an ambush. The NVA tactics could best be described as a "Lame Duck Act". The total enemy force contacted on the 18th was one NVA battalion.

Between the contact on the 18th and the 20th the NVA did not attempt to break contact. The NVA maintained contact through the use of small trail parties and reconnaissance elements.

During the contact on the 20th the NVA used an estimated force of two battalions with one battalion in reserve.

During both attacks the enemy made maximum use of terrain, cover, and concealment. The enemy used mortars and automatic weapons in a basically conventional role, and to maximum advantage. The amount of mortar ammunition fired indicates that the NVA were capable of more than harassing fire.

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The morale and discipline of the NVA troops was considered very high. This can be accounted for by their recent arrival in South Vietnam from Cambodia. It is further demonstrated, by the manner in which they conducted both attacks and their actions during the contacts, that they appeared to have been well coordinated and had good esprit de corps.

Enemy losses can be estimated between 150 and 200 KIA in addition to the 157 KIA (BC). It is estimated 150-250 additional personnel were wounded in the contact. A total of 400-500 were wounded or killed in the 32nd Regiment, thus decreasing its combat strength by an estimated 30 percent.

9.(C) Mission: 1/8 Inf to establish FSB vic DUC CO (YA769239) to conduct S&D operations in assigned AO to locate and destroy enemy forces and installations.

10.(C) Concept of Operation: 1/8 Inf established FSB vic YA790259 on 13 May. Companies A and B (mutually supporting) commenced sweep to the west northwest to vic YA7331 where they would then sweep east. Co C initially provided security at FSB.

11.(C) Action prior to separation of the 4th platoon of Co B, 1/8 Inf:

Co B was moving north on an azimuth of 350 degrees, when at 1040 hours vic YA720306, it spotted and fired at 1 NVA in khaki uniform with weapons. The NVA withdrew to the north on a high speed trail. The unit swept the area and continued to proceed north in a column of platoons with the 4th platoon on the left front, the 2nd platoon on the right front, and the 3rd and 1st platoons bringing up the left and right rear files respectively.

At 1055 hours vic YA721307 the point squad of the 2nd platoon observed three (3) NVA in khaki to their front. The column was halted and the platoon leader moved forward. The platoon leader was informed that the men heard voices to their front. At this time one (1) NVA in khaki and armed with an AK-47 stepped into view on the right front of the formation. The platoon leader yelled in Vietnamese for the NVA to "come here" in hopes of capturing him. The NVA then attempted to fire on the platoon and the platoon leader and several members of his platoon fired on the NVA. The one NVA fled to the north. The three (3) NVA first sighted fled to the northwest.

The company commander, Lt Allen, then maneuvered the company to sweep to the north along the ridge where the NVA were sighted. Upon sweeping the contact area the company found a fresh, well used trail running generally east-west and another well used trail running north-south. The unit established a perimeter and started cutting a FZ to evacuate the 4 NVA ruck sacks that had been found in the area (See TAB A).

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The company commander then sent the 1st platoon to the east southeast to check that portion of the trail, and the 4th platoon was sent to the west and northwest to check out the trail in that direction. They were instructed to go no farther than 200 meters. The 1st platoon moved along the trail to the southeast for a distance of 250 meters and returned with negative findings. The 4th platoon started to the northwest along the trail. The trail forked to the north and the 4th platoon then moved in a northerly direction. At approximately 1130 hours the 4th platoon observed 1 NVA and received small arms fire. The platoon leader called back and requested to pursue the one NVA.

At approximately 1200 hours the volume of fire had increased in intensity and the platoon was receiving fire. The company commander informed the platoon to return to the company perimeter. The platoon attempted to return to the company perimeter but was unable to do so as it was receiving heavy AW fire from the east, between the platoon and the company.

The company commander then started to maneuver the company in a north northwesterly direction to link up with the 4th platoon. The company was in a line formation with the 1st platoon in the rear as reserve, the 3d platoon on the left, the 2d platoon on the right, with the CP group in the middle. The company moved approximately 20 meters forward of the company perimeter. The point elements of the 2d and 3d platoons came under intense fire (See Incl B) in which several men were wounded. The company was unable to move forward and attempted to maneuver to the right and left flank but was pinned down by AW and small arms fire on both sides. The company then went into a perimeter defense.

At this point the description of the action has to be separated as the 4th platoon was one separate element and the company was another.

b. Action of the 4th platoon, Co B after separation:

The 4th platoon after initially moving to the west observed one NVA wearing a green uniform and carrying a ruck sack. The platoon attempted to close with the NVA and started following a trail that ran NW to SE from the main EW trail. The platoon then observed 4-5 NVA and then 10-15 NVA. It was at the last sighting that the platoon started receiving small arms and AW fire. At this time the platoon leader called in and requested assistance from the company. The company commander attempted to move to his aid. The platoon then started receiving heavy AW fire from the east, northeast and southeast between its location and the company's. The platoon leader then requested artillery fire.

The platoon was divided into two elements when initially moving along the trail. When the firing first started, the rear element was ordered to link up with the lead element. As this was being accomplished the platoon was taking fire from the north in relatively heavy volume and receiving sniper fire from the west. The platoon at this time had one radio destroyed, leaving only one operational radio. The platoon then started receiving heavy AW fire from the southeast, east and northeast. They reported that they were cut off and could not move back to the remainder of the company. The platoon therefore moved to the west into a ravine to set up a defensive perimeter.

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Apparently the platoon could not reach the company on the company net and switched the remaining radio to the Bn command net. In this manner it established communications with the company. The platoon's fire commands were then relayed over the battalion command net.

The battalion commander was located in his C&C aircraft over the scene of the contact. He was able to communicate with company CP but could not talk to the 4th platoon. Occasionally he was able to hear the platoon leader relaying a report to the company CP.

The platoon is believed to have had only 2 smoke grenades, which were used early in the contact in an attempt to mark its position for the adjustment of artillery. However, due to the heavy canopy these two grenades were not effective markers.

As the platoon withdrew to the west it was surrounded and was receiving heavy MW, MG, B40, and sniper fire from all sides. Seven men of the platoon ran to the west and into a small creek bed. All but one of these men were immediately killed by machine gun fire from the northwest (See T&B C). The platoon established a perimeter approximately 15 to 20 meters in diameter which consisted of three groups (See Incl D).

The platoon leader moved from the vicinity of the stream to the command group and radio, and started requesting artillery fire to his west. The first round was smoke and the platoon leader was unable to observe. He then started calling in corrections to move the artillery to the west, and it was moved closer to his front. The platoon was getting hit from all sides with enemy fire. The survivors indicate there was a machine gun and B40 rocket launcher to the southeast, a B40 rocket launcher to the north northeast, and snipers and MW on all sides.

The NVA attempted to overrun the platoon from the west across the creek but were repelled. At 1337 hours the artillery was cut off and the gunships started to work the area on the west side of the stream. The platoon leader talking to the aircraft indicated the aircraft were firing where he wanted them, but the survivors indicated the aircraft were not effective as they were firing too far west.

At 1404 hours the artillery was employed again. The platoon leader called for artillery fire closer to his position. At approximately 1458 hours the platoon leader requested artillery fire on top of his position because he was being overrun. About this time the command group was killed by machine gun and rocket fire.

The survivors indicated the NVA were in a line formation, firing as they moved, and stopping to search each body and gather the weapons, ammunition, canteens, and other personal effects, i.e. jewelry (watches and rings). The NVA tied two of the survivors hands behind their backs as if going to take them prisoner, but left them in place. The NVA swept the platoon's area from two directions, initially from the east, and a few minutes later another group came into the area from the northwest.

According to the survivors at least two persons who had been wounded were deliberately shot by the NVA. All of the survivors either played dead or were unconscious from wounds while the NVA searched the perimeter.

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One of the NVA's who was apparently the leader, would kick a body several times in the back or ribs and if it moved it might be shot. The survivors estimate the NVA were in the area approximately 30-40 minutes, methodically searching all personnel. After searching the bodies, the NVA withdrew to the west across the stream. The survivors indicate the NVA kept up constant activity during the night but never reentered the platoon area. In the morning the survivors could see only 1 NVA in a tree as Co A approached. He left the area without firing a round.

Co A closed with the 4th platoon of Co B at 190820H May and found 7 US MIA, 1 man unharmed, and discovered 1 man MIA. At this time a PZ was cut and the KIA'S and WIA'S were evacuated.

c. Action of Co B(-) after separation of the 4th Platoon:

The company commander of Co B, being unable to maneuver and close with the 4th platoon due to the intense MW and sniper fire, organized the remainder of the company in a perimeter and at 1400 hours started cutting a PZ to evacuate the wounded.

Co A was located vic YL733303 at 1330 hours and was instructed to move and close Co B's location from the northeast. At 1512 hours Co A was located vic YL728308 moving west to assist Co B. At this time Co A was diverted to move south to a suitable PZ location vic YL730305.

At 1620 hours the 2nd platoon of Co B again attempted to close with the 4th platoon and was again stopped at the ravine to the front. The company commander then ordered the company to remain in the perimeter and to complete the PZ as soon as possible. At 1645 hours Co B reported that it was receiving only sporadic small arms and sniper fire, and it had had no contact with the 4th platoon for the last hour.

At 1725 hours the first element of the Recon Platoon and Capt Shelly (Co B commander) were airlifted from the fire support base into the Co B(-) location. The last element of Recon closed Co B's location at 1745 hours.

At 1755 hours a Medevac aircraft reported receiving fire from the southwest of Co B's location. Gunships and artillery were employed against the fire. Co B reported receiving sporadic MW fire from the north but in a decreasing amount. It appeared that the enemy was attempting to break contact.

At 181700H May Co A closed into the designated area vic YL730305 and proceeded clearing a sufficient area for a one aircraft PZ. At 1755 hours the first element of Co A was lifted to Co B(-) with the last of Co A closing Co B's location at 1915 hours. At 1923 hours Co A moved west in an attempt to link up with the 4th platoon of Co B. The movement utilized illumination from an Air Force flare aircraft. At 2245 hours Co A stopped moving and set up its night location vic YL713306, having made negative contact with the 4th platoon of Co B. (It was later determined that Co A had passed 100 meters south of the 4th platoon's location.)

At 190219H May Co B(-) reported receiving estimated 30 rounds of mortar fire from [redacted] at a range of 500-600 meters. All mortar rounds landed outside the perimeter. No small arms fire was received during the night. At 0627H on the 19th Co B reported receiving 5 rounds of B40 rocket fire from the north.

At 190705H May Co A started moving north, then east and at 0820 hours linked up with the 4th platoon of Co B.

Co C, 1/8 Inf was relieved of mission of FSB security at 190800H May and Co A, 1/22nd Inf was placed under OPCON 1/8 Inf. 1/22nd Inf closed 1/8 Inf FSB at 0940 hours and assumed security mission.

At 0941 hours the 1st element of Co C(-) was lifted from the fire support base into Co B's location with the last lift closing at 1130 hours. The 3rd platoon of Co C, operating with the CIDG, was lifted from vic Y:793292 at 1355 hours closing Co B's location at 191440H May.

During the remainder of the 19th all three companies swept the battle field finding a total of 119 NVA KIA (BC). At 1730 hours Co B received 25 rounds of 82mm mortar fire from vic YA713313. Artillery and airstrikes were employed and the mortar fire ceased. All companies closed their night locations by 1700 hours. Co A located vic Y:718309 and Co B and Co C vic Y:722310.

d. Subsequent Action: 20 May to 24 May 67:

It was planned that on 20 May all companies would sweep west with Co A and Co C abreast and Co B trailing. Upon sweeping west to the ridge vic YA710315 they would then turn north and close location vic Y:715317. Both objectives would have an artillery prep prior to the movement of the companies.

At 200515H May Co B reported receiving 15-20 rounds of 82mm mortar fire outside the perimeter. At 0730 hours an outpost for Co C vic Y:723310 observed and fired on 3NVA that were moving north. At 1005 hours Co B received 10 additional mortar rounds outside the perimeter. At 1130 hours all units were prepared to move awaiting the artillery prep.

At 1159 hours artillery prep commenced vic YA713315. At 1233H all three companies having swept the first objective started moving north. Co C located 5 unexpended 82mm mortar fuzes vic Y:713313 and two mortar positions vic YA715310 along a NW to SE trail that had been recently used. At 1453H Co C observed and fired at 1 NVA with negative results. The NVA withdrew to the west. At 1510H Co A found three mortar positions with fifty foxholes in a perimeter vic Y:717316.

At 201600H Co A, Co B, and Co C went into their night location vic Y:717317 and established one large perimeter 200 meters north and south by 250 meters east and west. Co B was on the south, Co A on the west and north, and Co C on the north and east. At 202020H Co A, Co B and Co C reported receiving mortar fire from the southwest and NVA attacking from the southeast, south, and southwest. At this time a FIC, AF flare ship, and immediate air strikes were requested. Artillery fire was employed to the companies' south vic

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YA715305 and all around the perimeter. The NVA kept pressing the attack until approximately 2145 hours at which time the companies reported only occasional mortar, small arms, grenades, and B40 rocket fire.

The attack was primarily from the south. It was initiated by a mortar attack and when the mortars shifted to the north the enemy attacked from the south. The NVA attacked in three separate waves utilizing grenades, B40 rockets, machine guns, and individual weapons. The enemy soldiers were able at times to advance to within five to ten meters of the company defensive position.

At 202247H May the companies reported that small arms fire had ceased, but they were still receiving sporadic mortar rounds and B40 rockets. Units estimated that a total of 175 mortars and 45 B40 rockets had been received as of 2400 hours in addition to the small arms, MM fire, and three ground attacks.

At 210011H May Co B reported hearing voices on the hill to their south via YA712310 and artillery was fired into the area. At 210114H the first US PW was evacuated utilizing a hoist. At 210347H Co B reported receiving grenades that were being thrown into the perimeter every two or three minutes. Units still reported hearing voices to their front in all directions. Co B received an estimated 35-40 grenades. At 210435H Co B reported movement to the south and artillery was fired into the area. At 210600H the Air Force flare ship was released. At 210600H Co B reported movement to the south and artillery was fired into the area.

At 210700H the companies started sweeping the perimeter in all directions. At 210718H Co B reported finding two armed NVA PW's and was trying to take them prisoner. At 210745H the companies reported receiving mortar fire from via YA702304. Artillery was directed into the area and the mortar fire ceased. By 210945H all companies reported that all fire had ceased and they were again sweeping the perimeter out to 500 meters. At 0927 hours Co B reported that it had captured the two wounded NVA but one had died of wounds. The other was evacuated at 0945 hours to Brigade Headquarters. At 1015 hours the Medevac aircraft reported receiving small arms fire via YA716320. Artillery was fired into the area with unknown results.

The decision was made to again reinforce the battalion forward area. All personnel, not absolutely essential, were drawn from the base camp and trains area and sent forward. At 211305H two engineer squads from Co A, 4th Engrs were sent to the forward area to start clearing a suitable two-aircraft LZ. During the remainder of the day all companies were resupplied with ammunition, rations, water, and personnel. The companies swept the area in all directions finding several weapons and evidence that many NVA had been killed. The units also found some wire and small trails that had been cut to within 15-20 meters of the perimeter. At 1450H a Bn T&CCP was set up in the forward area for greater control and increased communications.

Aircraft that went in and out of the forward area all day periodically reported receiving small arms and MM fire 300-1500 meters to the west and northwest of the forward location. The battalion employed heavy denial fires around the company positions during the night.

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On the morning of the 22nd Co A found a recently used, high speed trail vic YA715516 running north to south. The unit also observed 2 NVA running north on a trail and fired at them with negative results. The units conducted saturation patrolling during the remainder of the day finding one mortar position vic YA713313, a well used trail running east to west vic YA711316, several fresh graves, assorted equipment, and some documents.

At 211530H all patrols closed back into the perimeter; OP's were sent out, and preparations were continued until dark on the LZ, perimeter fortifications, and protective bunkers. During the night of the 22nd the LP's periodically reported seeing lights to the west, and hearing movement all around them.

The companies again searched in all directions from their position on the 23rd. It was planned to move the battalion back to Jackson Hole on the morning of the 24th and to move Co B and Co C, 3/8 Inf into the forward area. At 231615H an Army and an AF aircraft received AK-47 fire from vic YL 666290. Gunships and AF aircraft were employed and the fire ceased. There was negative contact the remainder of the day and on the 24th Co B and Co C, 3/8 Inf replaced 1/8 Inf. Some of the aircraft received small arms fire damaging two aircraft. Artillery and airstrikes were called and the fire ceased.

Searching of the battle area around the companies' perimeter on 21, 22, and 23 May resulted in a body count of 38 NVA KIA.

12.(C) Results:

a. EN Losses:

(1) 18 May: 119 NVA KIA (BC), 3 AK-47s, 1 SKS, 1 BLC rocket launcher, and 6 Chicom grenades.

(2) 20 May: 38 NVA KIA (BC), 1 NVLC(WLA), 3 RPD, 4 AK-47s, 31 Chicom grenades, 1 BLC rocket launcher, 20 AK-47 magazines and ammo, 10 RPD magazines, 7 web belts, 11 entrenching tools, and 22 82mm mortar rounds.

b. US Losses:

(1) 18 May: 29 KIA, 31 WLA, 1 MIA, 28 M16 rifles, 1 M60 MG, 1 PRC 25 radio.

(2) 20 May: 16 KIA, 65 WLA, 0 MIA.

13. (C) Administrative Matters:

a. Supply: Resupply was initiated on the 18th and was limited to 4 cases of smoke, 6 cases of 5.56, 2 cases of 7.62 link, and 200 gallons of water. 19 May was normal resupply day. Resupply on 21 May consisted of 18 cases of smoke, 10 cases of grenades, 10 cases of 7.62 link, 10 cases of 5.56, 10 cases of bangalore torpedos, 10 cases of claymore mines, 8,000 sand bags, 200 gallons of water, 4 chain saws, 20 'D' handle shovels, 15 axes, 16 cases of trip flares, 12 cases of hand flares, and 4 cases of 40mm ammunition. All this equipment was delivered by HULD helicopters.

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All combat troops carried 3 times the basic load of ammunition. Weapons carried were the M-16, M148a, and the M60 MG.

b. N/A

c. Initial treatment of injured was conducted by organic medics. On 18 May all WIA were evacuated by helicopter by 1900 hours with the exception of the WIA with the 4th platoon of Co B. Evacuation from the action on the night of 20 May was hampered by low ceiling and malfunction of the hoist on one of the medevac aircraft. Further evacuation started at 210114 hours and was completed at 211130H May.

d. Transportation: N/A

e. Communications: Commo was maintained with the companies with organic equipment during the contact on 18 May (292 mast head and lead wire attached to PRC 25 at company level). During the contact on the 20th communications were supplemented by the command and control, aircraft. Communications were continuous throughout the actions with the exception of the loss of communication with the 4th platoon, Co B, (See Execution).

f. Medical Evaluation: Of all the US WIA only six were considered serious. Twenty personnel were returned to duty and the remainder were evacuated to higher medical facilities.

14. (C) Special Equipment: None

15. (C) Commander's Analysis: There were no Civil Affairs in the contact area due to the lack of civilian population. From the 18th to the 24th ten leaflet drops consisting of 556,000 leaflets and eight tape missions with a total of eight and one-half hours of playing time were flown over the contact area.

16. (C) Recommendation:

a. Problem area: Ability to identify targets for air support and to provide continuous artillery coverage while aircraft are on target.

(1) Recommendation: Units should be issued additional 40mm star clusters or some equally suitable pyrotechnic for use in marking friendly locations, both during the day and the night.

17. (C) Lessons Learned: It is felt that there were no new Lessons Learned from these contacts, merely reinforcements of old Lessons Learned.

4 Incl
as

/s/ Timothy G Gannon
TIMOTHY G GANNON
LTC INF
Commanding

A TRUE COPY

Francis E Cutler

FRANCIS E CUTLER
Maj, Armor

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