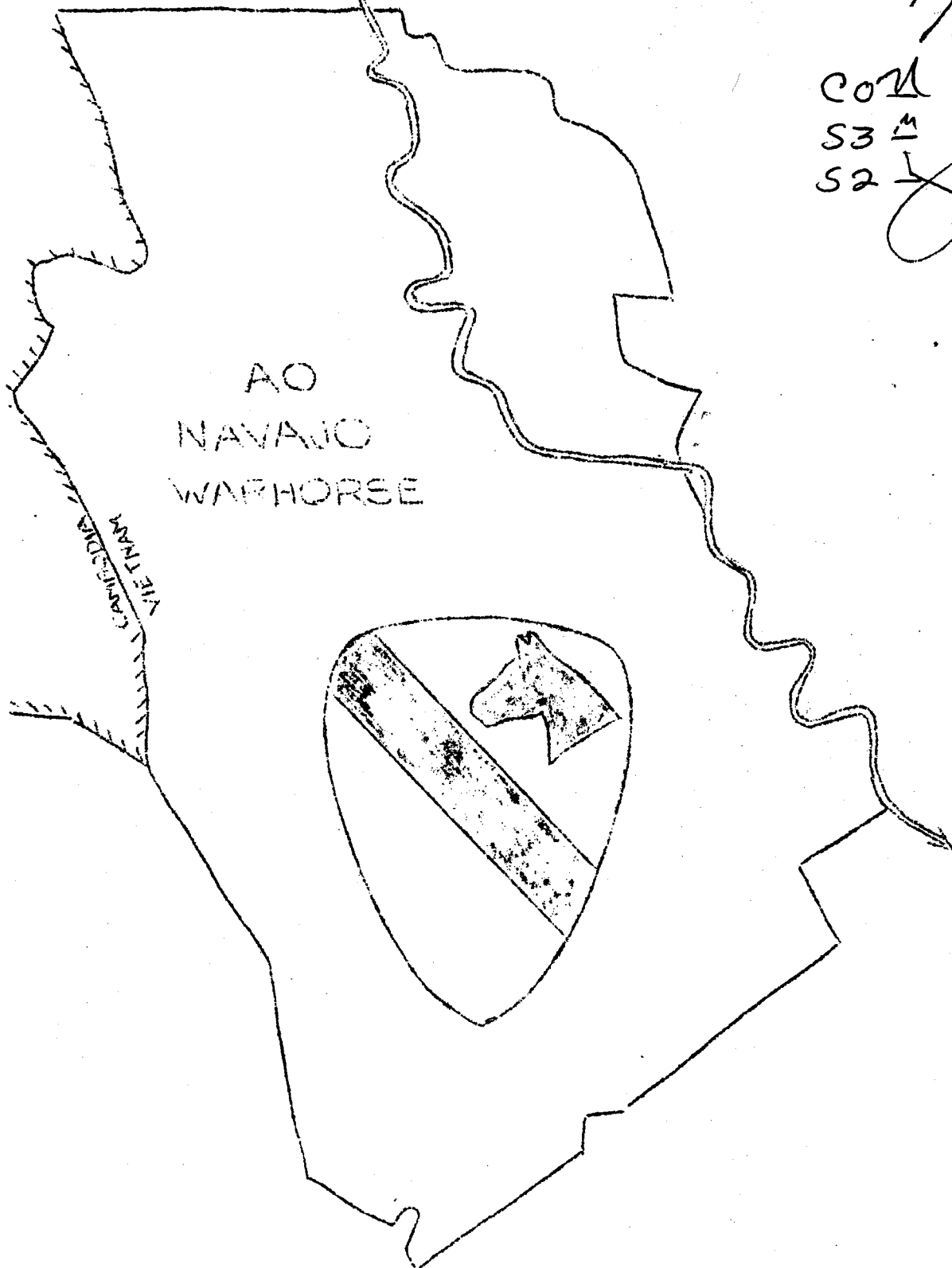


CONFIDENTIAL

1/7  
CO 2  
S3 4  
S2 8

DECLASSIFIED



8-12 [illegible]

CONFIDENTIAL

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY  
HEADQUARTERS 1ST CAVALRY DIVISION (AIRMOBILE)  
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96490

AVDAGT-7

19 March 1969

SUBJECT: Combat Operations After Action Report - 2-5 Cav Contact of 8-9 March 1969  
in AO NAVAJO WARHORSE.

TO: Commanding General  
II Field Force Vietnam  
Attn: AVFBC-RE  
APO 96266

Forwarded herewith is a report of the combat action of 2-5 Cav on 8-9 March 69  
with the 1st Bn, 272d Regt, 9th VC Div.

FOR THE COMMANDER

*John V. Gibney*  
for  
ROBERT N. MACKINNON  
Colonel, GS  
Chief of Staff

1969-03-19

19 March 1969

Subject: Combat Operations After Action Report - 2-5 Cav Contact of 8-9 March 1969  
in AO NAVAJO WARHORSE.

TO: Commanding General  
II Field Force Vietnam  
Attn: AVFBC-RE  
APO 96266

Forwarded herewith is a report of the combat action of 2-5 Cav on 8-9 March 69  
with the 1st Bn, 272d Regt, 9th VC Div.

FOR THE COMMANDER

# CONFIDENTIAL

1.(C) INTRODUCTION: During the night of 8-9 March 1969, the 2d Bn, 5th Cav, 1st Cav Div engaged in close, heavy combat with an enemy force later determined to be the 1st Bn, 272d Regt, 9th VC Div. The site of the engagement was southwestern Tay Ninh Province (vic XT 340150), approximately 2½ kilometers from that portion of the RVN - Cambodian border known as the Angel's Wing (Tab A). This report records the principal events and results of that action and attempts to draw lessons therefrom.

## 2.(C) GENERAL:

### a. Influencing Factors:

(1) Mission: Consistent with the overall mission of the 1st Cav Div to function as the screening/covering force for the II FFV/III Corps defense of the Saigon - Bien Hoa Complex, the Div's 1st Bde had been directed to deploy two battalions in the western Hau Nghia - southwestern Tay Ninh area (AO NAVAJO WARHORSE) in response to the threat posed by major elements of the 9th VC Div. In a role analogous to that of a GOPL, the two battalions (2-5 and 1-8 Cav) had the mission of detecting, delaying/disorganizing, and, to the extent possible, defeating enemy forces moving east from their Cambodian base areas. The Brigade Commander's concept dictated an aggressively mobile posture, with small, semi-independent units deployed as far west of the Vam Co Dong River as practical so as to provide the early warning required for timely commitment of reserves. Reflecting this concept, Co B, 2-5 Cav had been positioned in the vicinity of a known infiltration route out of the southern tip of the Angel's Wing and had the mission of detecting and attacking enemy forces utilizing that route. Inherent within that mission was the requirement for Co B to be mobile, particularly during the hours of darkness, and, consistent with normal security precautions, to employ semi-independent patrols and ambushes to facilitate extensive area coverage.

(2) The Battlefield: The terrain of this uninhabited area was flat, open, dry rice paddy, with intermittent irrigation ditches. The vegetation was sparse, with occasional, widely-separated clusters of small trees. Mobility was excellent. The moon provided approximately 70% illumination during the night of 8-9 March, affording good visibility, and the weather was clear, dry, and warm. The battlefield was exactly 2.7 kilometers from the Cambodian border, 7 kilometers west of the Vam Co Dong River and 3 kilometers from the nearest inhabited area (AP Gieng Gang XT 3715).

### (3) Opposing Forces:

(a) Enemy: A prisoner captured during the engagement identified the enemy force as the 1st Bn, 272d Regt, 9th VC Div. The Bn's estimated strength was 500-600 men, and their performance gave evidence of high morale, good discipline and skillful, aggressive leadership. The enemy's supporting weapons included three .51 caliber and five 30 caliber machineguns, four 82mm and eight 60mm mortars, and an undetermined number of B-40 rocket launchers. It can be assumed that the enemy was thoroughly familiar with the battlefield. Obviously, the proximity of his Cambodian sanctuary greatly enhanced his operation.

### (b) Friendly Forces:

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

1 8-9 March disposition of 1st Bde units committed to NAVAJO WARHORSE AO is depicted on overlay at Tab A.

2 Of the 2-5 Cav's five rifle companies (one of which was attached from 1-8 Cav), one was committed to the security of LZ Terri and the remaining four were deployed west of the Vam Co Dong River. With approximately three kilometers between companies, they were, in effect, maneuvering independently. However, the nature of the terrain and the availability of pre-positioned airlift (six ships) enhanced the battalion commander's ability to reinforce any one of his units, either by air or ground.

3 Co B, 2-5 Cav had a total of 112 men (including attachments), with both the 1st and 2nd Plats at a strength of one officer and 26 EM. In addition to the M-16 rifle, each plat was armed with three M-60 machineguns and three M-79 grenade launchers. Each plat also carried eight claymores. The 1st Platoon had one M-72 Law while the 2nd Plat had two. Each machine-gunner had 800-900 rounds, each M-79 grenadier had 70 HE rounds, and each rifleman carried a basic load of ammunition (15-20 magazines). The force of 58 men at the company CP (which included the 3d Plat) was similarly armed, including one 90mm RR, which was found to be inoperable, and one 81mm mortar with 30 rounds of HE, 20 rounds of WP, and 10 rounds of illumination.

4 Non-organic fire support for 2-5 Cav's rifle companies included three batteries of tube artillery: A/1-77 Arty (105) at LZ Terri (XT 4216), C/2-19 Arty (105) at LZ Tracy (XT 4307), and B/1-30 Arty (155), which had a plat on each of those two fire bases. Additionally, one battery of aerial rocket artillery (2-20 Arty) was in a CR role, with its 12 aircraft laagered at Tay Ninh. Spooky, moonshine and TAC AIR were also available on the normal troops-in-contact basis.

b. Chronological Sequence of Events - Unit had been in field eight days prior to contact.

8 March

- 1300 - B/2-5 Cav - Reconned positions planned for night ambush and fired defensive
- 1500 H targets to include some targets for deception only.
- 1500 H B/2-5 Cav - Received last Log (Aerial Resupply) at XT 343145.
- 1900 H B/2-5 Cav - Moved from Log site northeast to night defensive position (NDP) XT 349154 and dug in.
- 2200 H 1st Plat - Moved from NDP due west northwest to XT 343156 where the unit set up its night ambush in a previously used plat position.
- 2200 H 2d Plat - Moved from NDP due south and then west to XT 345147 where the unit set up its night ambush due east of an irrigation ditch.

9 March

- 0037 H 2d Plat - Sighted with starlight scope six enemy soldiers approaching its location from the west at a range of approximately 300 meters. Plat leader called company commander and requested artillery. Artillery began firing at 0040 H.

CONFIDENTIAL

- 0040 H A/1-77 Artillery - Fired one round smoke and 24 rounds HE in response to 0037 H fire request from B/2-5 Cav.
- 0045 H 2nd Plat - Engaged with organic weapons the six enemy soldiers who had approached to within approximately 25 meters of the platoon's location. Enemy returned fire and evaded to the south. The plat leader reported no friendly casualties and unknown enemy assessment. The company commander decided to leave the 2nd plat at that location in order to conduct a first light check.
- 0230 - 1st Plat - Sighted five enemy soldiers approximately 600 meters to the southwest moving out of tree line. The plat leader observed through a starlight scope and noted that there were at least 200 enemy soldiers behind the original five soldiers. The plat leader called the company commander, reported at least 200 enemy in column moving due east, and requested artillery and ARA.
- 0300 - A/1-77th Artillery - Fired one round smoke and 49 rounds HE in support of the 1st Plat.
- 0300 H 1st Bde - ARA initially refused because the unit was not in contact.
- 0316 H 1st Plat - In contact with a large enemy force estimated to be at least a company in size. ARA requested and approved (on station at 0325 H). The plat engaged two enemy who broke and ran from the artillery straight toward the plat location. One was KIA, the other WIA and later captured. The plat lost communication at this time due to both radios being damaged by the initial mortar and rocket fire.
- 0316 H Almost immediately after the 1st Plat engaged the two enemy, both the 1st and 2nd Plat came under heavy mortar and B-40 rocket fire. The NDP force attempted to support with small arms and 81mm mortar fire but they too came under heavy mortar, B-40 rocket, and sniper fire. The 2nd Plat suffered most of its casualties in the initial mortar fire as they moved from the ambush location to the irrigation ditch for protection. The 1st Plat also became engaged with at least a company sized force from both east and west of the irrigation ditch.
- 0325 H Spooky and ARA (requested at 0316 H) on station. Both experienced problems initially in tracking enemy targets as the heavily engaged friendly forces had difficulty in marking their positions. Tube artillery had to be shut off prior to arrival of aircraft on station.
- 0330 H The battalion commander and S-3 went airborne in the Command/Control helicopter which had been damaged at LZ Tracy.
- 0330 - Spooky had difficulty in engaging targets due to its inability to distinguish friendly from enemy positions. Therefore, Spooky was shifted to engage anti-aircraft targets on the periphery which were distracting ARA. The battalion commander decided to utilize ARA in place of tube artillery and Spooky because of its great responsiveness and because of the proximity of opposing forces. The battalion commander also considered use of
- 0400 H

CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED

TAC AIR but decided against it because the units in contact were having considerable difficulty in marking their locations. B/1-30 Artillery (155) fired 33 rounds HE and four rounds WP between 0550 H and 0700 H in response to request for blocking fires west of the point of contact.

- 0330 - 2nd Plat - Attempted to mark its location initially with trip flares,  
0400 H next with heat tabs, and finally by soaking their shirts with insect repellent, igniting them, and throwing them outside the ditch. The final method was successful.
- 0330 - 1st Plat - Was so heavily engaged it could not reach its trip flares.  
0500 H Heat tabs were also used unsuccessfully. Puddles of insect repellent were ignited but drew too much accurate enemy fire. The plat finally succeeded in marking its location by putting out a heavy volume of tracer fire due west. The only strobe light available in the company was located in the NDP.
- 0400 H The battalion commander made the decision to reinforce the engaged units and ordered C/2-5 Cav to move from its location (XT 370171), link up with the 1st Plat of B Co, and block to the north. He also requested airlift to move the 1st Plat, A/2-5 Cav from LZ Terri to reinforce the 2nd Plat of B Co and to lift A/1-8 (XT 355125) to a position from which it could block to the south. The S-3 requested TAC AIR and 1-9 Cav scouts for first light.
- 0430 H C Co (- one plat) - Moved overland to link up with the 1st Plat of B Co. The company experienced some difficulty in navigation but accomplished the assigned mission prior to dawn.
- 0507 H 1st Plat, A/2-5 Cav - Conducted a night air assault into XT 360152 and linked up with the 2nd Plat of B Co at 0515 H.
- 0515 - Contact was broken, with the enemy observed carrying numerous casualties  
0600 H back toward Cambodia.
- 0550 - B/1-30 Artillery - Fired four rounds WP and thirty three rounds HE to  
0700 H block enemy withdrawal to the west.
- 0040 - A/1-77 Artillery - On LZ Terri fired a total of two rounds smoke and 143  
0830 H rounds HE in support as requested at 0037 H, and 0700 H.
- 0325 - Nine sections of ARA (A/2-20 Artillery laagered at Tay Ninh) expended  
0700 H in close support of engaged units as requested at 0316 H.
- 0622 H Medevac was requested for the 1st Plat. At 0625 H Medevac ships picked up all 1st Plat casualties and flew them to the 12th Evac Hospital at Cu Chi.
- 0658 H All 2nd Plat casualties were extracted by the six lift ships and taken to the 12th Evac Hospital in Cu Chi.

DECLASSIFIED

- 0757 - TAC AIR - Five sorties of two F-100s supported as requested for first light at 0400 H; they engaged suspected targets between the point of contact and the Cambodian border.
- 0800 H 1-9 Cav - Apache Scouts (light fire team) arrived on station to conduct a first light check. Apache experienced some delay due to mechanical difficulty and a mix up in radio frequencies.
- 0829 H A/1-8 Cav - Air assaulted into XT 334149 and swept the battlefield to the southwest. C/2-5 Cav swept the battlefield to the northwest. The 1st Plat of A/2-5 Cav swept the battlefield in the immediate vicinity of the contact area. Upon completion of the search, C/2-5 Cav and A/1-8 Cav were relocated to continue their missions. B Co and the plat from A Co were returned to LZ Terri.

c. Results:

(1) Enemy - Found on the battlefield were numerous bloody trails heading due west, numerous bloody bandages and puddles of blood, 32 NVA bodies, one NVA WIA (PW at 0904 H), two AK-47 rifles, eight full AK-47 magazines, 150 loose AK-47 rounds in a sack, one box of 7.60mm anti-aircraft machinegun ammunition, one gas or smoke grenade, one box of Chicom frag grenades, five dud B-40 rockets, some armor piercing .51 cal machinegun rounds, one Russian gas mask, 1/2 of documents, eight .51 cal machinegun firing positions, and six bunkers with overhead cover.

(2) Friendly:

(a) Casualties: 11 KIA, 33 WIA (Evac), 4 WIA (Slight).

	<u>1st FLAT</u>	<u>2nd FLAT</u>	
KIA	6	5	= 11
WIA (Evac)	17	16	= 33
WIA (Slight)	2	2	= 4
Not Wounded	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	= 6
Total	27	27	= 54

37

(b) Ammunition Expenditures:

<u>105mm</u>	<u>ARTILLERY</u>	<u>155mm</u>
2 smoke		4 WP
<u>143</u> HE		<u>33</u> HE
145 Total		37 Total

TAC AIR

(Five Sorties of two F-100 Fighters)

- 12 500LB Bombs
- 20 750LB Bombs
- 8 Napalm Bombs
- 11,000 Rounds 20mm

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~  
Aerial Rocket Artillery (ARA)

(Nine sections of two AH1G Cobras)

371 10 LB Rockets  
27 13 LB Wt Rockets  
75 40mm HE grenades  
76 "Bee Hive" Rounds  
13,000 Rounds 7.62mm Minigun

Organic Weapons

81mm Mortar - 24 HE, 20 WP, 10 Ill  
M-60 Machinegun - 4,900 Rounds 7.62mm  
M-79 Grenade Launcher - 420 Rounds 40mm HE  
M-16 Rifle - 16,400 Rounds 5.56mm  
M-26 Frag Grenade - 115  
M-181A Claymore - 10  
M-72 LAW (66mm) - 2

3.(C) CONCLUSION:

a. Evaluation: When the decision was made to deploy forces west of the Vam Co Dong River in the Angel's Wing area, it was done in full realization of the risks involved. Commanders at all levels were cognizant of the enemy's two great advantages: (1) The security afforded by the near proximity of the Cambodian border; and (2) His ability to mass his forces at a time and place of his own choosing against one or more of the necessarily dispersed friendly elements. To offset completely these enemy advantages would have required the positioning of units at a considerable distance from the border, probably east of the Vam Co Dong River itself, and/or the substitution of a series of fixed, hardened, well defended strongpoints for the mobile posture actually employed. To have opted for either or both of these alternatives, however, would have been to negate accomplishment of the mission. Giving up space west of the Vam Co Dong River would have bought some measure of security but at the cost of the early warning needed to marshal a force large enough to defeat the enemy before he could penetrate the populated areas east of the river. Given the number of units available and the size of the area to be covered, no line of fixed, fortified positions could have afforded complete surveillance, and, consequently, the enemy could have by passed these positions at will. In light of these considerations, the most effective course of action was the employment of mobile, semi-independent, small units capable of detecting the infiltration of major enemy forces and delaying these until they could be attacked and destroyed by the application of massed fires. In this engagement on 2-9 March, B/2-5 Cav fulfilled this role completely, notwithstanding its own, relatively high casualties. It positioned itself on what proved to be an infiltration route, detected a major enemy force, attacked same, fixing it in position until heavy fires could be brought to bear. It is uncertain as to whether the enemy battalion was attempting a major move east of the Vam Co Dong River or - as the PW indicates - moving to destroy a US unit or installation. However, in neither case was that objective attained, and the damage to the 1st Bn, 272d Regt must have been severe.



b. Lessons Learned:

CONFIDENTIAL

(1) The results of this engagement - - specifically, the higher-than-normal casualty rate for B/2-5 Cav - - naturally caused a reevaluation of the concept of operations in the M.VAJO WARHORSE AO. As indicated above, that reassessment fully indorsed the concept of a "forward" deployment, in a small unit, mobile posture of the elements of 1-8 and 2-5 Cav. However, approval of the general concept does not, in this case, imply approval of the specific positioning of companies on the night of 8-9 March. One of the salient lessons of this action is the fact that the term "forward" deployment is a highly relative one, with its application determined by the specific circumstances prevailing. While endorsing the deployment of B/2-5 Cav (and the other companies) west of the Vam Co Dong River, this report acknowledges that an increase of only two or three kilometers of "stand-off" distance between B Co's position and the border would have been appropriate. With hindsight, it appears that the cost in terms of "early warning time", as discussed above, would have been compensated for adequately by the advantages of maneuver room for commitment of airmobile reserves and for unrestricted application of pursuing fires. In short, commitment of small, semi-independent units within a certain minimum distance of the Cambodian border (a distance varying according to circumstances, but usually not less than five kilometers) is a risky venture, justified only in special circumstances and after careful evaluation.

(2) When maneuvering independently on the Vietnam battlefield, the US company or platoon normally secures itself by assuming a purely defensive posture: by coiling into a perimeter on the most defensible terrain available, digging in, registering defensive concentrations and firing them occasionally during the night as a precautionary measure, and by limiting its "ambushes" to local-security range from the main position. When this approach is clearly incompatible with the mission and/or the dictated concept of operations - - as was the case in this engagement - - then the unit must find its security in deception and mobility. Clearly, the CO of Co B understood this. His company had been in the field, on the move, for the eight days preceding this engagement, positioning itself in a different location each night, moving away from its obviously compromised log (aerial resupply) position, reconnoitering night positions during daylight but occupying them only after dark, and by registering deceptive defensive concentrations as well as the actual ones. All of this is highly commendable and undoubtedly accounts for the fact that this was a friendly-initiated action, with B Co achieving surprise and the enemy receiving the initial, and, apparently, very damaging fires. If, after this initial deliverance of their organic and supporting fires, the 1st and 2nd Plats had retained their mobility, had disengaged and fallen back even as much as two, or three hundred meters (possibly on the main company position), then the same gains might well have been achieved at much less the cost. Conversely, by losing their mobility and allowing themselves to be fixed in non-hardened, virtually indefensible positions, by a superior force, these platoons invited the high casualties which resulted and, in fact, risked the disaster of being overrun. Patently, this is easier said than done, particularly on flat, open terrain on a moonlight night, when bullets are flying and instinct calls for hugging the earth. However, easy or difficult, it is an undisputable fact that the unit which allows itself to be fixed in an unprepared position by a superior force is in deep trouble. This danger needs constant emphasis, and techniques to avoid it need to be developed, rehearsed and employed.

CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

(3) In this action the normal situation prevailed in that the infantry commanders had a number of types of fire support to call upon. Unfortunately, in this action as in many others, all of these fire support means were not necessarily complementary, at least, not at the same time. Consequently, the Battalion Commander had to pick and choose, selecting one at the expense of suppressing others. The record indicates that he picked and chose wisely, with the result that the total fire support rendered was very effective. However enough problems -- mainly of control and coordination -- did arise as to warrant some concern and corrective action. These problems were not major ones, but do indicate the need to update SOPs for "packaging" the total fire support available and for spelling out in detail the authority and responsibility of each person involved in that process.

(4) The fact that a significant number of things unaccountably "went wrong" at most inappropriate times does not warrant the label of a "lesson learned" since even in the best of outfits, such as this one, this phenomenon has occurred often in the past and unfortunately, will presumably do so in the future. Obviously there is no real excuse for supporting gunships not having the right frequency, or a unit carrying an inoperable recoilless rifle in the field and not carrying adequate devices for night marking of positions, and for supporting aircraft to be discovered as "not mission ready" only when they are assumed to be lifting off; just as obviously, there is no simple remedy for these problems either. However, commanders and staff officers need to expect them and to anticipate them by longer lead times, alternate solutions, etc. even while they are working to preclude them.

CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED