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U.S. ARMY MILITARY HISTORY INSTITUTE

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
28TH MILITARY HISTORY DETACHMENT
11TH ARMORED CAVALRY REGIMENT
APO SAN FRANCISCO 96257

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SUBJECT: Combat After Action Report

THRU: Commanding General
United States Army, Vietnam
ATTN: Command Historian
APO San Francisco 96375

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TO: Headquarters
Department of the Army
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Chris Eckman

1. TYPE OF OPERATION: Successful Defense of an Armored Cavalry Squadron Fire Support Base.
2. DATE OF ATTACK: 15 April 1970.
3. LOCATION: Fire Support Base Kraner (XT 018730, Map Sheet Number 6132, Series I607, 1: 100, 000 RVN) located in the "Dog's Head" region of Tay Ninh Province, Republic of Vietnam.
4. PERSONS BEING INTERVIEWED: Lieutenant Colonel James B. Reed, First Squadron Commander; Major James Abrahamson, S-3, 1/11th ACR; Captain Charles R. Cassell, 1/11th ACR Howitzer Battery Commander; First Lieutenant Joseph R. Poche, Artillery LNO; Sergeant First Class William R. Rehrn, Medical Platoon Sergeant (HET 1/11th ACR); Sergeant First Class Thomas P. Murphy, Assistant Operations Sergeant; and various members of Headquarters Troop and D Company.
5. INTERVIEWING SPECIALIST: Enlisted Personnel of the 28th Military History Detachment.
6. TASK ORGANIZATION: Headquarters Troop, the Howitzer Battery, and elements of 1st Squadron, 11th ACR; OPCON to 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (AM). Also involved were D/1/11th ACR and two 8" guns from IIFV.

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7. SUPPORTING FORCES: Night Hawk, Spooky ARA, artillery, and a Pink Team supported the attack.

8. BACKGROUND INFORMATION: On April 9, FORT DEFIANCE (CP of 2/11th ACR) was shelled, taking over 80 rounds of rocket and mortar fire. Two men were killed and fifteen were wounded. FT. DEFIANCE, at XT504832, was nearly in the center of the Saigon-Michelin corridor. Elements of the 165th NVA Regiment participated in the attack.

Much earlier, and closer to the FSB KRAMER, was the attack on FSB JAY on March 29th. FSB JAY was a battalion Command Post of the First Brigade, First Air Cavalry Division. In the early morning hours, FSB JAY (XT038749) received an attack by fire from the west and southwest coupled with a ground probe by an estimated enemy company. The base received mixed rounds of 122mm and 107mm rockets, B-20 rockets, 120mm rockets, 82mm mortars, 75mm recoilless rifle rounds, B-40 rockets and small arms fire. The defenders returned fire with organic weapons and were supported by ARA, Artillery, an armed C-119 aircraft, and a flareship. Supporting aircraft received .51 caliber machinegun fire from positions south of FSB JAY. In an early morning sweep, 74 NVA dead were found, and three prisoners were taken. The U.S. losses were 13 killed and 30 wounded. Twelve enemy weapons were captured.

On 1 April, FSB ILLINGSWORTH (XT039792), again defended by elements of First Air Cavalry Division, received 15 to 20 rounds of 107mm and 122mm rockets, about two hours after midnight. The FSB also received 100 rounds of 82mm mortars, and 100 rounds of 120mm mortars. Following the attack by fire, two reinforced companies made a ground probe, using small-arms, automatic weapons, and B-40 fire. The defenders engaged with organic weapons, and were supported by ARA, artillery, a light fire team, Shadow Nighthawk, an armed C-119 aircraft, and air strikes. In the early morning sweep following the attack, the defenders found 54 enemy dead, and they captured 28 individual weapons and one crew-served weapon. The US losses were 24 killed and 54 wounded.

Throughout the period of 1-11 April, the First Squadron, 11th ACR, conducted reconnaissance missions in the AO around CAMP HAZARD (XT078840). After the first few days in April, enemy activity in the AO all but ceased.

On 12 April, 1/11th ACR conducted a tactical road march from HAZARD to a new AO, establishing FSB KRAMER at XT030728. The various troops conducted reconnaissance operations in the new area during the day and set out automatic ambushes at night.

The next day, B Troop, at XT022669, reconed an area where a Pink Team had sighted and engaged an individual in the open. At 1545 hours, B Troop received RPG and small-arms fire resulting in four troopers being wounded. Artillery and Blue Max supported the contact. In the ensuing sweep, the Troop found five dead NVA and one wounded soldier which they captured.

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A rice cache (XT000690) containing ten thousand pounds of rice, was found the next day by B Troop. Troop A found ten dead NVA solidiers, whose death was attributed to the contact of 13 April. In the same location (XT022669) the troopers found an additional seven bodies, thought to be a week old.

9. THE DEFENSE OF FSB KRAMER: Compared to DEFIANCE or HAZARD, FSB KRAMER is luxurious in fields of fire and interior space. It is approximately 250 meters in diameter, surrounded by a four foot black earth berm, and one strand of wire 20 meters beyond the berm. North of its center is an open field, large enough to accommodate the medevac ships. On the north end is the TOC, which has its own interior berm about three feet high. South of the center field and a bit east is the 155mm Howtzer Battery, formed in a star pattern with the Number 6 piece in the center. Across from the Howitzers on the west side, are the two eight inch pieces. Tents and trailers grouped in small clusters throughout the base complete the picture.

Beyond the berm on the southwest side, the woodline is only about 75 meters away. Along the rest of the perimeter, the distance from the berm to the woods varies from 150 to 200 meters. The grass is low between the berm and woods, allowing excellent fields of fire to the D Company tanks, Headquarters Troop tracks, and the two II Field Force "dusters" that ring the berm.

Although the canvas tents, with their two foot wall of sand bags, look vulnerable, they are not. Each man had dug a shallow trench for his cot, and then had used the extracted dirt to fill sandbags which were then used to build individual walls around each cot. Culverts were placed on the individual walls and then covered with sandbags. Thus the troopers had protection from mortar blasts and shrapnel. Some crewmen of the tracks on the berm had built bunkers into the earthen wall of the perimeter. To reinforce their construction, the troopers had used ammunition boxes and sand bags.

LTC Reed designed a new type of bunker to protect the 155mm Howitzer ammunition. The designed featured a horseshoe shape with complete overhead coverage. A bulldozer pushed up diagonal earth walls to further protect the ammunition. The Howitzer covered the fourth open wall. The eight inch ammunition was buried in a deep trench with both ends open and two feet of overhead cover. The Howitzer ammunition was sheltered above ground and not subject to the flooding of the monsoon rains.

The star formation of the 155mm Howitzers gives gives a better coverage in an impact area. The five guns on the points of the star have a 6400 mil capacity for berm defensive fires. The center gun may fire self-illumination as needed, or can add its fire to the fire missions. For ground probes the battery can fire Killer-Junior capacity, although the minimum safety range is greater than the Howitzers. The Killer-Junior fires can be used to block an enemy withdrawal or as direct support.

The artillery LNO controlled the Killer-Junior fires. Every evening the artillery LNO, 1LT Joseph R. Poche, cleared target fires out to 3,000 meters from

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the berm through the 2/19th Fire Support Control Center of the Direct Support Artillery Battalion which controlled all fires in the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (AM), AO. The basic fire plan for supporting fires was made by the Brigade Artillery Section. If needed, the 1st Squadron could have guns from FSB's WOOD and ATKINSON fire defensive concentrations or defensive target groups.

10. THE 15 APRIL ATTACK: On the afternoon of 14 April, the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division (AM), sighted and engaged ten NVA about five kilometers west of FSB KRAMER. First Squadron was alerted that an enemy ground attack might occur soon. There was a theory in the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) that NVA units needed four days to complete their reconnaissance and battlefield preparations before attacking a fire support base. Although the 1st Squadron had only been in KRAMER for three days (as of 15 April), they were ready for an attack, since LTC Reed did not completely agree with the infantry's theory.

LTC Reed had picked the location of his fire support base because of its good fields of fire. Fortunately, a bulldozer had been available to push up a large berm on this relatively flat plain. After the berm had been constructed, the Squadron Commander had emphasized construction within the berm. According to MAJ Abrahamson, "LTC Reed put a lot of emphasis on digging in when we got here."

To augment the vision of the troopers, who kept watch of the territory outside the berm, LTC Reed added radar. "I predicted that any attack would come from the north, so I put the radar there." The radar rested on the berm near the TOC. (This PPS Radar has an effective scan of about 120 degrees.)

At 0042 hours, elements of Headquarters Troop reported movement northwest of KRAMER and received permission to shoot a hand flare. The flare's light revealed nothing. An hour later, the radar operator reported that the radar equipment showed movement at an azimuth of 6120 mils and a range of 110 meters. Some of the Headquarters' troopers reconned the area by fire. They saw an individual crawling away from the area of their fire. Within minutes two Cobras from the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) were on station, strafing the area.

At about 0215 hours, the berm exploded with a "mad minute", an unscheduled minute of fire from the vehicles on the perimeter. (There are four "mad minutes" a night and the times are always changed.) During the period the tanks fired HE rounds, while the rest of the tracks used their own respective weapons. Sixteen minutes later, the fire support base received mortar and rocket fire. The troopers responded immediately, firing their .50 caliber and M-60 machine guns. Crewmen of the tanks blasted the jungle with HE rounds from the main gun, while the "dusters" pounded the area in front of their positions. Within four minutes of the initial incoming, an enemy 75mm recoilless rifle hit an AVLB, which burst into flames. An uncontrollable fire was started moments later when another 75mm recoilless rifle round slammed into a M548, located near the eight inch ammunition. One man was slightly wounded when a RPG round struck the searchlight of his tank.

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The troopers responded to their various preplanned tasks simultaneously. The ammunition detail of the Howtzer Battery had been trained to act as the fire damage control team during an attack. The men of this team quickly grabbed fire extinguishers and shovels and began fighting the AVLB fire. The cooks, who serve as litter bearers during an attack, reported to the medic track. The litter bearers and medics were then divided into smaller teams and sent to the previously designated collection points for the wounded. These points are spaced uniformly around the perimeter. The enlisted personnel who work in the TOC reported to SFC Murphy and then manned positions of the TOC interior berm. The Squadron Commander and staff began organizing the fire support and checking the defenses of KRAMER. 1LT Poche immediately cleared the Howtzer firings, and the Number 3, 5 and 6 pieces began firing Killer-Junior rounds. At 0243 hours, the 1st Squadron requested a "Spooky" from the 1st Brigade to supplement their own fires.

CPT Cassell, Howtzer Battery Commander, gave this account: "I was asleep in my bunk when the 107mm rocket hit the M548. I awoke and the lieutenant (1LT Meyer, from II Field Force in charge of the two eight inch pieces) informed me that SSG Carelli had been wounded in the neck by shrapnel. Guns 3, 5 and 6 were already firing Killer-Junior. Since the eight inch ammunition was near the M548 fire, the two guns wouldn't fire. The FDC was closed up (during incoming the tracks close their hatches and doors), so I checked the guns. Then I checked on the wounded man's section. He had been hit in the neck as he turned to get the ammunition. (He was on the track.) 1LT Meyer requested assistance in putting out the M548 fire. My ammo team (acting as fire damage control team) went there, but the M548 burned for an hour before anyone could get close to it. The .50 caliber machine gun had ammunition in its ready-rack which exploded and made it dangerous to get close. In the first minutes of fire, each gun fired in its quadrant at a range of about 600 meters".

1LT Poche called on the 2/19th for supporting fire from FSB WOOD and FSB ATKINSON. He "walked" 105mm rounds within 100 meters of the wire. He received a radio call stating that friendly troops were receiving shrapnel from the 105mm rounds. He began to "walk" the rounds out. "It was hard to tell where the perimeter was because of the dust," 1LT Meyer remarked. "I moved it in slowly, waiting for everyone to tell me if they got metal their way."

By this time the smoke and the dust from the artillery, tanks, "dusters" and machine guns combined with the dirt from the incoming and the billowing smoke from the fires within the berm to form an impregnable cloud. This choking curtain of smoke and dirt made it difficult for the defenders of KRAMER to see at all.

In the preceding months, SFC William R. Rehrm, the Medical Platoon Sergeant, had thought about organizing collection points for the wounded, but had never actually instituted his plan in any fire support base before KRAMER. As he said, "This was the first time we put it into effect...because other fire support bases were getting hit." Before the attack SFC Rehrm had set up four collecting points for the wounded-- one at the Howtzer Battery tent, one on

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the north side, another on the south side by the AVLB, and a fourth on the west side. On the night of the attack, the wounded were brought to the collection points where a medic treated them. The medics had arrived with the litter bearers (cooks) at their appointed collection point very soon after the incoming rounds had impacted. Each reported his needs and gave a status report to SFC Rehrm by radio. Soon, the medevac helicopters were called.

By 0304 hours, a Nighthawk was on station and worked out to the south of FSB KRAMER. The incoming had ceased at 0235 hours, but there was some confusion over supporting fires from FSB WOOD. The closeness of the rounds led some troopers to believe that they were still receiving incoming. By 0327 hours, the situation had calmed; with the Cobras in the area the berm had ceased firing. There were five wounded, one seriously and four lightly. At 0400 hours, the Nighthawk left station and was replaced by a Shadow aircraft. Twelve minutes later, troopers from Headquarters Troop reported a light in the woodline about 200 meters to the west. At 0241 hours, the medevac ship landed and "dusted-off" three men. The medevac pad was in the center of FSB KRAMER.

At 0657 hours, a Pink Team spotted four bodies to the southwest of the perimeter-- the first indication that a ground probe had been attempted. The ship also spotted a RPG launcher and rounds. At 0708 hours, elements of D Company moved out of the gate in column and then deployed on line to sweep the area. D Company began finding weapons at 0708 hours, and by 0930 hours, the sweep was completed. The troopers found 3 SKS's, 8 AK-47's, 24 60mm rounds, 2 60mm tubes, 2 RPG-2 launchers, 1 RPG-7 launcher, 23 B-40 rounds, 3 B-41 rounds, 30 Chicom grenades, 3 Chicom "Claymores", and 20 NVA killed. Although a number of the bodies had .50 caliber holes, many contained shrapnel holes indicating the artillery defensive concentrations and target groups had indeed been on target.

LTC Reed commented, "We probably pre-empted the attack with one of our 'mad minutes'. I think the key to the thing was that we were dug in, everybody sleeping under cover, and we were organized. We had damage-control teams and wounded collection points. Everybody knew where to go... The artillery fired some 500-600 rounds in our support." (The 1st Squadron Howitzers fired nearly 200 rounds.)

As D Company swept the area for enemy weapons and bodies, troopers at FSB KRAMER began policing shrapnel and fragments of 57mm and 75mm recoilless rifle rounds, plus 60mm and 82mm mortar rounds. Several tanks had a number of 60mm mortar holes in the ground behind them. Two 107mm rockets hit KRAMER-- both struck vehicles.

The enemy force had consisted of elements of two battalions of the 95C Regiment which had attacked FSB ATKINSON a few days before.

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